



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 23 October 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles recounts that after that transformative encounter with Jesus, Saint Paul is welcomed by the Church of Jerusalem thanks to the mediation of Barnabas, and he begins to proclaim Christ. However, due to the hostility of some, he is forced to move on to Tarsus, his native city, where Barnabas joins him in order to engage him in the long *journey of the Word of God*. We can say that the Book of the Acts of the Apostles on which we are commenting in these catecheses is the Book of the long journey of the Word of God: the Word of God is to be proclaimed, and to be proclaimed everywhere. This journey begins in the wake of severe persecution (cf. Acts 11:19); but instead of provoking a setback for evangelization, it becomes an opportunity to expand the field on which to sow the good seed of the Word. The Christians do not feel afraid. They must flee, but they flee with the Word and they spread the Word somewhat everywhere.

Paul and Barnabas arrive first in Antioch, Syria, where they stay for a whole year to teach and help the community to put down roots (cf. Acts 11:26). They proclaimed to the Hebrew community, to the Jews. Antioch thus becomes the centre of missionary impulse, thanks to the preaching of the two evangelizers — Paul and Barnabas — which impresses the hearts of believers who, here in Antioch, are called “Christians” for the first time (cf. Acts 11:26).

The nature of the Church appears from the Book of the Acts; she is not a fortress but a tent able to enlarge her space (cf. Is 54:2) and give access to all. Either the Church “goes forth” or she is not a Church; either she is on a journey always widening her space so that everyone can enter, or she is not a Church. A “Church whose doors are open” (Apostolic Exhortation *[Evangelii Gaudium](#)*, 46), always with open doors. When I see a small church here, in this city, or when I would see one in the other diocese that I come from, with closed doors, this is a bad sign. Churches should always have their doors open because this is the sign of what a church is: always open. The Church is always “called to be the house of the Father... so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door” (ibid., 47).

But this novelty of *doors open* to whom? To the *Gentiles*, because the Apostles were preaching to the Jews, but the Gentiles came to knock at the Church's doors; and this novelty of doors open to the Gentiles triggers a very lively controversy. Several Jews affirm the need to become Jewish through circumcision in order to be saved, and then to receive Baptism. They say: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1), that is, you cannot receive Baptism afterwards. First the Jewish rite and then Baptism: this was their position. And to resolve the issue, Paul and Barnabas seek the advice of the Apostles and of the elders of Jerusalem, and what takes place is what is held to be the First Council in the history of the Church, *the Council or Assembly of Jerusalem*, to which Paul refers in the Letter to the Galatians (2:1-10).

A very delicate theological, spiritual and disciplinary issue is addressed, that is, *the relationship between faith in Christ and observance of the Law of Moses*. During the Assembly, the discourses of Peter and James — "pillars" of the Mother Church — are decisive (cf. Acts 15:7-21; Gal 2:9). They exhort not imposing circumcision on the Gentiles but, instead, asking them only to reject idolatry and all its expressions. From the discussion emerges the common path, and this decision was ratified with the so-called *Apostolic Letter* sent to Antioch.

The Assembly of Jerusalem sheds important light on the way to face differences and to seek the "truth in love" (Eph 4:15). It reminds us that the ecclesial method for resolving conflict is based on dialogue made of careful and patient listening and on discernment undertaken in the light of the Spirit. Indeed, it is the Spirit who helps to overcome closure and tension, and works within hearts so that they may achieve unity in truth and goodness. This text helps us understand synodality. It is interesting how they write the Letter: the Apostles begin by saying: "The Holy spirit and we *believe* that...". The presence of the Holy Spirit is proper to synodality, otherwise it is not synodality. It is the parlour, parliament, something else....

Let us ask the Lord to strengthen in all Christians, particularly in presbyters, the desire and the responsibility of communion. May he help us to experience dialogue, listening and encounter with our brothers and sisters in faith and with those afar, in order to savour and manifest the fruitfulness of the Church which is called to be, in every age, the "joyous mother" of many children (cf. Ps 113[112]:9).

Appeal and Special Greetings

I have been following with concern what is happening in Chile. I hope that by putting an end to the violent demonstrations through dialogue, an effort may be made to find solutions to the crisis and to face the difficulties that caused it, for the good of the entire population.

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the

groups from England, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Indonesia, Israel, Malaysia, the Philippines, 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!

Lastly, I greet *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. Yesterday we celebrated the liturgical memorial of Saint John Paul II. Let us imitate him, this teacher of faith and of evangelic life, an example of love for Christ and mankind.