

Pope: True faith known by sincerity of heart, not hypocrisy of appearances

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Christians must strive for a sincere faith that seeks to serve others rather than to exploit the weakest for personal gain, Pope Francis said.

Addressing pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square Nov. 7 for his Sunday Angelus address, the pope warned the faithful to be on guard "against hypocrisy, which is a dangerous illness of the soul."

"This is a warning for all time and for everyone, Church and society: to never take advantage of a specific role to crush others, never to make money off the backs of the weakest!" he exclaimed.

After praying the Angelus prayer, the pope expressed concerns over increasing violence in Ethiopia amid reports that Tigray Defense Force rebels were approaching the outskirts of the country's capital, Addis Ababa.

The conflict, which began in Tigray Nov. 4, 2020, has killed thousands and displaced more than 1 million people, as it destroyed villages and towns.

"I invite everyone to pray for these people so sorely tried and I renew my appeal that fraternal harmony and the peaceful path of dialogue may prevail," the pope said.

The pope also prayed for victims of a deadly tanker explosion in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Nov. 5 that claimed the lives of over 100 people.

In his main talk, Pope Francis reflected on the day's Gospel reading in which Jesus warns a crowd listening to him to be

weary of those who seek “seats of honor in synagogues and places of honor at banquets.”

Jesus’s warning to “watch out for hypocrites” means being on guard from basing “our lives on the cult of appearances, externals, and the exaggerated care of one’s own image,” he said.

Departing from his prepared remarks, the pope said that this “ugly attitude” can be seen today, even in the Church, when some place themselves “above the humble, exploiting them, thrashing them, (while) feeling perfect.”

“This is the evil of clericalism,” he said.

In the Gospel, the pope continued, Jesus also said that the actions of a poor widow who gave all that she had to the temple treasury serves as a warning about exploiting those less fortunate, especially within the Church.

“How important it is to free the sacred from ties with money,” the pope said.

The poor woman, he added, is a “teacher of faith” because “she does not go to the temple to clear her conscience, she does not pray to make herself seen, she does not show off her faith, but she gives from her heart generously and freely.”

“Let us learn from her,” Pope Francis said. “A faith without external frills, but interiorly sincere; a faith composed of humble love for God and for our brothers and sisters.”