



## The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS *ANGELUS* Saint Peter's Square

Sunday, 11 December 2016 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

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*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent, which is characterized by Saint Paul's invitation: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.... The Lord is at hand" (Phil 4:4-5). It is not a superficial or purely emotional cheerfulness that the Apostle exhorts, nor is it the cheerfulness of worldliness or of consumerism. No, it is not that, but rather, it entails a more authentic joy, the taste of which we are called to rediscover. The taste of true joy. It is a joy that touches our innermost being, as we await Jesus, who has already come to bring salvation to the world, the promised Messiah, born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary. The liturgy of the Word offers us the appropriate context for understanding and living out this joy. Isaiah speaks of wilderness, of dry land, of plains (cf. 35:1); the Prophet has before him weak hands, feeble knees, fearful hearts, people who are blind, deaf and dumb (cf. vv. 3-6). The context of this situation is desolation, an inexorable fate without God.

But finally salvation is proclaimed: "Be strong, fear not!" — the Prophet says — "Behold, your God.... He will come and save you" (cf. Is 35:4). And straight away everything is transformed: the desert blooms, comfort and joy permeate hearts (cf. vv. 5-6). These signs proclaimed by Isaiah as signs of salvation which is already present; they are fulfilled in Jesus. He himself affirms it by responding to the messengers sent by John the Baptist — what does Jesus say to these messengers? "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up" (Mt 11:5). They are not words, but are facts which demonstrate how salvation, brought by Jesus, seizes the human being and regenerates him. God has entered history in order to free us from the slavery of sin; he set his tent in our midst in order to share our existence, to heal our lesions, to bind our wounds and to give us new life. Joy is the fruit of this intervention of God's salvation and love.

We are called to let ourselves be drawn in by the feeling of exultation. This exultation, this joy.... But a Christian who isn't joyful is a Christian who is lacking something, or else is not a Christian! It is heartfelt joy, the joy within which leads us forth and gives us courage. The Lord comes, he comes into our life as a liberator; he comes to free us from all forms of interior and exterior slavery.

It is he who shows us the path of faithfulness, of patience and of perseverance because, upon his return, our joy will be overflowing. Christmas is near, the signs of his approach are evident along our streets and in our houses; here too, in Saint Peter's Square, the Nativity scene has been placed with the tree beside it. These outward signs invite us to welcome the Lord who always comes and knocks at our door, knocks at our heart, in order to draw near to us; he invites us to recognize his footsteps among the brothers and sisters who pass beside us, especially the weakest and most needy.

Today we are called to rejoice for the imminent coming of our Redeemer; and we are called to share this joy with others, giving comfort and hope to the poor, the sick, and to people who are lonely and unhappy. May the Virgin Mary, the "handmaid of the Lord", help us to hear God's voice in prayer and to serve him with compassion in our brothers, so as to be prepared for the Christmas appointment, preparing our hearts to welcome Jesus.

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### **After the Angelus:**

Dear brothers and sisters, every day I am close to the people of Aleppo, above all in prayer. We must not forget that Aleppo is a city, that there are people there: families, children, elderly, sick people.... Sadly we have now become accustomed to war, to the destruction, but we must not forget that Syria is a country full of history, culture and faith. We cannot accept that this is denied by war, which is an aggregation of oppression and untruth. I appeal to everyone for the commitment to make a civilized choice: say 'no' to destruction, 'yes' to peace, 'yes' to the people of Aleppo and of Syria.

Let us also pray for the victims of several brutal terrorist attacks which have struck various countries in recent hours. The places are different, but sadly the violence which sows death and destruction is unique. Unique too, is the response: faith in God and unity in human and civil values. I would like to express particular closeness to my dear brother Pope Tawadros II [Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church] and to his community, in praying for the dead and the wounded.

Today in Vientiane, Laos, Mario Borzaga, a priest of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Paolo Thoj Xyooj, a faithful lay catechist, and 14 companions killed in hatred of the faith shall be declared Blessed. May their heroic faithfulness to Christ be an encouragement and an example to missionaries and especially to catechists, who in mission lands carry out a valuable and irreplaceable apostolic work, for which the Church is grateful to them. Let us also think of our catechists: they do so much work, such beautiful work! Being a catechist is a beautiful thing: it is bringing the Lord's message so that it may grow in us. A round of applause for catechists, everyone!

I warmly greet all of you, dear pilgrims from various countries. Today the first greeting is reserved

for the children and youth from Rome, who have come for the traditional blessing of the “Baby Jesus” [statuettes], organized by the parish oratories and by the Catholic schools of Rome. Dear boys and girls, when you pray before your Nativity scene with your parents, ask Baby Jesus to help us all to remember to love God and neighbour. Remember to pray for me too, as I remember you. Thank you.

I greet the professors of the Catholic University of Sydney, the choir of the Monastery of Grijó in Portugal, the faithful of Barbianello and Campobasso.

I wish everyone a happy Sunday. Do not forget to pray for me. And I would like to say something to the children and youth: we want to hear your song! *Arrivederci!* Enjoy your lunch! Sing!