



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 18 October

2017 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

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*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today I would like to compare Christian hope with the reality of death, a reality that our modern civilization tends more and more to erase. In this way, when death arrives, for those who are close to us or for ourselves, we find we are unprepared, lacking even an appropriate “alphabet” to sketch meaningful words about its mystery, which in any case endures. Even the first traces of human civilization passed precisely through this enigma. We could say that man is born with the worship of the dead.

Other civilizations, before our own, had the courage to look it in the eye. It was an event recounted by the elders to the young generations as an inescapable reality which obliged man to live for an absolute ideal. Psalm 90[89]:12 states: “teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom”. Numbering one’s days makes the heart become wise! The words bring us back to a healthy realism, driving away the delusion of omnipotence. What are we? We are “essentially in vain”, says another Psalm (cf. 89[88]:47); our days go by quickly: even if we lived 100 years, in the end it would seem that it was all a breath. So often I have heard the elderly say: “my life has passed by as a breath...”.

Thus death lays our life bare. It makes us discover that our acts of pride, of anger and of hate have been in vain: totally in vain. We realize with regret that we have not loved enough and have not sought what was essential. And, on the other hand, we see what we have sown that was truly good: the loved ones for whom we sacrificed ourselves and who now take us by the hand.

Jesus illuminated this mystery of our death. By his example, he permits us to grieve when a dear person passes on. He is “deeply” troubled at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, and “wept” (Jn 11:35). Here, Jesus’ demeanour makes us feel very close to him, our brother. He wept for his friend Lazarus.

Then Jesus prays to the Father, wellspring of life, and commands Lazarus to come out of the

tomb. And so it happens. Christian hope draws from Jesus' approach to human death: if it is present in creation, it is nonetheless an affront that tarnishes God's loving plan, which the Saviour wishes to remove for our sake.

Elsewhere the Gospels tell of a father who has a very sick daughter, and with faith he beseeches Jesus to save her (cf. Mk 5:21-24, 35-43). There is no figure more moving than that of a father or mother with a sick child. And straight away Jesus goes with that man, whose name is Jairus. At a certain point someone comes from Jairus' house and says that the girl is dead, and there is no need to trouble the Teacher any further. But Jesus says to Jairus: "Do not fear, only believe" (Mk 5:36). Jesus knows that this man is tempted to react with anger and despair, because the girl has died, and He recommends that Jairus safeguard the little flame that burns in his heart: faith. "Do not fear, just have faith; do not fear, just continue to keep that flame burning!". Then, when he arrives at the house, he will awaken the girl from death and give her back to her loved ones, alive.

Jesus places us on this "cusp" of faith. He counters Martha's weeping at the loss of her brother Lazarus, with the light of a dogma: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (Jn 11:25-26). That is what Jesus repeats to each one of us, each time that death comes to shred the fabric of life and of our loved ones. Our entire existence is at stake here, between the gradient of faith and the precipice of fear. Jesus says: "I am not death; I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this? Do you believe this?". We who are here today in the Square, do we believe this?

We are all small and defenceless before the mystery of death. However, what a grace if at that moment we safeguard in our heart the little flame of faith! Jesus takes us by the hand, as he took Jairus' daughter by the hand, and repeats once again: "Talitha cumi"; "Little girl, arise!" (cf. Mk 5:41). He will say this to us, to each one of us: "Arise, rise again!". I invite you, now, to close your eyes and think about that moment: of our death. Each of us think about our own death, and imagine that moment that will come, when Jesus will take us by the hand and tell us: "Come, come with me, arise". There, hope will end and reality will abide, the reality of life. Think hard: Jesus himself will come to each of us and take us by the hand, with his tenderness, his meekness, his love. Each one repeat Jesus' words in your heart: "Arise, come. Arise, come. Arise, rise again!".

This is our hope in the face of death. For those who believe, it is a door that is thrust open wide; for those who doubt it is a glimmer of light that filters through an exit that is not quite completely closed. But for all of us it will be a grace, when this light, of the encounter with Jesus, illuminates us.

I would like to express my sorrow at the massacre that occurred days ago in Mogadishu, Somalia, which caused over 300 deaths, several children among them. This act of terrorism deserves the firmest condemnation, also because it targets an already severely tried population. I pray for the deceased and for the injured, for their families and for all the people of Somalia. I implore the conversion of the violent and I encourage those who, with enormous difficulty, work for peace in that tortured land.

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### **Special greetings:**

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from England, Scotland, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, China, Ghana, Lesotho, the Philippines, and the United States of America. May Jesus Christ strengthen you and your families in faith and make you witnesses of hope to the world, especially to those who are mourning. May God bless you all!

Lastly, I offer my greeting to *young people to the sick*, and to *newlyweds*. Today is the Feast of Saint Luke, evangelist and physician. Dear *young people*, may his testimony of life spur you to make courageous choices of solidarity and tenderness; dear *sick people*, based on his teaching may you find in Jesus the remedy for your suffering; and may you, dear *newlyweds*, ask for his intercession so that in your new family attention may never be lacking for those who suffer.