



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
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[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

In the Creed we profess that Jesus “will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead”. Human history begins with the creation of man and woman in God’s likeness and ends with the Last Judgement of Christ. These two poles of history are often forgotten; and, at times, especially faith in Christ’s return and in the Last Judgement, are not so clear and firm in Christian hearts. In his public life Jesus frequently reflected on the reality of his Final Coming. Today I would like to reflect on three Gospel texts that help us to penetrate this mystery: those of the ten virgins, of the talents and of the Last Judgement. All three are part of Jesus’ discourse on the end of time which can be found in the Gospel of St Matthew.

Let us remember first of all that in the Ascension the Son of God brought to the Father our humanity, which he had taken on, and that he wants to draw all to himself, to call the whole world to be welcomed in God’s embrace so that at the end of history the whole of reality may be consigned to the Father. Yet there is this “immediate time” between the First and the Final Coming of Christ, and that is the very time in which we are living. The parable of the ten virgins fits into this context of “immediate” time (cf. Mt 25:1-13). They are ten maidens who are awaiting the arrival of the Bridegroom, but he is late and they fall asleep. At the sudden announcement that the Bridegroom is arriving they prepare to welcome him, but while five of them, who are wise, have oil to burn in their lamps, the others, who are foolish, are left with lamps that have gone out because they have no oil for them. While they go to get some oil the Bridegroom arrives and the foolish virgins find that the door to the hall of the marriage feast is shut.

They knock on it again and again, but it is now too late, the Bridegroom answers: I do not know you. The Bridegroom is the Lord, and the time of waiting for his arrival is the time he gives to us, to all of us, before his Final Coming with mercy and patience; it is a time of watchfulness; a time in which we must keep alight the lamps of faith, hope and charity, a time in which to keep our heart open to goodness, beauty and truth. It is a time to live in accordance with God, because we do not know either the day or the hour of Christ's return. What he asks of us is to be ready for the encounter — ready for an encounter, for a beautiful encounter, the encounter with Jesus, which means being able to see the signs of his presence, keeping our faith alive with prayer, with the sacraments, and taking care not to fall asleep so as to not forget about God. The life of slumbering Christians is a sad life, it is not a happy life. Christians must be happy, with the joy of Jesus. Let us not fall asleep!

The second parable, the parable of the talents, makes us think about the relationship between how we use the gifts we have received from God and his return, when he will ask us what use we made of them (cf. Mt 25:14-30). We are well acquainted with the parable: before his departure the master gives a few talents to each of his servants to ensure that they will be put to good use during his absence. He gives five to the first servant, two to the second one and one to the third. In the period of their master's absence, the first two servants increase their talents — these are ancient coins — whereas the third servant prefers to bury his and to return it to his master as it was.

On his return, the master judges what they have done: he praises the first two while he throws the third one out into the outer darkness because, through fear, he had hidden his talent, withdrawing into himself. A Christian who withdraws into himself, who hides everything that the Lord has given him, is a Christian who... he is not a Christian! He is a Christian who does not thank God for everything God has given him!

This tells us that the expectation of the Lord's return is the time of action — we are in the time of action — the time in which we should bring God's gifts to fruition, not for ourselves but for him, for the Church, for others. The time to seek to increase goodness in the world always; and in particular, in this period of crisis, today, it is important not to turn in on ourselves, burying our own talent, our spiritual, intellectual, and material riches, everything that the Lord has given us, but, rather to open ourselves, to be supportive, to be attentive to others.

In the square I have seen that there are many young people here: it is true, isn't it? Are there many young people? Where are they? I ask you who are just setting out on your journey through life: have you thought about the talents that God has given you? Have you thought of how you can put them at the service of others? Do not bury your talents! Set your stakes on great ideals, the ideals that enlarge the heart, the ideals of service that make your talents fruitful. Life is not given to us to be jealously guarded for ourselves, but is given to us so that we may give it in turn. Dear young people, have a deep spirit! Do not be afraid to dream of great things!

Lastly, a word about the passage on the Last Judgement in which the Lord's Second Coming is described, when he will judge all human beings, the living and the dead (cf. Mt 25: 31-46). The image used by the Evangelist is that of the shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats. On his right he places those who have acted in accordance with God's will, who went to the aid of their hungry, thirsty, foreign, naked, sick or imprisoned neighbour — I said "foreign": I am thinking of the multitude of foreigners who are here in the Diocese of Rome: what do we do for them? While on his left are those who did not help their neighbour. This tells us that God will judge us on our love, on how we have loved our brethren, especially the weakest and the neediest. Of course we must always have clearly in mind that we are justified, we are saved through grace, through an act of freely-given love by God who always goes before us; on our own we can do nothing. Faith is first of all a gift we have received. But in order to bear fruit, God's grace always demands our openness to him, our free and tangible response. Christ comes to bring us the mercy of a God who saves. We are asked to trust in him, to correspond to the gift of his love with a good life, made up of actions motivated by faith and love.

Dear brothers and sisters, may looking at the Last Judgement never frighten us: rather, may it impel us to live the present better. God offers us this time with mercy and patience so that we may learn every day to recognize him in the poor and in the lowly. Let us strive for goodness and be watchful in prayer and in love. May the Lord, at the end of our life and at the end of history, be able to recognize us as good and faithful servants. Many thanks!

Greetings:

I am pleased to greet the Vietnamese pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Hôchiminh Ville, led by Cardinal Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Man. I also greet the group of Marist Brothers taking part in a programme of spiritual reunion. My cordial welcome also goes to the visitors from Cambridge Muslim College in England. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, including those from England, Ireland, Norway, Australia, South Korea and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Lord.

Lastly, I offer an affectionate thought to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. May Christ the Good Shepherd give security to each one of you, dear *young people*, especially to the large number of students, so that in following his voice you do not lose your way; may he support you, dear *sick people*, in carrying your daily cross; and may he help you, dear *newlyweds*, to build your family on God's love. Thank you!
