



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Paul VI Audience Hall

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*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!*

The Christian community is born from the superabundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit and it grows thanks to the leaven of sharing among brothers and sisters in Christ. There is a dynamism of *solidarity* which builds up the Church as the family of God, for whom the experience of *koinonia* is central. What does this strange word mean? It is a Greek word which means “pooling one’s goods”, “sharing in common”, being a community, not isolated. This is the experience of the first Christian community, that is, “communality”, “sharing”, “communicating, participating”, not isolation. In the primitive Church, this *koinonia*, this communality, refers primarily to participation in the Body and Blood of Christ. This is why when we receive Holy Communion, we say that “we communicate”, we enter into communion with Jesus, and from this communion with Jesus we reach a communion with our brothers and sisters. And this communion in the Body and Blood of Christ that we share during Holy Mass translates into fraternal union and, therefore also into what is most difficult for us; pooling our resources and collecting money for the mother Church in Jerusalem (cf. Rm 12:13, 2 Cor 8-9) and the other Churches. If you want to know whether you are good Christians, you have to pray, try to draw near to Communion, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. But the sign that your heart has converted is when conversion reaches the pocket, when it touches one’s own interests. That is when one can see whether one is generous to others, if one helps the weakest, the poorest. When conversion achieves this, you are sure that it is a true conversion. If you stop at words, it is not a real conversion.

Eucharistic life, prayer, the preaching of the Apostles and the experience of communion (cf. Acts 2:42) turn believers into a multitude of people who — the Book of the Acts of the Apostles says — are of “one heart and soul” and who do not consider their property their own, but hold everything in common (cf. Acts 4:32). It is such a powerful example of life that it helps us to be generous and not miserly. This is why the Book says, “there was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid at the apostles’ feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need” (Acts 4:34-35). The

Church has always had this gesture of Christians who stripped themselves of the things they had in excess, the things that were not necessary, in order to give them to those in need. And not just money: also time. How many Christians — you for example, here in Italy — how many Christians do volunteer work! This is beautiful. It is communion, sharing one's time with others to help those in need. And thus: volunteer work, charity work, visits to the sick; we must always share with others and not just seek after our own interests.

In this way, the community, or *koinonia*, becomes the *new way of relating among the Lord's disciples*. Christians experience a new way of being and behaving among themselves. And it is the proper Christian method, to such an extent that Gentiles would look at Christians and remark: "Look at how they love each other!". Love was the method. But not love in word, not false love: love in works, in helping one another, concrete love, the concreteness of love. The Covenant with Christ establishes a bond among brothers and sisters which merges and expresses itself in the communion of material goods too. Yes this method of being together, of loving this way, 'up to the pocket', also brings one to strip oneself of the hindrance of money and to give it to others, going against one's own interests. Being the limbs of the Body of Christ makes believers share the responsibility for one another. Being believers in Jesus makes us all responsible for each other. "But look at that one, the problem he has. I don't care, it's his business". No, among Christians we cannot say: "poor thing, he has a problem at home, he is going through this family problem". But "I have to pray, I take him with me, I am not indifferent". This is being Christian. This is why the strong support the weak (cf. Rom 15:1) and no one experiences poverty that humiliates and disfigures human dignity because they live in this community: having one heart in common. They love one another. This is the sign: concrete love.

James, Peter and John, the three Apostles who were the "pillars" of the Church in Jerusalem, take a decision in common that Paul and Barnabas would evangelise the Gentiles while they evangelised the Hebrews, and they only asked Paul and Barnabas for one condition: not to forget the poor, to remember the poor (cf. Gal 2:9-10). Not only the material poor, but also the poor in spirit, the people with difficulty who need our closeness. A Christian always begins with him/herself, from his/her own heart and approaches others as Jesus approached us. This was the first Christian community.

A practical example of sharing and communion of goods comes to us from the testimony of Barnabas. He owns a field and sells it in order to give the proceeds to the Apostles (cf. Acts 4:36-37). But beside this positive example, there is another that is sadly negative: After selling their land, Ananias and his wife Sapphira decide to hand over only part of the proceeds to the Apostles and to keep part of the proceeds for themselves (cf. Acts 5:1-2). This deceit interrupts the chain of freely sharing, serene and disinterested sharing and the consequences are tragic. They are fatal (Acts 5:5-10). The Apostle Peter exposes Ananias and his wife's deceit and says to them: "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? ... You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3-4). We could say that Ananias lied to God

because of an isolated conscience, a hypocritical conscience, that is due to an ecclesial belonging that is “negotiated”, partial and opportunistic. Hypocrisy is the worst enemy of this Christian community, of this Christian love: pretending to love each other but only seeking one’s own interests.

Falling short of sincere sharing, indeed, falling short of the sincerity of love means cultivating hypocrisy, distancing oneself from the truth, becoming selfish, extinguishing the fire of communion and choosing the frost of inner death. Those who behave in this manner transit in the Church like a tourist. There are many tourists in the Church who are always passing through but never enter the Church. It is spiritual tourism that leads them to believe they are Christians whereas they are only tourists of the catacombs. No, we should not be tourists in the Church but rather one another’s brothers and sisters. A life based only on drawing gain and advantages from situations to the detriment of others, inevitably causes inner death. And how many people say they are close to the Church, friends of priests, of bishops, while they only seek their own interests. Such hypocrisy destroys the Church!

May the Lord — I ask this for all of us — pour over us his Spirit of tenderness which vanquishes all hypocrisy and generates that truth that nourishes Christian solidarity, which, far from being an activity of social work, is the inalienable expression of the Church, the most tender mother of all, especially of the poorest.

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### ***Special Greetings***

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from England, Malta, Japan and the United States of America. Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord. May God bless you!

I offer a special thought to *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. Following the example of the [Holy Pontiff Pius X](#), whose feast day we celebrate today, I invite you to walk towards Jesus Christ by listening to his Gospel and through good works. May the Holy Spirit sustain you on your journey.