



Children ride with Pope Francis in the popemobile during the pope's general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Nov. 22. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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A person hearing God's call to follow him does not mean that person then belongs to a special or privileged clique of the perfect or the "elected," Pope Francis said.

"The call is never a privilege. We cannot say that we are privileged over others," the pope said Nov. 22 at his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square.

"No, the call is for a service and God chooses one in order to reach everyone, in order to love everyone," he said.

Francis continued his series of talks about the "zeal for evangelization," focusing on a few themes from his 2013 apostolic exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel."

The theme of his talk Nov. 22 was that the Gospel and the joy of God's love are for everyone, quoting from his exhortation that everyone has "a right to receive the Gospel. Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone."

The pope said, "Let us distinguish ourselves for our capacity to come out of ourselves, to overcome every limit" and bring the Good News to everyone, with an "open and expansive" attitude that "comes from Jesus, who made his presence in the world a continuous journey, aimed at reaching out to everyone, even learning from some of his encounters.

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He said the Gospel according to St. Matthew details Jesus' refusal to cure the daughter of a pagan Canaanite woman. Jesus tells her he "was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" and that "it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs."

But the woman insisted, replying, "even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." This moves Jesus, who then says, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish," the pope said.

This encounter with a foreign and pagan woman shows Jesus changing his mind, the pope said. "The Lord himself finds confirmation that his preaching should not be limited to the people to whom he belongs, but open to all."

"Perhaps the greatest temptation" for Christians, the pope said, is to consider God's call as being "a privilege. Please, don't."

"When God calls a person and makes a pact with some of them," he said, it is always to elect the one in order to reach others.

The church as "catholic" or universal is also "to prevent the temptation of identifying Christianity with a culture, with an ethnicity, with a system," he added. Christianity is not a "clique of the elected, of first class."

"Let us not forget: God chooses some to love all," Francis said, and "the Gospel is not just for me, it is for everyone."