



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 12 June 2013

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning! Today I would like to reflect on another term by which the Second Vatican Council defined the Church: “People of God” (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 9; *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 782). And I do so with several questions for each one of you to reflect on.

1. What does “People of God” mean? First of all it means that God does not belong in a special way to any one people; for it is He who calls us, convokes us, invites us to be part of his people, and this invitation is addressed to all, without distinction, for the mercy of God “desires all men to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4). Jesus does not tell the Apostles or us to form an exclusive group, a group of the *elite*. Jesus says: go out and make disciples of all people (cf. Mt 28:19). St Paul says that in the People of God, in the Church, “there is neither Jew nor Greek... for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). I would also like to say to anyone who feels far away from God and the Church, to anyone who is timid or indifferent, to those who think they can no longer change: the Lord calls you too to become part in his people and he does this with great respect and love! He invites us to be part of this people, the People of God!

2. How does one become a member of this people? It is not through physical birth, but through a new birth. In the Gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he needs to be born from on high, from water and from the Spirit in order to enter the Kingdom of God (cf. Jn 3:3-5). It is through Baptism that

we are introduced into this people, through faith in Christ, a gift from God that must be nourished and cultivated throughout our life. Let us ask ourselves: how do I make this faith that I received in my Baptism grow? How do I make this faith that I received and that belongs to the People of God grow?

3. Another question: what is the law of the People of God? It is the law of love, love for God and love for neighbour according to the new commandment that the Lord left to us (cf. Jn 13:34). It is a love, however, that is not sterile sentimentality or something vague, but the acknowledgment of God as the one Lord of life and, at the same time, the acceptance of the other as my true brother, overcoming division, rivalry, misunderstanding, selfishness; these two things go together. Oh how much more of the journey do we have to make in order to actually live the new law — the law of the Holy Spirit who acts in us, the law of charity, of love! Looking in newspapers or on television we see so many wars between Christians: how does this happen? Within the People of God, there are so many wars! How many wars of envy, of jealousy, are waged in neighbourhoods, in the workplace! Even within the family itself, there are so many internal wars! We must ask the Lord to make us correctly understand this law of love. How beautiful it is to love one another as true brothers and sisters. How beautiful! Let's do something today. We may all have likes and dislikes; many of us are perhaps a little angry with someone; then let us say to the Lord: Lord, I am angry with this or that person; I am praying to you for him or her. To pray for those with whom we are angry is a beautiful step towards that law of love. Shall we take it? Let's take it today!

4. What is this people's mission? It is to bring the hope and salvation of God to the world: to be a sign of the love of God who calls everyone to friendship with Him; to be the leaven that makes the dough rise, the salt that gives flavour and preserves from corruption, to be a light that enlightens. Look around us — it is enough to open a newspaper, as I said — we see the presence of evil, the Devil is acting. However, I would like to say out loud: God is stronger! Do you believe this, that God is stronger? Let us say it together, let us say it all together: God is stronger! And do you know why he is stronger? Because He is Lord, the only Lord. And I would like to add that reality, at times dark and marked by evil, can change, if we first bring the light of the Gospel especially through our lives. If in a stadium — say the Olympic stadium in Rome or the San Lorenzo in Buenos Aires — on a dark night, if someone turns on a light, you can barely see it but if the other 70,000 spectators turn on their own light, the whole stadium shines. Let our lives together be the one light of Christ; together we will carry the light of the Gospel to the whole of reality.

5. What is the destination of this People? Our destination is the Kingdom of God, which God himself inaugurated on this earth and which must be extended until its fulfillment, when Christ, our life, shall appear (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 9). The end then is full communion with the Lord, familiarity with the Lord, entry into his own divine life, where we will live in the joy of his love beyond measure, a full joy.

Dear brothers and sisters, being the Church, to be the People of God, in accordance with the

Father's great design of love, means to be the leaven of God in this humanity of ours. It means to proclaim and to bring the God's salvation to this world of ours, so often led astray, in need of answers that give courage, hope and new vigour for the journey. May the Church be a place of God's mercy and hope, where all feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live according to the good life of the Gospel. And to make others feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged, the Church must be with doors wide open so that all may enter. And we must go out through these doors and proclaim the Gospel.

Greetings:

I offer an affectionate greeting to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, including those from England, Scotland, Ireland, Malta, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and the United States. May your stay in the Eternal City confirm you in love for our Lord and his Church. God bless you all!

Appeal

Today throughout the world the *World Day Against Child Labour* is being celebrated with a special reference to the exploitation of children in domestic work: a deplorable and constantly increasing phenomenon, particularly in poor countries. There are millions of minors, mostly young girls, who are victims of this hidden form of exploitation that often entails abuse as well, mistreatment and discrimination. This really is slavery!

I sincerely hope that the international community can initiate more effective measures to confront this real scourge. All children must be able to play, study, pray and grow, in their own families, and do so in a harmonious context of love and serenity. It is their right and our duty. Many people instead of letting them play make slaves of them: this is a scourge. A serene childhood allows children to look forward with confidence to life and the future. Woe to those who stifle their joyful impulse of hope!