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Pope Francis waves to visitors in St. Peter's Square while riding the popemobile before his general audience at the Vatican May 22, 2024. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)



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Though not found on the classical list of cardinal or theological virtues, humility lies "at the base of Christian life," Pope Francis said.

"Whereas pride and arrogance swell the human heart, making us appear to be more than we are, humility restores everything to its correct dimension," he said. Human beings are "are wonderful creatures, but we are limited, with qualities and flaws."

During his general audience in St. Peter's Square May 22, the pope ended his series of talks on vices and virtues by discussing humility, which he said is "the gateway to all virtues."

In the beatitudes, Jesus praised the "poor in spirit" and said "theirs is the kingdom of heaven," he said. "It is the first beatitude because it underlies those that follow it: meekness, mercy (and) purity of heart arise from that inner sense of littleness."

"Blessed are the people who guard this sense of their own littleness in their hearts," he said. "These people are shielded from an ugly vice: arrogance."

Humility is present throughout the Gospel, even in its opening pages, he said, noting how the Angel Gabriel announces Jesus' coming birth not in Jerusalem, but in the small town of Nazareth in Galilee, "but it is precisely from there that the world is reborn."

Similarly, the person selected to bring the Son of God into the world "is not a queen who grew up coddled, but an unknown girl: Mary."

God is drawn to the "littleness" in Mary, "which is above all an interior littleness," the pope said. "He is also drawn to our own littleness when we accept this littleness."

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Although Mary may have faced difficult periods "in which her faith advanced in darkness," Francis said that Mary's "rock-solid" humility never wavered.

Mary's humility, he said, "is her invincible strength; it is she who remains at the foot of the cross while the illusion of a triumphant Messiah is shattered."

Francis added that humility is what "saves us from the devil and from the danger of becoming his accomplices."

"Humility is the source of peace in the world and in the church," he said. "Where there is no humility, there is war, there is discord, there is division."

Francis ended his audience asking Christians to pray for peace for the world consumed by war.

"Let us not forget the martyred Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, that this war may end; let us not forget Myanmar; let us not forget the many countries at war," he said. "Brothers and sisters, we must pray for peace in this time of world war."