



# The Holy See

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

Wednesday, 11 December 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

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*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!*

In the Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospel's journey throughout the world continues and Saint Paul's witness becomes increasingly marked by the seal of suffering. However, this is something that grows over time in Paul's life. Paul is not only an evangelizer filled with ardour, the fearless missionary among the Gentiles who gives life to the new Christian communities, but also the suffering witness of the Risen One (cf. Acts 9: 15-16).

The Apostle's arrival to Jerusalem, described in Chapter 21 of the Acts, unleashes fierce hatred against him. They reproach him: "But he was a persecutor! Do not trust him!". As it was for Jesus, Jerusalem is a hostile city to him too. Having gone to the Temple, he is recognized, led outside to be lynched and saved *in extremis* by Roman soldiers. He is accused of teaching against the Law and the Temple, is arrested and thus begins his pilgrimage as a prisoner, first before the Sanhedrin, then before the Roman Governor in Caesarea, and finally before King Agrippa. Luke highlights the similarities between Paul and Jesus: both despised by their adversaries, publicly accused and recognised as innocent by the empire's authorities. And thus, Paul becomes associated with the passion of his Teacher and his passion becomes a living Gospel.

I have come here from Saint Peter's Basilica where I had my first audience this morning with Ukrainian pilgrims, from a diocese in the Ukraine. How persecuted these people have been; how much they have suffered for the Gospel! But they did not negotiate their faith. They are an example. In the world today, in Europe, many Christians are persecuted and give their life for their own faith, or they are persecuted with white gloves, that is, left aside, marginalized ... Martyrdom is the air in the life of Christians and Christian communities. There will always be martyrs among us. This is the sign that we are on Jesus' path. It is the Lord's Blessing that there be among the People of God, someone who can offer this witness of martyrdom.

Paul is called to defend himself from the accusations and, in the end, in the presence of King

Agrippa II, his *apologia* turns into an effective proclamation of faith (Acts 26: 1-23).

Paul then tells of his own conversion: the Risen Christ had made him a Christian and entrusted him with the mission among the people: “that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith” in Christ (v. 18). Paul had accepted this responsibility and had done nothing but reveal that the prophets and Moses had foretold what he was now announcing: that “Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles” (v. 23). Paul’s passionate witness touches the heart of King Agrippa who is only missing the definitive step. And the king says: “In a short time you think to make me a Christian” (v. 28). Paul is declared innocent but he cannot be released because he has appealed to Caesar. Thus continues the unstoppable journey of the Word of God towards Rome. Paul, in chains, will end up here in Rome.

From this moment onwards, Paul’s figure becomes that of a *prisoner* whose chains mark his fidelity to the Gospel and the witness made to the Risen One.

The chains are certainly a humiliating trial for the Apostle who appears before the world as a “criminal” (2 Tim 2:9). However, his love for Christ is so strong that these chains too are read through the eyes of faith, a faith which for Paul “is not a theory, an opinion about God and the world” but rather “the impact of God’s love in his heart ... love for Jesus Christ” (Benedict XVI, [Homily for the opening of the Pauline year](#), 28 June 2008).

Dear brothers and sisters, Paul teaches us to have perseverance during trials and the ability to read everything through the eyes of faith. Let us ask the Lord today for the Apostle’s intercession, to revive our faith and help us to be faithful to the end, to our vocation as Christians, disciples of the Lord, missionaries.

### ***Special Greetings***

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from the United States of America. I pray that each of you, and your families, may experience a blessed Advent, in preparation for the coming of the newborn Saviour at Christmas. May God bless you!

Lastly, I greet *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. This Friday is the Feast of Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr. May the light of Baby Jesus, which is now on the horizon, permeate all of you with its blessing.

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