



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Catechesis on the Letter to the Galatians: 6. *The dangers of the Law*

Brothers and sisters, good morning!

The Letter to the Galatians reports a rather surprising fact. As we have heard, Paul says that he reproached Cephas, or Peter, in front of the community at Antioch, because his behaviour was not that good. What had happened that was so serious that Paul felt obliged to address Peter in such harsh terms? Was Paul perhaps exaggerating, allowing his character to get in the way without knowing how to control himself? We will see that this is not the case, but that, yet again, what was at stake was the relationship between the Law and freedom. And we must return to this often.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul deliberately mentions this episode that had taken place years before in Antioch. He wanted to remind the Christians of those communities that they were absolutely not to listen to those who were preaching that it was necessary to be circumcised, and therefore be “under the Law” with all of its prescriptions. Let us recall that it was these fundamentalist preachers who had gone there and were creating confusion, and had even robbed that community of their peace. The object of the criticism regarding Peter was his behaviour when sitting down to table. For a Jew, the Law prohibited eating with non-Jews. But Peter himself, in another circumstance, had gone to the house of Cornelius the centurion in Caesarea, knowing that he was transgressing the Law. At that time he had said: “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Once he returned to Jerusalem, the circumcised

Christians, who were faithful to the Mosaic Law, reproached Peter for his behaviour. He, however, justified himself saying: “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’. If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:16-17). Let us remember that the Holy Spirit had come at that time into Cornelius’ house when Peter went there.

Something similar had also taken place in Antioch in Paul’s presence. First, Peter had been eating with the Christians of pagan origin without any difficulty; however, when some circumcised Christians from Jerusalem arrived in the city — those who were originally Jews — he then no longer did so, because he did not want to incur their criticism. This was the error — he paid more attention to criticism, to making a good impression. And this was serious in Paul’s eyes, also because other disciples imitated Peter, first among them Barnabas who, with Paul, had evangelized precisely the Galatians (cf. *Gal 2:13*). In so doing, without wanting to, Peter, who was a bit here and a bit there, not clear, not transparent, was, in fact, creating an unjust division within the community: “I am pure.... I am following this line.... I have to do this ... this cannot be done...”.

In his reproach — and this is the heart of the problem — Paul uses a term that allows us to enter into the merit of his reaction: *hypocrisy* (cf. *Gal 2:13*). This is a word that is repeated many times: hypocrisy. I think we all understand what it means.... The observance of the Law on the part of Christians led to this hypocritical behaviour that the apostle wanted to counter forcefully and convincingly. Paul was upright, he had his defects — many of them ... his character was terrible — but he was upright. What is hypocrisy? When we say, “Be careful, that person is a hypocrite”, what are we trying to say? What is hypocrisy? It can be called the *fear of the truth*. Hypocrites are afraid of the truth. They prefer to pretend rather than be themselves. It is like applying makeup on your soul, like putting makeup on your behaviour, putting makeup on how to proceed: it is not the truth. “I am afraid of proceeding as I am and I put make up on my behaviour”. To pretend hinders the courage to openly speak the truth; and thus, the obligation to speak the truth at all times, everywhere and in spite of anything, can easily be escaped. Pretending leads to this: to half-truths. And half-truths are a sham because the truth is the truth or it is not the truth. But half-truths are a way of acting that is not true. We prefer, as I said, to pretend rather than to be ourselves, and this pretence hinders the courage to openly speak the truth. And thus, we escape the duty — and this is a commandment — to always speak the truth, to say it everywhere and in spite of anything. And in an environment where interpersonal relations are lived under the banner of formalism, the virus of hypocrisy easily spreads. That smile that does not come from the heart. Trying to be on good terms with everyone, but with no one.

In the Bible, there are several examples where hypocrisy is contested. A beautiful testimony to counter hypocrisy is that of the elderly Eleazar who was asked to pretend to eat meat sacrificed to the pagan deities in order to save his own life: to pretend that he was eating it when he was not eating it. Or to pretend he was eating pork but his friends had prepared something else. But that

God-fearing man replied: “Such pretence is not worthy of our time of life, lest many of the young should suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year has gone over to an alien religion, and through my pretence, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they should be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age” (2 Mac 6:24-25). An honest man: he did not take the path of hypocrisy! What a beautiful episode on which to reflect to distance ourselves from hy-poc-ri-sy! The Gospels, too, report several situations in which Jesus strongly reproaches those who externally appear just, but who internally are filled with falsity and iniquity (cf. Mt 23:13-29). If you have some time today, pick up the twenty-third chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew and see how many times Jesus says: “hypocrites, hypocrites, hypocrites”, and thus reveals what hypocrisy is.

Hypocrites are people who pretend, flatter and deceive because they live with a mask over their faces and do not have the courage to face the truth. For this reason, they are not capable of truly loving: a hypocrite does not know how to love. They limit themselves to living out of egoism and do not have the strength to show their hearts transparently. There are many situations in which hypocrisy is at work. It is often hidden in the work place where one appears to be friends with one’s colleagues, while competition leads them to stab them in the back. In politics, it is not unusual to find hypocrites who live one way in public and another way in private. Hypocrisy in the Church is particularly detestable; and unfortunately, hypocrisy exists in the Church and there are many hypocritical Christians and ministers. We should never forget the Lord’s words: “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Mt 5:37).

Brothers and sisters, today, let us think about the hy-poc-ri-sy that Paul condemns, and that Jesus condemns: hy-poc-ri-sy. And let us not be afraid to be truthful, to speak the truth, to hear the truth, to conform ourselves to the truth. In this way, we will be able to love. A hypocrite does not know how to love. To act other than truthfully means jeopardizing the unity of the Church, that unity for which the Lord himself prayed.

Special Greetings

I cordially greet the English-speaking faithful. I pray that this period of summer holidays will be a time of refreshment and spiritual renewal for you and your families. Upon all of you I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord Jesus. May God bless you!

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to *the elderly*, to *the sick*, to *young people* and to *newlyweds*. May the desire to enter into an ever deeper friendship with Christ, and find serenity and Christian hope in him, grow within your hearts.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

APPEAL

Yesterday, in Tokyo, the Paralympic Games got underway. I send my greetings to the athletes and I thank them because they offer everyone a witness of hope and courage. They, in fact, manifest how being committed to sports helps overcome apparently insurmountable difficulties.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in our continuing catechesis on the Letter to the Galatians, we have seen how Paul teaches that those living in the grace of Christ are set free from the demands of the Mosaic Law. Today we consider Paul's claim that he had reprimanded Saint Peter in this regard. Peter had taken meals with Gentile Christians, but ceased to do so when a group of circumcised Christians arrived from Jerusalem. For Paul, this was a form of "hypocrisy" (*Gal 2:13*) that caused division in the community. All hypocrisy is born of a fear that holds us back from speaking the full truth; it leads to a life of pretense, where we say one thing but do another. Hypocrisy spreads like a virus. We find it often in our workplaces, in political life and, most detestably, in the Church itself. Jesus told us to let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no" (cf. *Mt 5:37*). To act otherwise is to jeopardize the very unity within the Church for which the Lord himself prayed.
