



The Holy See

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

Wednesday, 13 April 2016 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

14. I desire mercy, and not sacrifice (*Mt 9:13*)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

We have heard the Gospel account of the call of Matthew. Matthew was a “publican”, namely, a tax collector on behalf of the Roman Empire, and for this reason was considered a public sinner. But Jesus calls Matthew to follow him and to become his disciple. Matthew accepts, and invites Jesus along with the disciples to have dinner at his house. Thus an argument arises between the Pharisees and the disciples of Jesus over the fact that the latter sit at the table with tax collectors and sinners. “You cannot go to these people’s homes!”, they said. Jesus does not stay away from them, but instead goes to their houses and sits beside them; this means that they too can become his disciples. It is likewise true that being Christian does not render us flawless. Like Matthew the tax collector, each of us trusts in the grace of the Lord regardless of our sins. We are all sinners, we have all sinned. By calling Matthew, Jesus shows sinners that he does not look at their past, at their social status, at external conventions, but rather, he opens a new future to them. I once heard a beautiful saying: “There is no saint without a past nor a sinner without a future”. This is what Jesus does. There is no saint without a past nor a sinner without a future. It is enough to respond to the call with a humble and sincere heart. The Church is not a community of perfect people, but of disciples on a journey, who follow the Lord because they know they are sinners and in need of his pardon. Thus, Christian life is a school of humility which opens us to grace.

Such behaviour is not understood by those who have the arrogance to believe they are “just” and to believe they are better than others. Hubris and pride do not allow one to recognize him- or herself as in need of salvation, but rather prevent one from seeing the merciful face of God and from acting with mercy. They are a barrier. Hubris and pride are a barrier that prevents a relationship with God. Yet, this is precisely Jesus’ mission: coming in search of each of us, in order to heal our wounds and to call us to follow him with love. He says so explicitly: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (v. 12). Jesus presents himself as a good physician! He proclaims the Kingdom of God, and the signs of its coming are clear: He heals people from disease, frees them from fear, from death, and from the devil. Before Jesus, no sinner

is excluded — no sinner is excluded! Because the healing power of God knows no infirmity that cannot be healed; and this must give us confidence and open our heart to the Lord, that he may come and heal us.

By calling sinners to his table, he heals them, restoring to them the vocation that they believed had been lost and which the Pharisees had forgotten: that of being guests at God's banquet. According to the prophecy of Isaiah: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined.... It will be said on that day, 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation'" (25:6, 9).

When the Pharisees see only sinners among the invited, and refuse to be seated with them, Jesus to the contrary reminds them that they too are guests at God's table. Thus, sitting at the table with Jesus means being transformed and saved by him. In the Christian community the table of Jesus is twofold: there is the table of the Word and there is the table of the Eucharist (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 21). These are the medicines with which the Divine Physician heals us and nourishes us. With the first — the Word — He reveals himself and invites us to a dialogue among friends. Jesus was not afraid to dialogue with sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes.... No, he was not afraid: he loved everyone! His Word permeates us and, like a scalpel, operates deep in the heart so as to free us from the evil lurking in our life. At times this Word is painful because it discloses deception, reveals false excuses, lays bare hidden truths; but at the same time it illuminates and purifies, gives strength and hope; it is an invaluable tonic on our journey of faith. The Eucharist, for its part, nourishes us with the very life of Jesus, like an immensely powerful remedy and, in a mysterious way, it continuously renews the grace of our Baptism. By approaching the Eucharist we are nourished of the Body and Blood of Jesus, and by entering us, Jesus joins us to his Body!

Concluding that dialogue with the Pharisees, Jesus reminds them of a word of the prophet Hosea (6:6): "Go and learn what this means, '*I desire mercy, and not sacrifice*'" (Mt 9:13). Addressing the people of Israel, the prophet reproaches them because the prayers they raised were but empty and incoherent words. Despite God's covenant and mercy, the people often lived with a "façade-like" religiosity, without living in depth the command of the Lord. This is why the prophet emphasized: "I desire mercy", namely the loyalty of a heart that recognizes its own sins, that mends its ways and returns to be faithful to the covenant with God. "And not sacrifice": without a penitent heart, every religious action is ineffective! Jesus also applies this prophetic phrase to human relationships: the Pharisees were very religious in form, but were not willing to sit at the table with tax collectors and sinners; they did not recognize the opportunity for mending their ways and thus for healing; they did not place mercy in the first place: although being faithful guardians of the Law, they showed that they did not know the heart of God! It is as though you were given a parcel with a gift inside and, rather than going to open the gift, you look only at the paper it is wrapped in: only appearances, the form, and not the core of the grace, of the gift that is given!

Dear brothers and sisters, all of us are invited to the table of the Lord. Let us make our own this invitation and sit beside the Lord together with his disciples. Let us learn to look with mercy and to recognize each of them as fellow guests at the table. We are all disciples who need to experience and live the comforting word of Jesus. We all need to be nourished by the mercy of God, for it is from this source that our salvation flows. Thank you!

Special greetings:

Next Saturday [16 April] I shall go to the island of Lesbos, through which in recent months a great number of refugees have passed. I shall go, with my Brothers Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Ieronymos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, in order to express closeness and solidarity both to the displaced people and to the citizens of Lesbos and to all the people of Greece, who are so generous in their welcome. I ask you, please, to accompany me with prayers, invoking the light and strength of the Holy Spirit and the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary.

I greet the English-speaking visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly the pilgrims from England, Scotland, The Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, China, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Lord, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

I offer a special greeting to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. May the Easter message continue to enable us to experience the astonishment of the disciples at Emmaus: dear *young people*, the Lord Jesus alone knows how to respond completely to the aspirations of happiness and goodness in your lives; dear *sick people*, there is no greater consolation in your suffering than the certainty of the Resurrection of Christ; and may you, dear *newlyweds*, live your marriage in concrete adherence to Christ and to the Gospel teaching.