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Pope: Christians can work with atheists, cannot kill in God?s name

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | May. 22, 2013
Pope Francis
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Christians are called to welcome and cooperate with the good accomplished by members of other religions or no religion at all, promoting a culture of dialogue and peace, Pope Francis said Wednesday.

"We are all children of God -- all of us. And God loves us -- all of us," the pope said in his homily during an early morning Mass in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae. Lebanese Cardinal Bechara Rai, the Maronite patriarch, concelebrated the Mass, which was attended by Vatican employees.

Pope Francis' homily focused on the day's Gospel story from Mark 9:38-40, which recounts the disciples complaining to Jesus about outsiders casting out demons in Jesus' name and Jesus telling the disciples, "Whoever is not against us is for us."

The pope said that by saying, "If he's not one of us, he cannot do good; if he's not in our party, he can't do good," the disciples were "a bit intolerant, closed in the idea of possessing the truth, in the conviction that 'all those who do not have the truth cannot do good.'"

However, the pope said, "the possibility of doing good is something we all have" as individuals created in the image and likeness of God.

All people are called to do good and not evil, the pope said. Some would object, "'but, Father, he isn't Catholic so he can't do good.' Yes, he can. He must."

The idea that others cannot really be good and do good in the world creates "a wall that leads to war and to something that historically some people have thought: that we can kill in the name of God. And that, simply, is blasphemy. To say that one can kill in God's name is blasphemy."

"The Lord has redeemed us all with the blood of Christ, all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone," he said. Some may ask, "'Father, even the atheists?' Them, too. Everyone."

The commandment to do good and avoid evil is something that binds all human beings, he said, and it is "a beautiful path to peace."

Noticing the good others do, affirming them and working with them promotes an encounter that is good for individuals and societies, he said. "Little by little we build that culture of encounter that we need so much."

Someone can object, "'But I don't believe, Father, I'm an atheist.' But do good and we'll meet there," he said.

Noting that May 22 was the feast of St. Rita of Cascia, sometimes called the saint of impossible causes, the pope asked the small congregation to pray for "this grace that everyone, all persons would do good and that we would encounter each other in this work."

"May St. Rita grant us this grace, which seems impossible," he said.

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