



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 11 December 2013

Video

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning.

Today I would like to begin the last series of catecheses on our profession of faith, by discussing the statement “I believe in eternal life”. In particular, I will reflect on the Last Judgement. We need not be afraid: let us listen to what the Word of God tells us. Concerning this, we read in the Gospel of Matthew: when Christ “comes in his glory, and all the angels with him.... Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.... And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Mt 25:31-33, 46).

Whenever we think of Christ’s return and of his final judgement, which will manifest to its ultimate consequences the good that each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life, we seem to find ourselves before a mystery which towers above us, which we fail even to imagine. A mystery which almost instinctively arouses a sense of fear in us, and perhaps even one of trepidation. If, however, we reflect well on this reality, it cannot but expand the heart of a Christian and come to constitute a cause of consolation and of trust.

In this regard, the testimony of the first Christian communities resounds ever so evocatively. In fact, they usually accompanied the celebrations and prayers with the acclamation *Maranatha*, an expression composed of two Aramaic words which, according to how they are pronounced, may be understood as a supplication: “Come, Lord!”, or as a certainty nourished by faith: “Yes, the Lord is coming, the Lord is near”. The whole of Christian revelation culminates in this exclamation, at

the conclusion of the marvellous contemplation which is offered to us by John in Revelation (cf. 22:20). In that case, it is the Church as bride who, on behalf of all humanity and as its first fruits, addresses herself to Christ her Bridegroom, looking forward to be enfolded in his embrace: Jesus' embrace, which is the fullness of life and the fullness of love. This is how Jesus embraces us. If we think of judgement in this perspective, all fear and hesitation fade and make room for expectation and deep joy: it will be the very moment when we will be judged finally ready to be clothed in Christ's glory, as with a nuptial garment, to be led into the banquet, the image of full and definitive communion with God.

A second reason for confidence is offered to us by the observation that, at the moment of judgement, *we will not be left alone*. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus himself foretells how, at the end of time, those who have followed him will take their place in glory, and judge with him (cf. Mt 19:28). The Apostle Paul then, writing to the community of Corinth, states: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?... How much more, matters pertaining to this life!" (1 Cor 6:2-3). How beautiful it is to know that at that juncture, in addition to Christ, our Paraclete, our Advocate with the Father (cf. 1 Jn 2:1), we will be able to count on the intercession and goodness of so many of our elder brothers and sisters who have gone before us on the journey of faith, who have offered their lives for us and who continue to love us ineffably! The saints already live in the sight of God, in the splendour of his glory praying for us who still live on earth. What consolation this certainty arouses in our hearts! The Church is truly a mother and, as a mother, she seeks her children's good, especially of those who are furthest away and are afflicted, until she finds its fullness in the glorious body of Christ with all its members.

A further suggestion is offered to us by the Gospel of John, where it explicitly states that "God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (Jn 3:17-18). This means, then, that *this final judgement is already in progress*, it begins now over the course of our lives. Thus judgement is pronounced at every moment of life, as it sums up our faith in the salvation which is present and active in Christ, or of our unbelief, whereby we close in upon ourselves. But if we close ourselves to the love of Jesus, we condemn ourselves. Salvation is to open oneself to Jesus, it is he who saves us. If we are sinners — and we all are — we ask him for forgiveness and if we go to him with the desire to be good, the Lord forgives us. But for this we must open ourselves to Jesus' love, which is stronger than all else. Jesus' love is great, Jesus' love is merciful, Jesus' love forgives; but you have to open yourself and to open oneself means to repent, to accuse oneself of the things that are not good and which we have done. The Lord Jesus gave himself and he continues to give himself to us, in order to fill us with all of the mercy and grace of the Father. We then, in a certain sense, can become judges of ourselves, by condemning ourselves to exclusion from communion with God and with the brethren. We must not grow weary, then, of keeping watch over our thoughts and our attitudes, in order that we may be given even now a foretaste of the warmth and splendour of God's Face — and this will be beautiful — which

in eternal life we shall contemplate in all its fullness. Forward, thinking of this judgement which begins now, which has already begun. Forward, doing so in such a way that our hearts open to Jesus and to his salvation; forward without fear, for Jesus' love is greater and if we ask forgiveness for our sins he will forgive us. This is what Jesus is like. Forward then with this certainly, which will bring us to the glory of heaven!

To special groups

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience. Upon you and your families I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace!

Tomorrow we are celebrating the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Dear *young people*, learn from Mary how to listen to the will of the Lord; dear *sick people*, invoke the Lord's Mother in moments of great difficulty; and you, dear *newlyweds*, be inspired by Our Lady to bring love and serenity into your family.

MESSAGE TO THE AMERICAS FOR THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Tomorrow is the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of the Americas. I would like to greet all my brothers and sisters on that continent, and I do so thinking of the Virgin of Tepeyac.

When Our Lady appeared to Saint Juan Diego, her face was that of a woman of mixed blood, a *mestiza*, and her garments bore many symbols of the native culture. Like Jesus, Mary is close to all her sons and daughters; as a concerned mother, she accompanies them on their way through life. She shares all the joys and hopes, the sorrows and troubles of God's People, which is made up of men and women of every race and nation.

When the image of the Virgin appeared on the tilma of Juan Diego, it was the prophecy of an embrace: Mary's embrace of all the peoples of the vast expanses of America – the peoples who already lived there, and those who were yet to come. Mary's embrace showed what America – North and South – is called to be: a land where different peoples come together; a land prepared to accept human life at every stage, from the mother's womb to old age; a land which welcomes immigrants, and the poor and the marginalized, in every age. A land of generosity.

That is the message of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and it is also my message, the message of the Church. I ask all the people of the Americas to open wide their arms, like the Virgin, with love and tenderness.

I pray for all of you, dear brothers and sisters, and I ask you to pray for me! May the joy of the Gospel always abide in your hearts. May the Lord bless you, and may Our Lady be ever at your side.

APPEAL

Yesterday *Caritas* launched a worldwide campaign against hunger and the wasting of food, with the motto: “One human family, food for all”. The scandal of the millions of people who suffer from hunger should not paralyze us, but rather move us to act — everyone, individuals, families, communities, institutions, governments — to eliminate this injustice. Jesus’ Gospel shows us the way: trusting in the Father’s providence and sharing our daily bread without wasting it. I encourage *Caritas* to carry on in this commitment, and I invite everyone to join in this “wave” of solidarity.