

Pope: Cross isn't an ornament, Christianity isn't a do-gooder's guide

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Christianity isn't a philosophy or guide to survival, good behavior and peace, it's a relationship with a real person who died on the cross for our sins, Pope Francis said.

"Christianity can't be understood without understanding this deep humiliation of the son of God, who abased himself, becoming a servant to the point of his death and death on the cross" in order to serve humanity, the pope said.

In his homily Tuesday during an early morning Mass in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Pope Francis focused on the day's reading from the Book of John (8:21-30), in which Jesus tells the Pharisees and the Jews that those who belong to this world and do not believe in him "will die in your sins."

Jesus tells them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am," the son of God, obeying God's will.

"Christianity doesn't exist without the cross and a cross doesn't exist without Jesus Christ," the pope said, according to a report by Vatican Radio.

The cross, however, "isn't an ornament" that is just placed in churches and on altars, and "it's not a symbol" of identification, he said.

"The cross is the mystery, the mystery of God's love, who lowers himself, who makes himself 'nothing'" and takes on humanity's sins, he said.

If people want to find their sins, he said, they should look to the cross, to "the Lord's wounds," and it's there that their sins will be healed and forgiven.

God's forgiveness doesn't mean "the debt we have with him is erased: the forgiveness that God gives us are the wounds of his son on the cross, lifted up on the cross, in which he pulls us toward him and we let ourselves be healed."

Jesus took everything upon himself, "all of our sins, our pride, our self-assurance, our vanity, our desire to become like God," the pope said. That is why "a Christian who doesn't know how to glory in the crucified Christ hasn't understood what being a Christian means."

"Christianity isn't a philosophical doctrine, it isn't a guide to life for survival, for being well-behaved and for building peace. These are the results," he said. "Christianity is a person, a person lifted up on the cross, a person who abased himself to save us."

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