



Pope Francis greets visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican to pray the Angelus Aug. 15, 2023. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

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Vatican City — August 15, 2023

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On the feast of Mary's assumption into heaven, Pope Francis entrusted to her people's prayers for peace, especially in Ukraine.

"The din of weapons drowns out attempts at dialogue," the pope told an estimated 10,000 people gathered in St. Peter's Square Aug. 15 to pray the Angelus with him.

"The law of force prevails over the force of law" and respect for human rights, "but we must not be discouraged," the pope said. "Let's continue to hope and pray because it is God, it is he who guides history. May he hear us."

While the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of Mary's assumption, body and soul, into heaven, the day's Gospel reading focused on the Visitation, Mary's decision to rush to visit her cousin Elizabeth when she heard the older woman also was expecting. The passage also includes the Magnificat, when Mary praises the greatness of God and all he has done for her.

"Mary ascends, and the word of God reveals to us what characterized her as she does so: service to her neighbor and praise to God," Francis told people in the square.

"In other words, Jesus and Mary travel the same road: two lives that ascend upward, glorifying God and serving their brothers and sisters," the pope said.

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Mary's journey from Nazareth to visit Elizabeth was not short, the pope said. Serving others has a price, which everyone experiences "in the effort, the patience and the worry that taking care of another brings," whether it is traveling for work to support one's family or sleepless nights caring for a newborn or volunteering to care for those who can offer nothing in return.

"It is tiring, but it is ascending upward, it is earning heaven," Francis said.

The Gospel also makes clear how praise -- especially of God but also of others -- changes the quality of one's actions and one's life, he said.

"Praise increases joy. Praise is like a ladder: it leads hearts upward," he said. "Praise elevates souls and defeats the temptation to give up."

"Haven't you seen how boring people, those who live on gossip, are incapable of praise," the pope asked the crowd.

"Ask yourself: Am I capable of praise?" he suggested. "How good it is to praise God every day, and others, too! How good it is to live in gratitude and blessing instead of regrets and complaints, to raise our gaze upward instead of keeping a long face!"