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Pope Francis, walking with a cane, arrives in the Paul VI Audience Hall for his weekly general audience at the Vatican Dec. 27. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Cindy Wooden

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The devil is sly and sneaky like a serpent and subtly entices people to sin, Pope Francis said at his weekly general audience Dec. 27.

Beginning a new series of audience talks about vices and virtues, the pope said that evil grows "when one begins to fantasize about it, to nurse it in the imagination and in thoughts, and one ends up being ensnared by its enticements."

One of the devil's first lines of attack, he said, is to go after one's pride just like the serpent who tricked Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden did.

When God told them they could eat the fruit of any tree except "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," God was not telling them they could not use their ability to reason, the pope said. Instead, God was telling them: "Recognize your limits; do not think you are the master of everything, because pride is the beginning of all evil."

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God made Adam and Eve the guardians of creation but wanted "to preserve them from the presumption of omnipotence, of making themselves masters of good and evil," the pope said. "This is a horrible temptation even now. It is the most dangerous trap for the human heart."

Francis told people they must "be on guard" because "the devil is a seducer."

"Never dialogue with him, because he is smarter than all of us and will make us pay for it," the pope said. "When a temptation comes, never dialogue. Close the door, close the window, close your heart," which is the only sure way to defend oneself.

"We need to ask for this grace — that of learning how to guard our hearts" from pride and jealousy, he said.

Greeting German speakers at the audience, Francis said he knows that "evil sometimes seems overwhelming," but "through the birth of his son, God has given us new hope: in the end, the power of love will overcome the power of evil. Let us spread God's love and thus illuminate the darkness of our days."

He told pilgrims from Poland that, looking back at the year that is ending, he wanted to give thanks for the generosity of so many Poles who continue to aid the victims of Russia's war on Ukraine.

"Let us pray with confidence that the Prince of Peace will grant us hope, love and true peace," he said.