



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** St Peter's Square

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*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Reading the Acts of the Apostles, one can see how the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of the Church's mission. It is he who guides the journey of the evangelizers by showing them the path to follow.

We can see this clearly in the moment in which the Apostle Paul, having reached Troas, has a vision. A Macedonian beseeches him: "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). The people of North Macedonia are proud of this; they are very proud of having called Paul for it was Paul who proclaimed Jesus Christ. I remember well those beautiful people who welcomed me with so much warmth. May they preserve this faith which Paul preached to them! The Apostle does not hesitate and leaves for Macedonia, certain that it is precisely God who is sending him, and he arrives in Philippi, a "Roman colony" (Acts 16:12) on the *Via Egnatia*, to preach the Gospel. Paul stops there for some days. Three events characterize his stay in Philippi in three days; three important events. 1) the evangelization and baptism of Lydia and her family; 2) the arrest he endures, along with Silas, after exorcising a slave exploited by her owners; 3) the conversion and baptism of his jailer and his family. Let us look at these three episodes in Paul's life.

The power of the Gospel is mostly addressed to the women of Philippi, in particular to Lydia, a merchant of purple goods from the city of Thyatira, a believer in God whose heart the Lord opens in order "to give heed to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14). Indeed Lydia welcomes Christ, receives baptism together with her family and welcomes *those who are of Christ*, hosting Paul and Silas in her home. We have here the testimony of Christianity's arrival in Europe: the beginning of a process of inculturation which continues still today. It entered via Macedonia.

After the warmth experienced in Lydia's home, Paul and Silas find themselves having to deal with the harshness of prison: they go from the comfort of this conversion of Lydia and her family, to the desolation of prison where they have been thrown for having freed in the name of Jesus, a "slave

girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain” with her position as soothsayer (Acts 16:16). Her owners earned well and this wretched slave did what fortune tellers do: she would guess your future, she would read your palms — as the song says: “*prendi questa mano zingara*” (take this hand, gypsy) — and people paid her for this. Today too, dear brothers and sisters, there are people who pay for this. I remember in my own diocese, in a very large park, there were more than 60 small tables where men and women fortune tellers sat reading palms and the people believed in these things! And they paid. And this also happened in Saint Paul’s days. In retaliation, her owners reported Paul and they brought the Apostles before the magistrates with the charge of public disorder.

But what happens? Paul is in prison and during his imprisonment a surprising fact occurs. He is desolated but instead of complaining, Paul and Silas begin to sing hymns praising God and this praise unleashes a power that frees them: during the prayer, an earthquake shakes the foundations of the prison, the doors open and everyone’s fetters fall off (cf. Acts 16:25-26). Just like the prayer of Pentecost, even the one said in prison brings about extraordinary effects.

Believing that the prisoners had escaped, the jailer was on the verge of committing suicide because jailers paid with their lives if a prisoner escaped. But Paul cries out: “we are all here” (Acts 16:28). He then asks: “what must I do to be saved?” (v. 30). The answer is: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (v. 31). At this point a change occurs: in the middle of the night, the jailer listens to the Word of the Lord with his family, he welcomes the Apostles, washes their wounds — because they had been beaten — and together with his family, he receives Baptism; then “he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God” (v. 34). He prepares a meal and invites Paul and Silas to stay with them: the moment of comfort! In the middle of this anonymous jailer’s night, the light of Christ shines and defeats the darkness: the chains of the heart fall off and a previously unknown joy blossoms within him and his relatives. Thus, the Holy Spirit is on mission: from the start, from Pentecost onwards he is the protagonist of the mission. And he carries us forward. We must be faithful to the vocation to which the Spirit moves us. In order to bring the Gospel.

Today, let us too ask the Holy Spirit for an open heart, like Lydia’s, receptive to God and welcoming towards our brothers and sisters and a bold faith, like that of Paul and Silas, and also an open heart like that of the jailer who allows himself to be touched by the Holy Spirit.

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### ***Appeal and Special Greetings***

Dear brothers and sisters, my thoughts go to beloved Iraq where this month’s protest demonstrations left many dead and wounded. As I express my condolences for the victims and my closeness to their families and to the wounded, I invite the Authorities to listen to the cry of the people who are calling for a dignified and peaceful life. I exhort all Iraqis, with the support of the

international community, to journey on the path of dialogue and reconciliation and to seek the just solutions to the challenges and problems of the country. I pray that this martyred people can find peace and stability after many years of war and violence during which they have greatly suffered.

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from England, Ireland, Denmark, Australia, Korea, Indonesia, Israel, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Lastly, I offer a special greeting to *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. I can see they are many ... At the end of the month of October let us invoke Mary, Mother of Jesus and our Mother. May you learn to turn to her, praying to her with the prayer of the Rosary. May Our Lady be your support in the *sequela* of her Son, Jesus Christ.