

Christians don't form cliques, pope says in Mission Sunday message

VATICAN CITY (CNS) (UPDATED)— Compassion and a constant effort to reach out to others are essential elements of being “missionary disciples,” even in the midst of a pandemic, Pope Francis said in his message for World Mission Sunday.

“In these days of pandemic, when there is a temptation to disguise and justify indifference and apathy in the name of healthy social distancing, there is urgent need for the mission of compassion, which can make that necessary distancing an opportunity for encounter, care and promotion,” the pope wrote in his message for the celebration, which will be held Oct. 24.

The theme chosen for the 2021 celebration is taken from the Acts of the Apostles: “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard.” The Vatican released the pope’s message Jan. 29.

“Our life of faith grows weak, loses its prophetic power and its ability to awaken amazement and gratitude when we become isolated and withdraw into little groups,” the pope wrote.

“By its very nature, the life of faith calls for a growing openness to embracing everyone, everywhere,” he said. “The first Christians, far from yielding to the temptation to become an elite group, were inspired by the Lord and his offer of new life to go out among the nations and to bear witness to what they had seen and heard: the good news that the kingdom of God is at hand.”

Christ calls every believer to share the good news of God’s love and his offer of salvation in Christ, the pope said. “No

one is excluded, no one need feel distant or removed from this compassionate love.”

“Always, but especially in these times of pandemic,” he said, “it is important to grow in our daily ability to widen our circle, to reach out to others who, albeit physically close to us, are not immediately part of our ‘circle of interests.’”

The early Christians faced misunderstandings, hostility and persecution from without and divisions within, Pope Francis noted, but the Acts of the Apostles documents how they endured hardship by clinging firmly to Christ and grew in the “conviction that God is able to act in any circumstance, even amid apparent setbacks, and in the certainty that all those who entrust themselves to God will bear good fruit.”

“Our own times are not easy,” the pope wrote. “The pandemic has brought to the fore and amplified the pain, the solitude, the poverty and the injustices experienced by so many people. It has unmasked our false sense of security and revealed the brokenness and polarization quietly growing in our midst.”

“We have experienced discouragement, disillusionment and fatigue,” he said, and most people have been tempted at times by “a growing negativity that stifles hope.”

But like the early Christians, “in our communities and in our families, we can hear the powerful message of life that echoes in our hearts and proclaims: ‘He is not here but has risen!’”

The message of Gospel hope frees Christians from fatalism, Pope Francis said, and gives them “the freedom and boldness needed to rise up and seek with creativity every possible way to show compassion, the ‘sacramental’ of God’s closeness to us, a closeness that abandons no one along the side of the road.”

Sharing “what we have seen and heard,” he said, includes the great mercy God has shown to each person.

The outreach of mercy and solidarity can “become a point of reference and a source of credibility, enabling us to recover a shared passion for building a community of belonging and solidarity worthy of our time, our energy and our resources,” the pope said.

Reading the Scriptures and holding fast to faith in the risen Lord motivates Christians and liberates them from “the worst kind of skepticism,” one that tells them that nothing will ever change, he said.

“In our present circumstances,” he wrote, “there is an urgent need for missionaries of hope who, anointed by the Lord, can provide a prophetic reminder that no one is saved by himself.”

Pope Francis remembered “with gratitude all those men and women who, by their testimony of life, help us to renew our baptismal commitment to be generous and joyful apostles of the Gospel.”

While reminding all Catholics of their obligation to support the missions and share the Gospel, he also asked people to pray that God would continue to call men and women to dedicate their lives totally to missionary work.

“The call to mission is not a thing of the past or a romantic leftover from earlier times,” the pope wrote. “Today, too, Jesus needs hearts capable of experiencing vocation as a true love story that urges them to go forth to the peripheries of our world as messengers and agents of compassion.”

The full text of the pope’s message [in English is here.](#)

The text [in Spanish is here.](#)