Vatican
Vatican News
Pope Francis sits at a long table with many other people on both sides. Food, flowers and soft

Pope Francis eats lunch with his guests in the Vatican audience hall Nov. 19, 2023, the World Day of the Poor. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — November 20, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The material, cultural and spiritual poverties that exist in the world are a "scandal" that Christians are called to address by putting their God-given capacity for charity and love into action, Pope Francis said.

The poor, whether "the oppressed, fatigued, marginalized, victims of war," migrants, the hungry, those without work or left without hope, "are not one, two, or three, they are a multitude," the pope said during a Mass celebrated for World Day of the Poor Nov. 19 in St. Peter's Basilica.

"And thinking of this immense multitude of the poor, the message of the Gospel is clear: let us not bury the wealth of the Lord. Let us spread charity, share our bread, multiply love," he said. "Poverty is a scandal."

Among the 5,000 who filled the basilica for Mass were homeless persons and other people in need who were seated in the front rows near Francis. After celebrating Mass and praying the Angelus, the pope ate lunch in the Vatican audience hall with some 1,250 people, continuing a tradition he began on the first World Day of the

Poor in 2017.

Seated at a central table, the pope prayed that God would bless the food and "this moment of friendship, all together." On the three-course menu were ricotta cheese-filled pasta tubes, meatballs and tiramisu for dessert.

This year's World Day of the Poor, the seventh edition, drew its theme from the Book of Tobit: "Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor." In the week leading up to the world day, the Vatican extended the hours and operations of a medical clinic it runs near St. Peter's Square dedicated to caring for anyone in need.

In his homily at the Mass, Francis said that Christians "have received from the Lord the gift of his love and we are called to become a gift to others." Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the Vatican organizer of the world day, was the main celebrant at the altar.

Advertisement

Reflecting on the day's Gospel reading from St. Matthew, in which Jesus tells the parable of a man who buries the money given to him by his master rather than seek to multiply it, the pope lamented the many "buried Christians" who hide their gifts and talents underground.

Mercy, compassion, joy and hope, he said, "are goods that we cannot keep only for ourselves."

"We can multiply all that we have received, making life an offering of love for others," the pope said, "or we can be blocked by a false image of God and because of fear hide underground the treasure we have received, thinking only of ourselves, without becoming passionate about anything other than our own comforts and interests."

Francis said that just as the master in the Gospel reading returned to his servants to "settle his accounts" with them, people must prepare for Jesus' coming at the end of time in which he "settles the accounts of history and introduces us to the joy of eternal life."

"We must ask ourselves, then: How will the Lord find me when I return?" he said. The pope referenced the writings of St. Ambrose, who wrote that upon his return Jesus will ask, "Why did you allow so many of the poor to die of hunger when you possessed gold to buy food for them?"

The pope also urged people to be mindful of poverty's "modesty," noting that "poverty is discreet, it hides. It must be us to go look for it, with courage."

"Let us pray that each of us, according to the gift we have received and the mission entrusted to us, may strive to make charity bear fruit and draw near to a poor person," he said.