



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 4 December 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and sisters, Good Morning!

The Gospel's journey throughout the world continues tirelessly in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, and passes through the city of Ephesus, manifesting its salvific scope. Thanks to Paul, some 12 men are baptized in the name of Jesus and experience receiving the warmth of the Holy Spirit which regenerates them (cf. Acts 19:1-7). Several miracles then take place through the Apostle: the sick are healed and the possessed are freed. (cf. Acts 19:11). This happens because the disciple resembles his Teacher (cf. Lk 6:40) and he makes him present, communicating to his brothers and sisters that same new life he received from him. Indeed, every evangelizer is conscious of being, in his person and through his actions, "a mission on this earth", and of being branded by fire, by this mission of "bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing" (Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 273). Paul is conscious of this branding and he thus spares no effort in his evangelization work.

God's power, which is unleashed in Ephesus, unmasks those who want to use Jesus' name to perform exorcisms without having the spiritual authority to do so (cf. Acts 19:13-17), and reveals the weakness of magical arts, which are abandoned by a large number of people who choose Christ, thereby abandoning the magical arts (cf. Acts 19:18-19). A true upheaval for a city like Ephesus, a city that was known for its practice of magic! Luke thus highlights the incompatibility between faith in Christ and magic. If one chooses Christ, one cannot turn to a sorcerer: faith is the trusting abandon into the reliable hands of a God who makes himself known, not through magical practices, but through revelation and with freely given love. Perhaps some of you might say to me: "Ah yes, magic is an ancient thing: this does not occur today with Christian civilization". But be careful! I ask you: how many of you go to have your tarot cards read, how many of you go to have your palms read by palm readers, or have your fortune read? Today too in large cities, practicing Christians do these things. And to the question: Why do you go to the sorcerer, to the fortune teller, to these people, if you are Christian?, they reply: "I believe in Jesus Christ but I go to them too out of superstition". Please: magic is not Christian! These things that are done to predict the

future or to guess many things or to change life situations, are not Christian. The grace of Christ brings you everything: pray and entrust yourself to the Lord.

The spread of the Gospel at Ephesus damages the trade of silversmiths — yet another problem —, who made statues of the goddess Artemis, making a true and proper business out of a religious practice. I ask you to think about this. As they see their trade, which earned a great deal of money, dwindle, the silversmiths organize an uprising against Paul, and the Christians are accused of causing problems to that category of artisans, to the shrine of Artemis and to the worship of this goddess (cf. Acts 19:23-28). The people are in uproar, but the town clerk is able to calm down the crowds, inviting the artisans to use legal avenues and exonerate Paul and the Christians from the accusations of sacrilege and blasphemy (cf. Acts 19:37).

Paul then leaves Ephesus headed for Jerusalem and arrives in Miletus (cf. Acts 20: 1-16). Here he sends for the elders of the Church of Ephesus — the presbyter, that is the priests — in order to make a transfer of “pastoral” deliveries (cf. Acts 20:17-35). These are the last stages of Paul’s Apostolic ministry and Luke presents his farewell speech to us, a sort of spiritual testament which the Apostle addresses to those who, following his departure, will have to lead the community of Ephesus. And this is one of the most beautiful pages of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles”. I advise you to take the new Testament today, the Bible, chapter XX, and to read this farewell of Paul to the presbyters of Ephesus, and he does it in Miletus. It is a way to understand how the Apostle takes his leave and also how presbyters today should take their leave as well as how we Christians should take our leave. It is a beautiful page.

In the autobiographical part, with a retrospective glance to his mission in Asia Minor, Paul revisits the past of his complete self-investment, his humble service, the trials that were inflicted on him by the Hebrews, how he never spared himself in order to bring faith to others. Moreover, he foresees the new time which awaits him: a future marked by the trusting abandon to the Holy Spirit that leads him, like his Master and Lord in Jerusalem; and marked by the trials that still await him, in order to bring to fulfillment the Word’s journey throughout the world.

In the exhortation part, Paul encourages the leaders of the community, whom he knows he will see for the last time. And what does he say to them? “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock”. This is the task of the shepherd: to keep watch, to keep watch over himself and over his flock. The shepherd must keep watch, the parish priest must keep watch, keep watch, the presbyters must keep watch, the Bishops, the Pope must keep watch. To keep watch in order to protect the flock and also to keep watch over oneself, examining one’s conscience and seeing how this duty of keeping watch is carried out. “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the Church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28), Saint Paul says. *Bishops* are asked to have the greatest closeness to the flock, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and the readiness to defend it from “wolves” (v.29). Bishops have to be very close to the people so as to protect them, to defend them, not be

detached from the people who threaten the sound doctrine and ecclesial communion. After entrusting the leaders of Ephesus with this task, Paul puts them in the hands of God and entrusts them to the “word of his grace” (v. 32), leaven of all growth and path of sanctity in the Church, inviting them to work with their own hands, like him, so as not to be a burden on others, to rescue the weakest and to experience that it “is more blessed to give than to receive” (v. 35).

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask the Lord to renew in us our love for the Church and for the deposit of faith that she safeguards, and to make us all mutually responsible in protecting the flock, supporting the pastors in prayer so that they may manifest the firmness and tenderness of the Divine Pastor.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from Malta, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada and the United States of America. I pray that each of you, and your families, may experience a blessed Advent, in preparation for the coming of the newborn Saviour at Christmas. May God bless you!

Lastly, I greet *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. This Friday is the Feast of Saint Nicholas of Bari. Let us imitate his virtue, learning not to put anything ahead of charity towards those who are most in need, seeing in them the face of God made man.
