

Gossip worse than COVID-19, Pope tells faithful

Gossip is “a plague worse than COVID,” Pope Francis said, asserting that while speaking ill of others comes almost naturally, it is a tool of the devil to divide the church.

Commenting Sept. 6 on the Sunday Gospel reading about Jesus telling his disciples what to do when a member of the community errs and requires correction, Pope Francis said that rather than helping the other mend his or her ways, “when we see a mistake, a fault, a slip, in that brother or sister, usually the first thing we do is to go and recount it to others – to gossip.”

Gossiping sows division, he told people gathered in St. Peter’s Square for the midday recitation of the Angelus prayer.

“The great gossip is the devil, who always goes around recounting bad things about others, because he is the liar who seeks to divide the church, to distance brothers and sisters and not create community,” the pope said.

“Please, brothers and sisters, let us make an effort not to gossip,” he said. “Let’s try: no gossip.”

The day’s Gospel reading (*Matthew* 18:15-20) is often cited as a lesson in “fraternal correction,” urging people to speak directly and privately to a person they believe is in the wrong. If that doesn’t work, Jesus tells the disciples to take “one or two others along with you” and try again. If that, too, is unsuccessful, then the community of the church should be informed.

The goal, the pope said, is not to embarrass or punish, but to rehabilitate.

In the Gospel, Jesus said that if even the love and support of the community are not enough to correct the person, then the community should treat him “as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

“This expression, seemingly so scornful,” the pope said, “in reality invites us to put the brother or sister in God’s hands: only the Father will be able to show a greater love than that of all brothers and sisters put together.”

After reciting the prayer, the pope greeted several groups in the square, including staff members and new students at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. The U.S. seminarians arrived in Rome Aug. 20 and were required to observe a 14-day quarantine before venturing to the Vatican and out into the city.