



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 9 August

2017 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

We have heard the reaction of the dining companions of Simon the Pharisee: “*Who is this, who even forgives sins?*” (Lk 7:49).

Jesus has just made a scandalous gesture. A woman of the city, known by all as a sinner, entered Simon’s house, stooped at Jesus’ feet and anointed them with fragrant oil. All those who were there at the table were whispering: if Jesus is a prophet, he should not accept such gestures from a woman like that. Those poor women, who served only to be met in secret, even by leaders, or to be stoned. According to the mentality of the time, there must be a clear division between saint and sinner, between pure and impure.

But Jesus’ attitude is different. From the beginning of his ministry in Galilee, he approaches lepers, the demon-possessed, all the sick and the marginalized. Conduct of the kind was not at all customary, such that Jesus’ compassion for the excluded, the “untouchable”, will be one of the things that upsets his contemporaries the most.

Wherever there is a person who suffers, Jesus takes on their burden, and that suffering becomes his own. Jesus does not preach that the condition of suffering must be borne with heroism, in the manner of stoic philosophers. Jesus shares human pain and, when he comes across it, that attitude which characterizes Christianity — mercy — gushes forth from his heart. Jesus feels mercy in the face of human suffering; Jesus’ heart is merciful. Jesus feels compassion. Literally: Jesus feels his heart tremble. Many times in the Gospel we meet with this type of reaction. Christ’s heart embodies and reveals the heart of God, who, wherever there is a man or woman suffering, wishes healing, liberation, full life for him or her.

This is why Jesus *opens his arms to sinners*. How many people even today persist in an ill-chosen life because they have found no one willing to look at them in a different way, with the eyes, or better, with the heart of God, that is, to look at them *with hope*. Jesus instead sees a possibility for

resurrection even in those who have amassed many mistaken choices. Jesus is always there, with an open heart; he throws open that mercy that he has in his heart; he forgives, embraces, understands and draws near: that is how Jesus is!

At times we forget that for Jesus it is not a matter of easy, low-cost love. The Gospels reveal the first negative reactions toward Jesus precisely when he forgives a man's sins (cf. Mk 2:1-12). It is a man who is suffering doubly: because he cannot walk and because he feels "inadequate". And Jesus understands that the second pain is greater than the first, to the extent that He greets him immediately with a message of liberation: "My son, your sins are forgiven" (v. 5). He frees that oppressive sense of feeling inadequate. It is then that several scribes — those who believe they are perfect: I think of the many Catholics who believe they are perfect and scorn others ... this is sad — several scribes present there are scandalized by Jesus' words, which sound like blasphemy, because only God can forgive sins.

We who are accustomed to experiencing the forgiveness of sins, perhaps at too "low" a "cost", must at times remind ourselves of how high a price God's love for us has cost. Each of us has cost a great deal: Jesus' life! He would have offered it even for just one of us. Jesus does not go to the Cross because he heals the sick, because he preaches charity, because he proclaims the beatitudes. The Son of God goes to the cross above all because he forgives sins, because he wants the total, definitive liberation of man's heart. Because he does not accept that the human being exhausts his entire existence with this indelible "tattoo", with the thought of not being able to be welcomed by the merciful heart of God. And with these sentiments Jesus goes to encounter sinners, which we all are.

This is how sinners are forgiven. They are not just comforted on the psychological level, because they are freed from the sense of guilt. Jesus does much more: he offers people who have made mistakes *the hope of a new life*. "But Lord, I am but a rag" — "Look forward and I will make you a new heart". This is the hope that Jesus gives us. A life marked by love. Matthew the publican becomes an Apostle of Christ: Matthew, who is a traitor to his country, an exploiter of the people. Zacchaeus, the rich, corrupt man from Jericho — this man surely had a degree in bribery — is transformed into a benefactor of the poor. The Samaritan woman, who had five husbands and is now living with another, hears the promise of "living water" which can well up within her forever (cf. Jn 4:14). This is how Jesus changes hearts; he does so with all of us.

It does us good to consider that God did not choose people who never make mistakes as the first dough to shape his Church. The Church is a people of sinners who feel the mercy and forgiveness of God. Peter understood the truth about himself more from the crowing of the cock than from his impulses of generosity, which swelled his chest, making him feel superior to others.

Brothers and sisters, we are all poor sinners, in need of God's mercy which has the power to transform us and to give us back hope, and to do this every day. And he does! And to the people

who understand this fundamental truth, God gives the most beautiful mission in the world, namely, love for brothers and sisters, and the message of a mercy which He does not deny anyone. And this is our hope. Let us go forth with this trust in the forgiveness, in the merciful love of Jesus.

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly those from Malta, Nigeria, Guam, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you, I invoke the grace of the Lord Jesus, that you may be a sign of mercy and Christian hope in your homes and communities. May God bless you!

Lastly, my cordial thoughts go to the *young people*, the *sick people* and the *newlyweds* who have come to Rome during this period. I hope, dear *young people*, that the encounter with so many places laden with culture, art and faith may be a propitious occasion to know and imitate the example given to us by so many witnesses to the Gospel who lived here, such as Lawrence, whose feast day is tomorrow. I encourage you, dear *sick people* to constantly join the suffering Jesus in faithfully carrying the cross for the redemption of the world. I wish that you, dear *newlyweds*, may build your family on the firm foundation of faithfulness to the Gospel of Love.

APPEAL FOR PEACE IN NIGERIA AND CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

I was deeply distressed by the massacre that occurred this past Sunday in Nigeria, inside a church, where innocent people were killed. And sadly this morning there was news of homicidal violence against the Christian community in the Central African Republic. I pray that every form of hatred and violence may cease and that such shameful crimes committed in places of worship, where the faithful gather to pray, will never be repeated. Let us think of our brothers and sisters of Nigeria and of the Central African Republic. Let us pray for them, all together: *Hail Mary*,
