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Pope Francis greets Italian Cardinal Matteo Zuppi of Bologna, president of the Italian bishops' conference, as he celebrates Mass in Trieste, Italy, July 7, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Carol Glatz

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God is present in the "dark corners" of local communities and in people's lives, Pope Francis said.

"His presence reveals itself precisely in the faces marked by suffering and where degradation seems to triumph," the pope said in his homily at Mass in the northern Italian city of Trieste July 7.

"God's infinity is concealed in human misery, the Lord stirs and becomes present, he becomes a friendly presence precisely in the wounded flesh of the least, the forgotten and the discarded," he said.

The pope was in Trieste, a port city on the Adriatic Sea close to the borders of Croatia and Slovenia, for a one-day pastoral visit which included speaking at the 50th edition of Italy's Catholic Social Week. About 8,500 people were present for the Mass in the city's Unity of Italy Square, including bishops and priests from the Serbian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and Lutheran Churches.

In his homily, published the same day by the Vatican, the pope reflected on the day's Gospel reading (Mk 6:1-6) that described people's reaction to hearing Jesus teach in the synagogue: Many were shocked and offended that a simple man — the son of a carpenter — could possess such wisdom and perform miracles.

Their taking offense and experiencing "scandal" refers to their encountering a kind of "'a stumbling block,' an obstacle, something that hinders and prevents you from going further" and truly believing in Jesus, the pope said.

That obstacle, he said, was Jesus' humanity, because "how can God, the Almighty, reveal himself in the fragility of human flesh?"

However, "what is the obstacle that prevents believing in Jesus" today, the pope asked.

The "scandal" or stumbling block today, he said, is believing that God truly cares for humanity and "is moved by our wounds, who takes on our weariness, who for us is broken like bread."

"We need the scandal of a faith rooted in the God who became man and, therefore, a human faith, a faith of flesh, that enters history, that touches people's lives, that heals broken hearts, that becomes a leaven of hope and a seed of a new world," he said.

"We don't need a religiosity closed in on itself, that looks up to heaven without caring about what happens on earth and celebrates liturgies in the temple but forgets the dust blowing in our streets," Francis said.

In a world where people face so many challenges, struggles and social and political issues, there needs to be "a faith that awakens consciences from lethargy, that puts its finger in the wounds, in the wounds of society, and there are many," he said.

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This kind of faith is "restless," it moves "from heart to heart" and it is moved by concrete problems in society, he said. It is a faith "that becomes a thorn in the flesh of a society often anesthetized and dazed by consumerism."

"Consumerism is a plague, a cancer, it makes your heart become ill, it makes you selfish," he said.

"We need a faith that disrupts the calculations of human selfishness, that denounces evil, that points out injustices, that disturbs the schemes of those who, in the shadow of power, play with the lives of the weak," he said, underlining how there are many people who "use faith to exploit people. This is not faith."

Instead of being "scandalized unnecessarily by so many little things," he said, "let us be indignant at all those situations where life is degraded, wounded and killed."

"Why are we not scandalized in the face of rampant evil, life being humiliated, labor issues, the sufferings of migrants? Why do we remain apathetic and indifferent to the injustices of the world? Why do we not take to heart the situation of prisoners" and all those in pain or discarded living in one's city, he asked.

It is because "we are afraid, afraid of finding Christ there," the pope said. "God is hidden in the dark corners of life and of our cities."

"Let us bring the prophecy of the Gospel into our flesh, with our choices even before our words," he said, asking the faithful to "be on the front line of spreading the Gospel of hope," especially toward migrants and "those who, in body or spirit, need to be encouraged and comforted."

Before praying the Angelus with those gathered in the square, the pope noted how Trieste has a "vocation of bringing different peoples together" because it is an important port and is located at the crossroads of Italy, Central Europe and the Balkans.

"In these situations, the challenge for the church and civil community is to know how to combine openness and stability, welcome and identity," he said. Trieste is equipped to face this challenge because, "as Christians, we have the Gospel, which gives meaning and hope to our lives and, as citizens, you have the constitution, a reliable 'compass' for the path of democracy."