



Thousands of people from different parts of the world gather in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican for Pope Francis' weekly general audience May 1, 2024.  
(CNS/Pablo Esparza)

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The greatest enemy of faith is fear, Pope Francis said at his weekly general audience.

That is why faith is the first gift "that must be welcomed and asked for daily, so that it may be renewed in us. It is seemingly a small gift, yet it is the essential one," he said May 1 in the Paul VI Audience Hall.

Continuing a series of audience talks about vices and virtues, the pope reflected on the virtue of faith, reiterating the difference between "cardinal" virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance and the "theological" or New Testament virtues of faith, hope and charity.

The three theological virtues, he said, "can be lived only thanks to the gift of God."

"Without them, we could be prudent, just, strong and temperate, but we would not have eyes that see even in the dark, we would not have a heart that loves even when it is not loved, we would not have a hope that dares against all hope," he said.

Faith is the act by which a person freely commits him or herself to God, the pope said.

Francis recounted the story of the disciples crossing the lake in a boat with Jesus, but beginning to panic when the boat started to fill up with water in a storm. They woke Jesus who had been sleeping and were upset he seemed not to care they were in danger.

Jesus rebukes them, saying, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?"

Francis said, "Here, then, is the great enemy of faith: it is not intelligence, it is not reason, as, alas, some continue obsessively to repeat." The enemy is "simply fear."

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"We who are believers also often realize that we have only a short supply" of faith, he said.

"But it is the happiest gift, the only virtue we are permitted to envy," the pope said, "because those who have faith are inhabited by a force that is not only human; indeed, faith 'triggers' grace in us and opens the mind to the mystery of God."

"Faith is the virtue that makes the Christian. Because to be Christians is not first and foremost about accepting a culture with the values that accompany it, but welcoming and cherishing a bond" between God and oneself, he said.

After his main talk, the pope noted that for the church May 1 is the feast of St. Joseph the worker. It is a major holiday in many countries, including Italy, as it marks Labor Day or International Workers' Day.

The day also begins "the Marian month," he said. "Therefore, to each of you I would like to re-propose the Holy Family of Nazareth as a model of domestic community: a community of life, work and love."