



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall*

*Wednesday, 29 November 2023*

**[Multimedia]**

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**Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer. 28. *Proclamation is for today***

*Dear brothers and sisters,*

The last few times, we saw that Christian proclamation is a *joy*, and it is *for everyone*; today we will look at a third aspect: it is *for today*.

One almost always hears bad things being said about today. Certainly, with wars, climate change, worldwide injustice and migration, family and hope crises, there is no shortage of cause for concern. In general, the present seems to be inhabited by a culture that puts the individual above all else and technology at the centre of everything, with its ability to solve many problems and its enormous advances in so many fields. But at the same time, this culture of technical-individual progress leads to the affirmation of a freedom that does not want to set itself limits and is indifferent to those who fall behind. And so, it consigns great human aspirations to the often voracious logic of the economy, with a vision of life that discards those who do not produce and struggles to look beyond the immanent. We could even say that we find ourselves in the first civilization in history that globally seeks to organize a human society without God's presence, concentrated in huge cities that remain horizontal despite their vertiginous skyscrapers.

The account of the city of Babel and its tower comes to mind (cf. *Gen 11:1-9*). It narrates a social

project that involves sacrificing all individuality to the efficiency of the collective. Humanity speaks only one language — we might say that it has a “single way of thinking” — as if enveloped in a kind of general spell that absorbs the uniqueness of each into a bubble of uniformity. Then God confuses the languages, that is, He re-establishes differences, recreates the conditions for uniqueness to develop, revives the multiple where ideology would like to impose the single. The Lord also distracts humanity from its delirium of omnipotence: “Let us make a name for ourselves”, say the ‘exalted’ inhabitants of Babel (v. 4), who want to reach all the way to heaven, to put themselves in God’s place. But these are dangerous, alienating, destructive ambitions, and the Lord, by confounding these expectations, protects mankind, preventing an impending disaster. This story really does seem topical: even today, cohesion, instead of fraternity and peace, is often based on ambition, nationalism, homologation and techno-economic structures that inculcate the conviction that God is insignificant and useless: not so much because one seeks *more knowledge*, but above all for the sake of *more power*. It is a temptation that pervades the great challenges of today’s culture.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* I tried to describe some of them (cf. [nos. 52-75](#)), but above all I called for “an evangelization capable of shedding light on these new ways of relating to God, to others and to the world around us, and inspiring essential values. It must reach the places where new narratives and paradigms are being formed, bringing the word of Jesus to the inmost soul of our cities” ([no. 74](#)). In other words, Jesus can be proclaimed only by inhabiting the culture of one’s own time; and always taking to heart the words of the Apostle Paul about the present: “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). There is therefore no need to contrast today with alternative visions from the past. Nor is it sufficient to simply reiterate acquired religious convictions that, however true, become abstract with the passage of time. A truth does not become more credible because one raises one’s voice in speaking it, but because it is witnessed with one’s life.

Apostolic zeal is never a simple repetition of an acquired style, but testimony that the Gospel is alive for us here today. Aware of this, let us therefore look at our age and our culture as a gift. They are ours, and evangelizing them does not mean judging them from afar, nor standing on a balcony and shouting out Jesus’ name, but rather going down to the streets, going to the places where one lives, frequenting the spaces where one suffers, works, studies and reflects, inhabiting the crossroads where human beings share what has meaning in their lives. It means being, as a Church, a leaven for “dialogue, encounter, unity. After all, our own formulations of faith are the fruit of dialogue and encounter among cultures, communities and various situations. We must not fear dialogue: on the contrary, it is precisely confrontation and criticism that help us to preserve theology from being transformed into ideology” (*Address at the Fifth National Congress of the Italian Church*, Florence, 10 November 2015).

It is necessary to stand at the crossroads of today. Leaving them would impoverish the Gospel and reduce the Church to a sect. Frequenting them, on the other hand, helps us Christians

understand the reasons for our hope in a renewed way, in order to extract and to share “what is new and what is old”, from the treasure of faith (*Mt 13:52*). In short, more than wanting to convert the world of today, we need to *convert pastoral care* so that it better incarnates the Gospel today (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 25). Let us make Jesus’ desire our own: to help fellow travellers not to lose the desire for God, to open their hearts to him and find the only One who, today and always, gives peace and joy to humanity.

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## Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those coming from Australia, Malaysia and the Philippines. I pray that each of you and your families may experience a blessed Advent, which will begin this Sunday, in preparation for the coming, at Christmas, of the newborn Jesus, Son of God and Prince of Peace. God bless you!

Lastly, my thoughts turn to young people, to the elderly, to the sick and to newlyweds. We are in the final days of the liturgical year, which invite us to reflect on the passing of time with eyes of faith. Always trust in divine Providence, which guides and accompanies our steps.

And please, let us continue to pray for the serious situation in Israel and Palestine. Peace, please — peace. I hope that the truce underway in Gaza may continue, so that all the hostages may be freed, and the necessary humanitarian aid may be able to enter. I spoke with the parish there: they don’t have water; they don’t have bread; and the people are suffering. It is the ordinary people who suffer. Those who wage war do not suffer. Let us ask for peace. And speaking of peace, let us not forget the dear Ukrainian people, who are suffering so much and who are still at war. Brothers and sisters, war is always a defeat. Everyone loses. Everyone. xxx Well, not everyone — there’s a group that gains a lot: arms manufacturers. They earn a lot from the deaths of others.

And I would like to thank, in this moment of joy, these young men and women from the circus. The circus expresses a dimension of the human spirit: that of gratuitous joy, that simple joy made with the mystique of play. I thank very much these young women and men who make people laugh, but who also give us a very powerful example of training, because doing what they do requires heavy, very heavy training. Let us thank them with a big round of applause.

And I give you all my blessing!

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## Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, we are reflecting on the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and its summons to proclaim “the joy of the Gospel” in the here and now of this, our present age. We can easily grow discouraged in these times when God seems to have no place and the deepest desires of the human heart often appear to be stifled by an obsession with money and power. Yet, Saint Paul reminds us that in God’s plan, this is the favourable time, the day of salvation. Apostolic zeal, thus, impels us, who have known the transforming grace of God’s word and the joy of the Gospel, to find new ways to bring that treasure to the places where we live, study and work, and to embody with our lives, especially through respect, compassion, and the gentleness of our words, the love of Jesus for every individual. May we, through our daily encounters, become witnesses of hope and bearers of the Gospel, who inspire all we meet to open wide the door to the One who alone can give joy and peace today and always.