



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 20 June 2018*

[Multimedia]

Before joining the faithful in Saint Peter's Square the Holy Father met and prayed with some 200 sick people who had gathered in the Paul VI Hall. Wishing them a good day, he offered these words of greeting:

Thank you for this visit. Before going to the Square, I wanted to greet you. With the jumbo screen you can follow the Audience in the Square; we will all be united. Thank you for coming. I assure you that I pray for you and I ask you to pray for me. Now I invite you to pray together to Our Lady.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

This Audience is taking place in two places: we, here in the Square, and in the Paul VI Hall where there are over 200 sick people who are following the Audience on the jumbo screen. All together we form one community. With a round of applause let us greet those who are in the Hall.

Last Wednesday we began a new series of catecheses on the Commandments. We saw that the Lord Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it. But we need to understand this perspective better.

In the Bible the Commandments do not exist for themselves, but are *part of a rapport, a relationship*. The Lord Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it. And there is that relationship, the *Covenant*^[1] *between God and his People*. At the beginning of chapter 20 of the Book of Exodus we read — and this is important—: “*God spoke all these words*” (v. 1).

It seems to be an introduction like any other, but nothing in the Bible is banal. The text does not

say: ‘*God spoke these commandments*’, but “*these words*”. Jewish tradition will always call the Decalogue ‘the Ten Words’. And this is exactly what the term ‘decalogue’ means.^[2] Yet they have the form of laws; they are objectively commandments. Why, then, does the sacred Author use, precisely here, the term ‘ten words’? Why? Why does he not say ‘ten commandments’?

Is there a difference between a *command* and a *word*? A command is a communication that does not require dialogue. A word, instead, is the essential medium of *relationship as a dialogue*. God the Father creates by means of his Word, and his Son is the Word made flesh. Love is nourished by words, and likewise education or cooperation. Two people who do not love each other are unable to communicate. When someone speaks to our heart, our loneliness is over. It receives a word; there is communication, and the commandments are God’s words: God communicates through these ten Words, and he awaits our response.

It is one thing to receive an order, and quite another to perceive that someone is trying to speak with us. A dialogue is much more than the communication of a truth. I may say to you: ‘Today is the last day of Spring, warm Spring, but today is the last day’. This is a truth; it is not a dialogue. But if I ask you: ‘What do you think about this Spring?’, a dialogue begins. The Commandments are a dialogue. Communication “arises from the enjoyment of speaking and it enriches those who express their love for one another through the medium of words. This is an enrichment which does not consist in objects but in persons who share themselves in dialogue” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 142).

But this difference is not something artificial. We see what happened in the beginning. The Tempter, the devil, wants to deceive man and woman on this point: he wants to convince them that God has forbidden them to eat the fruit of the tree of [the knowledge of] good and evil in order to keep them submissive. This is precisely the challenge: is the first rule that God gave to man a despot’s imposition which forbids and compels, or is it the care of a father who is looking after his little ones and protecting them from self-destruction? Is it a word or a command? The most tragic among the various lies that the serpent tells Eve is the insinuation of an envious divinity — ‘But no, God envies you’ — of a possessive divinity — ‘God does not want you to be free’. The facts show dramatically that the serpent has lied (cf. Gen 2:16-17; 3:4-5); he made believe that a loving word was a command.

Man is at this crossroads: does God impose things on me or does he take care of me? Are his commandments merely a law or do they contain a *word*, to nurture me? Is God master or Father? God is Father: never forget this. Even in the worst situations, remember that we have a Father who loves us all. Are we subjects or children? This battle, inside and outside of us, is constantly present: 1,000 times we have to choose between a slavish mentality and a mentality of children. A commandment is from the master; a word is from the Father.

The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of children; he is the Spirit of Jesus. A spirit of slaves cannot but view the

Law as oppressive, and this can produce two conflicting results: either a life made up of duties and obligations, or a violent reaction of rejection. The whole of Christianity is the passage from the letter of the Law to the life-giving Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:6-17). Jesus is the Word of the Father; he is not the condemnation of the Father. Jesus came to save, with his Word, not to condemn us.

One sees whether a man or a woman has lived this transition or not. People realize whether a Christian reasons as a Christian or as a slave. And we ourselves remember if our teachers took care of us like fathers and mothers, or if they only imposed rules. The Commandments are the journey toward freedom. They set us free because they are the Word of the Father on this journey.

The world needs not legalism but care. It needs Christians with the heart of children.^[3] It needs Christians with the heart of children: do not forget this.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly those from England, Sweden, Switzerland, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Malaysia 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!

I offer a special thought to *young people*, to *the elderly*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. In the month of June popular piety has us pray more fervently to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. May that Merciful Heart teach you to love without asking for any return and may it sustain you in the most difficult choices of life. Pray to it for me too and for my ministry, but also for all priests, so as to strengthen faithfulness to the call of the Lord.

^[1] Chapter 20 of the Book of Exodus is preceded by the offer of the Covenant in chapter 19, in which the pronouncement is central: "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6). This terminology is emblematically summarized in Lev 26:12: "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people", and continues up to the announcement of the name of the Messiah, foretold in Isaiah 7:14, that is, *Emmanuel*, which appears in Matthew: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us)" (Mt 1:23). All this indicates the essentially relational nature of the Jewish faith and, to the greatest degree, the Christian faith.

^[2] Cf. also Ex 24:28b: "he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments".

[3] Cf. [John Paul II](#), Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 12: “The gift of the Decalogue was a promise and sign of the New Covenant, in which the law would be written in a new and definitive way upon the human heart (cf. Jer 31:31-34), replacing the law of sin which had disfigured that heart (cf. Jer 17:1). In those days, ‘a new heart’ would be given, for in it would dwell ‘a new spirit’, the Spirit of God (cf. Ez 36:24-28)”.