



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Saint Peter's Square*

*Wednesday, 16 October 2013*

### Video

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!*

When we recite the Creed we say “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”. I don’t know if you have ever reflected on the meaning of the expression “the Church is apostolic”. Perhaps from time to time, coming to Rome, you have thought about the importance of the Apostles Peter and Paul who here gave their lives to bring and bear witness to the Gospel.

But it is even more. To profess that the Church is apostolic means to stress the constitutive bond that she has with the Apostles, with that small group of 12 men whom Jesus one day called to himself, he called them by name, that they might remain with him and that he might send them out to preach (cf. Mk 3:13-19). “Apostle”, in fact, is a Greek word meaning “sent”, “dispatched”. An Apostle is a person who has been given a mandate, he is sent to do something and the Apostles were chosen, called and sent out by Jesus to continue his work, that is to pray — which is the primary job of an apostle — and, second, to proclaim the Gospel. This is important, because when we think of the Apostles we might think that they were only sent out to proclaim the Gospel, to do many good deeds. However, a problem arose in the early times of the Church because of how much the Apostles had to do, and that is why they instituted deacons, so that there would be more time for the Apostles to pray and proclaim the Word of God. When we think of the Successors of the Apostles, the bishops — this includes the Pope for he too is a bishop — we must ask ourselves if this successor of the Apostles prays first and then proclaims the Gospel: this is what it means to be an Apostle and this is what makes the Church apostolic. Every one of us, if we want

to be apostles as I shall explain now, must ask ourselves: do I pray for the salvation of the world? Do I proclaim the Gospel? This is the Church apostolic! It is the constitutive bond that we have with the Apostles.

Starting from this I would like to focus briefly on the three meanings of the adjective “apostolic” as it is applied to the Church.

1. The Church is apostolic because she is *founded on the preaching and prayer of the Apostles*, on the authority that was entrusted to them by Christ himself. St Paul writes to the Christians of Ephesus: “You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being a cornerstone” (2:19-20); that is, he compares Christians to living stones that form an edifice that is the Church, and this edifice is founded on the Apostles, like columns, and the cornerstone that carries it all is Jesus himself. Without Jesus the Church cannot exist! Jesus is the foundation of the Church, the foundation! The Apostles lived with Jesus, they listened to his words, they shared his life, above all they were witnesses of his Death and Resurrection. Our faith, the Church that Christ willed, is not based on an idea, it is not based on a philosophy, it is based on Christ himself. And the Church is like a plant that over the long centuries has grown, has developed, has borne fruit, yet her roots are planted firmly in Him and that fundamental experience of Christ which the Apostles had, chosen and sent out by Jesus, reaching all the way to us. From this little plant to our day: this is how the Church has spread everywhere in the world.

2. But let us ask ourselves: how is it possible for us to be connected to that testimony, how could what the Apostles’ experienced with Jesus, what they heard from him reach us? This is the second meaning of the term “apostolic”. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that the Church is apostolic because “with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church *keeps and hands on* the teaching, the ‘good deposit’, the salutary words she has heard from the Apostles” (n. 857). Over the centuries, the Church conserves this precious treasure, which is Sacred Scripture, doctrine, the Sacraments, the ministry of Pastors, so that we can be faithful to Christ and share in his very life. It is like a river coursing through history, developing, irrigating; but running water always comes from a source, and the source is Christ himself: he is the Risen One, he is the Living One, and his words never pass away, for he does not pass, he is alive, he is among us today, he hears us and we speak to him and he listens, he is in our hearts. Jesus is with us today! This is the beauty of the Church: the presence of Jesus Christ among us. Do we ever think about how important this gift that Jesus gave us is, the gift of the Church, where we can meet him? Do we ever think about how it is precisely the Church on her journey through the centuries — despite the difficulties, the problems, the weaknesses, our sins — that transmits to us the authentic message of Christ? She gives us the certainty that what we believe in is really what Christ communicated to us?

3. My final thought: the Church is apostolic because she is *sent to bring the Gospel to all the world*. She continues in history the mission which Jesus entrusted to the Apostles: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:19-20). This is what Jesus told us to do! I insist on this missionary aspect, because Christ invites all to “go out” and encounter others, he sends us, he asks us to move in order to spread the joy of the Gospel! Once again let us ask ourselves: are we missionaries by our words, and especially by our Christian life, by our witness? Or are we Christians closed in our hearts and in our churches, sacristy Christians? Are we Christians in name only, who live like pagans? We must ask ourselves these questions, which are not a rebuke. I ask myself as well: what kind of Christian am I, is my witness true?

The Church’s roots are in the teaching of the Apostles, the authentic witnesses of Christ, but she looks to the future, she has the firm consciousness of being sent — sent by Jesus — of being missionary, bearing the name of Jesus by her prayer, proclaiming it and testifying to it. A Church that is closed in on herself and in the past, a Church that only sees the little rules of behaviour, of attitude, is a Church that betrays her own identity; a closed Church betrays her own identity! Then, let us rediscover today all the beauty and responsibility of being the Church apostolic! And remember this: the Church is apostolic because we pray — our first duty — and because we proclaim the Gospel by our life and by our words.

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### To special groups

I cordially greet all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today’s Audience, including those from England, Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Israel, Ghana, Nigeria, Australia, China, Japan, Korea, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada and the United States. My particular greeting goes to the delegation from the Nato Defense College and the pilgrims from Norway. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke God’s blessings of joy and peace!

Finally, an affectionate thought to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. Today we celebrate the memory of St Margaret Mary Alacoque. May her devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus instruct you, dear *young people*, especially children of Rome’s Salesian Borgo Institute and Salerno’s Smaldone Institute, to love as he loved; may it make you strong, dear *sick* people, in carrying your cross of suffering with patience; and may it sustain you, dear *newly weds*, in building your family upon fidelity and dedication.

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