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Pope Francis waves at the crowd surrounding his popemobile. A TV camera films him in the p

Pope Francis greets visitors from the popemobile before his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Nov. 15, 2023. (CNS photo/Pablo Esparza)

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Often enough, the first people who need to be evangelized are Christians themselves, Pope Francis said.

"A Christian who is discontented, sad, dissatisfied, or worse still, resentful or rancorous, is not credible" and will not attract anyone to a relationship with Jesus and a life of faith, the pope said Nov. 15 at his weekly general audience.

After almost a year of audience talks about "zeal for evangelization" and highlighting the example of saints and other exemplary men and women from around the world, Francis said his last talks in the series would focus on four points from his 2013 apostolic exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel."

The first point, the subject of his talk Nov. 15, was the essential role of joy in the life of Christians and in their ability to share the Gospel with others.

"The Gospel is not an ideology; the Gospel is a proclamation of joy," he said. "All ideologies are cold, but the Gospel has the warmth of joy. Ideologies don't make people smile, but the Gospel is a smile. It makes you smile because it touches your soul with the Good News."

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Saying the first people who need to be evangelized are Christians themselves, the pope asked those gathered for the audience to reflect on how well they preserve and share the joy of knowing that God sent his son into the world, that Jesus loves each person always, that he offered his life out of love and wants to give each person eternal life.

Especially in places where it seems most people are not interested in religion, he said, Christians must recognize that "humanity abounds with brothers and sisters waiting for a word of hope."

People are waiting to hear the Gospel message "even today," the pope said. "People of all times need it, even the civilization of programmed unbelief and institutionalized secularity; indeed, especially the society that leaves the spaces of religious meaning deserted. This is the right moment for the proclamation of Jesus."

Through a relationship with Jesus, "joy is always born and reborn. Don't forget this," he said. "And if any of us do not perceive this joy, let us ask ourselves whether we have found Jesus."

Departing from his prepared text, Francis said, "Today each one of us should take a bit of time and think: Jesus, you are within me. I want to encounter you each day. You are a person, not an idea. You are a companion on the journey, not a program. You are love that resolves so many problems. You are the starting point of evangelization. You, Jesus, are the source of joy."