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Material progress not enough to make people free, happy, pope says

by Carol Glatz by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — The world's huge technological and scientific progress hasn't always made people freer or happier, Pope Benedict XVI said.

While scientific knowledge and advancements "are important for human life, it's not enough on its own," the pope said Wednesday at his weekly general audience.

"We need not just material sustenance, we need love, meaning, hope and a solid foundation" that helps people live with courage even in the face of doubt, difficulties, and everyday problems, he said.

Before an estimated 20,000 people gathered in St. Peter's Square, the pope continued a new series of catecheses to accompany the Year of Faith, which runs until Nov. 24, 2013. His talk focused on the nature of faith and what it means to believe.

The pope said, "Despite the great magnitude of scientific discoveries and technological successes, humanity today does not seem to have become truly freer and more human." Along with signs of progress and increased well-being, there also are "many forms of exploitation, manipulation, violence, tyranny and injustice."

Faith gives people a solid sense of certainty in uncertain times because "faith is believing in this love of God that never fails in the face of human wickedness, evil and death, but is capable of transforming every form of slavery, offering the possibility of salvation," he said.

"Faith is not the simple intellectual approval by man of truths concerning God; it is an act in which I freely entrust myself to a God who is Father and loves me," the pope said.

In fact, having faith is above all about having a relationship with a God whose love is "indestructible" and who understands people's problems, he said.

Christian faith entails giving up control and placing one's life in God's hands, he said. It's this "liberating and reassuring certainty of faith" that helps people live without fear, proclaiming and living out the Gospel with courage.

While faith is a gift of God and it takes divine grace and help from the Holy Spirit in order to truly believe, a free acceptance of faith is also necessary.

Trusting in God and adhering to his truths "is contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason," he said quoting the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

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Breaking free from one's own limited views and expectations, and believing God will show the way result in true liberty, an authentic human identity, real joy and peace, he said.

At the end of his general audience talk, Pope Benedict called on young people, newlyweds and the ill to look for inspiration from Blessed John Paul II, whose feast day was Monday.

Pope Benedict told young people to learn from his Polish predecessor and "live life with his passion and enthusiasm." He told the infirm to "carry the cross of suffering with joy like he himself taught us." And he asked newlyweds to always keep God at the center of their life so it will be filled with "more joy and happiness."

Among the many dignitaries the pope greeted after the audience was Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, the apostolic nuncio to the United States. They engaged in a minute-long exchange, after which the archbishop thanked the pope, kissed his ring and knelt before him.

Before his appointment to the United States, Vigano was the secretary general of the governor's office of Vatican City. He had written a series of letters in 2011 -- leaked to the press in early 2012 -- to the pope and Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican Secretary of State, warning of corruption, abuse of power, a lack of transparency in awarding Vatican contracts and opposition to his efforts to enact financial reforms.

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