



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 191009c

Wednesday 09.10.2019

General Audience

This Wednesday's general audience took place in Saint Peter's Square, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian the Pope continued his catechesis on the Acts of the Apostles, this time focusing on the theme: "*He is a chosen instrument of mine* (Acts 9: 15). Saul, from persecutor to evangelizer" (Acts of the Apostles, 9: 3-6).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. The General Audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Starting with the episode of the stoning of Stephen, there appears a figure who, alongside Peter, is the most present and incisive in the Acts of the Apostles: that of "a young man called Saul" (Acts 7: 58). He is described at the beginning as one who approves of Stephen's death and wants to "destroy the Church" (cf. Acts 8: 3); but who will then become the instrument chosen by God to proclaim the Gospel to the nations (cf. Acts 9: 15; 22: 21; 26: 17).

With the permission of the high priest, Saul hunts down Christians and captures them. You, who come from some peoples who have been persecuted by dictatorships, understand well what it means to hunt down people and capture them. So did Saul. And he does this, thinking that he is serving the Law of the Lord. Luke says that Saul "breathed" "threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9: 1): in him there is a breath that smells of death, not of life.

The young Saul is portrayed as an intransigent, that is, one who manifests intolerance towards those who think differently from himself, absolutizes his own political or religious identity and reduces the other to a potential enemy to fight. An ideologist. In Saul religion was transformed into ideology: religious ideology, social ideology, political ideology. Only after being transformed by Christ, will he then teach that the real battle is not “against flesh and blood, but against [...] the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil” (*Eph 6: 12*). He will teach us that we must not fight people, but the evil that inspires their actions.

Saul's angry – because he was angry – and conflictual condition invites us all to ask ourselves: how do I live my life of faith? Do I go towards others or am I against others? Do I belong to the universal Church (the good and bad, everyone) or do I have a selective ideology? Do I adore God or do I adore dogmatic formulations? How is my religious life? Does the faith in God that I profess make me friendly or hostile to those who are different from me?

Luke tells us that, while Saul is all intent on eradicating the Christian community, the Lord is on his trail to touch his heart and convert him to Himself. It is the Lord's method: it touches the heart. The Risen One takes the initiative and manifests Himself to Saul on the road to Damascus, an event which is narrated three times in the Book of the Acts (cf. *Acts 9: 3-19; 22: 3-21; 26: 4-23*). Through the combination of “light” and “voice”, typical of theophanies, the Risen One appears to Saul and asks him to account for his fratricidal fury: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? (*Acts 9: 4*). Here the Risen One manifests His being as one with those who believe in Him: to strike a member of the Church is to strike at Christ Himself! Even those who are ideologues because they want the “purity” – in quotes – of the Church, strike Christ.

The voice of Jesus says to Saul: “But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do” (*Acts 9: 6*). Once on his feet, though, Saul no longer sees anything, he has become blind, and from being a strong, authoritative and independent man, he becomes weak, needy and dependent on others, because he cannot see. Christ's light has dazzled him and blinded him: “Thus what was his inner reality is also outwardly apparent, his blindness to the truth, to the light that was Christ” (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 3 September 2008).

From this “one to one” between Saul and the Risen One, a transformation begins that shows Saul's “personal Pasch”, his passage from death to life: what was once glory becomes “loss” to be rejected in order to acquire the true gain that is Christ and life in Him (cf. *Phil 3:7-8*).

Paul receives Baptism. Baptism thus marks for Saul, as for each one of us, the beginning of a new life, and it is accompanied by a new outlook on God, on himself and on others, who instead of enemies now become brothers in Christ.

Let us ask the Father to let us also experience, as in Saul, the impact with His love which alone can turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh (cf. *Ez 11: 15*), capable of accepting within itself the sentiments of Christ Jesus (cf. *Phil 2: 5*).

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Nigeria, Uganda, Belize, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Korea, 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. May God bless you!

Greetings in various languages

The Pope greeted among the German-speaking pilgrims the participants in the information week of the Pontifical Swiss Guard, and reminded Polish-speaking pilgrims that last Monday we celebrated the memory of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Rosary. "During her apparitions in Gietrzwałd, Poland", he said, "Our Lady recommended: 'It is my wish that you pray the rosary every day'. She assured that the graces implicit in this prayer would be salvific and would lead men to happiness in heaven. Remember these words, especially now, in the month of October, which is dedicated to the Holy Rosary. Through the intercession of Mary, Mediatrix of Grace, let us ask for peace for the world, wisdom for rulers and faith and unity for families. Praise be to Jesus Christ".

He also addressed Croatian pilgrims, especially students of the Catholic Theology Faculty at Split University. "In this extraordinary missionary month", he observed, "I invite you to respond courageously to God's vocation so that you may nurture, through study and prayer, the supernatural gifts of faith, hope and charity for the good of your brothers and sisters. Praise Jesus and Mary!"

Finally, he dedicated a special thought to the young, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds, exhorting everyone to imitate, in this Marian month, "the zeal of the Virgin and missionary zeal", becoming "heralds of Christ in every environment of your life".
