



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE* Wednesday, 16 October 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

The Gospel's journey through the world, which Saint Luke recounts in the Acts of the Apostles, is accompanied by the supreme creativity of God which is manifested in a surprising way. God wants his children to overcome all particularism in order to open themselves up to the universality of salvation. This is the aim: to overcome particularism in order to be open to the universality of salvation, because God wants to save everyone. Those who are reborn by water and by the Holy Spirit — the baptized — are called to go out of themselves and be open to others, to live the closeness, the way of living together, which transforms every interpersonal relationship into an experience of fraternity (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 87).

The witness to this process of “fraternization” that the Spirit wishes to initiate in history is Peter, the protagonist in the Acts of the Apostles, along with Paul. Peter experiences an event that marks a decisive turning point in his life. While he is praying, he receives a vision that acts as divine “provocation”, so as to bring about a change of mindset in him. He sees a great tablecloth that descends from on High, containing various creatures: four-legged animals, reptiles and birds, and he hears a voice that invites him to eat of that flesh. He, as a good Jew, responds by claiming that he has never eaten anything unclean, as required by the Law of the Lord (cf. Lev 11). Then the voice reiterates forcefully: “What God has cleansed, you must not call common” (Acts 10:15).

With this event the Lord wants Peter to no longer value events and people according to the categories of clean and unclean, but that he learn to go further, to look at the person and at the intentions in his or her heart. What renders man unclean, in fact, comes not from outside but only from within, from the heart (cf. Mk 7:21). Jesus said it clearly.

After that vision, God invites Peter to go to the house of an uncircumcised Gentile, Cornelius, “a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God”, who gave alms liberally to the people and always prayed to God (cf. Acts 10:1-2), but was not a Jew.

In that Gentile's home, Peter preaches Christ Crucified and Risen, and the forgiveness of sins to those who believe in Him. And as Peter speaks, the Holy Spirit pours out upon Cornelius and his household. And Peter baptizes them in the name of Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 10:48).

This extraordinary fact — it is the first time that this sort of thing happens — becomes common knowledge in Jerusalem, where the brethren, scandalized by Peter's behaviour, criticize him bitterly (cf. Acts 11:1-3). Peter did something that went beyond what was customary, beyond the law, and this is why they criticize him. But after the encounter with Cornelius, Peter is more free of himself and in greater communion with God and with others, because he has seen the will of God in the action of the Holy Spirit. Thus he is able to understand that the election of Israel is not a reward for merit, but the sign of the freely given call to be a mediator of the divine blessing among the Gentiles.

Dear brothers and sisters, we learn from the Prince of the Apostles that an evangelizer cannot be an impediment to the creative work of God, who "desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4), but one who fosters the encounter of hearts with the Lord. And we, how do we behave towards our brothers and sisters, especially those who are not Christian? Are we an impediment to the encounter with God? Do we obstruct their encounter with the Father or do we facilitate it?

Today let us ask for the grace to allow ourselves to be astonished by God's surprises, not to obstruct his creativity, but to recognize and foster the ever new ways through which the Risen One pours out his Spirit upon the world and attracts hearts by making them come to know him as "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36). Thank you.

Special Greetings

I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from England, Scotland, Finland, Norway, Nigeria, Zambia, Kenya, Malawi, Korea, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. I greet in particular the Delegation from the nato Defense College, with good wishes for their efforts in the cause of peace. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Lastly I greet *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. The day after tomorrow we will celebrate the Feast of Saint Luke, the Evangelist who best reveals Jesus' heart and his mercy. May that occasion help everyone to rediscover the joy of being Christian, witnesses to the goodness of the Lord.

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