Spirituality

Francis, the comic strip

Pope Francis waves during his Angelus in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Dec. 3. (CNS /Reuters/Tony Gentile)

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Like a sprout, humility needs to be nourished so that the Holy Spirit may grow within all Christians, Pope Francis said.

While some believe that "being humble means being polite, courteous and closing your eyes in prayer," accepting humiliation is the only real sign of humility, the pope said in his homily Dec. 5 at morning Mass in the Domus Sanctae Marthae.

"Humility without humiliation is not humility. The humble one is that man, that woman who is capable of enduring humiliations like Jesus, the humiliated one, the great humiliated one," he said.

The pope centered his homily on the day's reading from Isaiah (11:1-10), in which the prophet foretells the coming of the Messiah as a shoot that "shall sprout from the stump of Jesse," and says that "the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him."

Christians, Francis said, must be aware "that each one of us is a sprout of that root," which must be cared for so that it can grow with the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Faith and humility are needed, he said, so that "this very small gift" will grow fully and bring forth the "gifts of the Holy Spirit," which are "the spirit of wisdom and intelligence, the spirit of wise counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord."

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"We need humility to believe that the Father, the lord of heaven and earth -- as today's Gospel says -- has hidden these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to the little ones," the pope said.

Humility, he added, means being small, "like the sprout, a little thing that grows every day, a small thing that needs the Holy Spirit to go forward, toward the fullness of its own life."