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Pope Francis speaks to visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square to pray the Angelus at the Vatican June 30, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Heaven is not a secure vault protected from outsiders but a "hidden treasure" that is reached by cultivating virtues, Pope Francis said.

Before praying the Angelus in St. Peter's Square on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul June 29, the pope reflected on Jesus giving St. Peter, the first pope, the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

"The mission that Jesus entrusts to Peter is not that of barring the doors to the house, permitting entry only to a few select guests, but of helping everyone to find the way to enter, in faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus," Francis said after celebrating Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

Heaven, he added, is "for everyone. Everyone, everyone, everyone can enter."

The pope said that St. Peter "received the keys to the kingdom not because he was perfect, no, he is a sinner, but because he was humble, honest and the Father had given him sincere faith."

Even after many trials and setbacks, the Apostle Peter was the first to experience for himself "the joy and freedom that come from meeting the Lord," and the first "to understand that authority is a service in order to open the door to Jesus."

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The following day, Francis again appeared in the window of the Apostolic Palace to keep his usual Sunday appointment of praying the Angelus with the faithful. He focused on the Gospel theme of inclusivity by reflecting on the day's Gospel reading from St. Mark in which a woman is healed after touching Jesus' cloak and a girl is resurrected after Jesus took her by the hand.

Highlighting the importance of physical contact in both healings, the pope asked, "Why is this physical contact important?"

"It is because these two women are considered impure and cannot, therefore, be physically touched — one because she suffers from bleeding and the other because she is dead," he said. "Yet, Jesus allows Himself to be touched and is not afraid to touch."

By carrying out the physical healing, Jesus "challenges the false religious belief that God separates the pure, placing them on one side, from the impure on another," the pope said. "Instead, God does not make this kind of separation because we are all his children."

He added that impurity "does not come from food, illness, or even death; impurity comes from an impure heart."

Francis urged Christians to take to heart the lesson from the day's Gospel reading, that "in the face of bodily and spiritual sufferings, of the wounds our souls bear, of the situations that crush us, and even in the face of sin, God does not keep us at a distance."

"God is not ashamed of us; God does not judge us," he said. "On the contrary, He draws near to let Himself be touched and to touch us, and He always raises us from death."