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Pope Francis sits in his wheelchair and leans toward and smiles at crowd members as he is w

Pope Francis greets visitors at the end of his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Oct. 18, 2023. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

Carol Glatz

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St. Charles de Foucauld, a turn-of-the-19th-century hermit, demonstrates how a life of meekness, tenderness and eucharistic adoration evangelizes, Pope Francis said.

The saint was known to remain in prayer "at Jesus' feet, before the Tabernacle," for hours a day, "sure that the evangelizing force resides there and feeling that it is Jesus who will bring him close to so many distant brothers and sisters," the pope said Oct. 18 at his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square.

"And do we, I ask myself, believe in the power of the Eucharist? Does our going out to others, our service, find its beginning and its fulfillment there, in adoration?" the pope asked, encouraging everyone to rediscover the sense of adoration before the Eucharist.

Continuing a series of audience talks highlighting saints who demonstrate zeal or passion for evangelization, Francis said St. Charles made Jesus and the poor "the passion of his life" after living his youth "far from God, without believing in anything other than the disordered pursuit of pleasure."

"The first step in evangelizing," the pope said, is to "fall head over heels" for Jesus so that love will show in one's life. If this does not happen, "we risk talking about ourselves, our group, a morality or, even worse, a set of rules, but not about Jesus, his love, his mercy."

The pope said he sees this tendency in some new movements that spend a lot of time talking about their organization, their new spiritual path or "vision of humanity," and "do not know how to talk about Jesus."

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St. Charles understood the importance of the laity in the life of the church and "he reminds us that 'there need to be lay people close to priests, to see what the priest does not see, who evangelize with a proximity of charity, with goodness for everyone, with affection always ready to be given,'" he said, citing the saint's writings.

However, the pope said, they need to be "holy lay people" in love with Jesus, not "climbers" in search of something else.

"We priests need so much to have next to us lay people who seriously believe" in Jesus, he said, and who, with their witness, "teach us the way" and help the priest understand he is not an "official" or administrator, but is "a mediator, he is a priest."

St. Charles is "a prophetic figure for our time," Francis said.

He demonstrated "the beauty of communicating the Gospel through the apostolate of meekness," welcomed everyone as a brother or sister and showed "the evangelizing force of tenderness," Francis said.

"Goodness is simple and asks us to be simple people, who are not afraid to offer a smile," he said, encouraging Catholics to imitate "God's style" of being close, compassionate and tender with others.