



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 19 April

2017 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good Morning!*

We are meeting today in the light of Easter which we have celebrated and we are continuing to celebrate in the Liturgy. For this reason, in our series of catecheses on Christian hope, I would like to speak to you today about the Risen Christ, our hope, as he is portrayed by Saint Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians. (cf. 1 Cor 15).

The Apostle wants to solve a problem which was surely at the centre of discussions in the community of Corinth. The Resurrection is the last topic discussed in the Letter, but it is probably the first in order of importance. In fact, everything rests on this premise.

Speaking to his fellow Christians, Paul begins with an irrefutable fact that is not the result of the reflection of a knowledgeable man, but a fact, a simple fact which occurred in the lives of some people. Christianity started from here. It is not an ideology; it is not a philosophical system; rather it is a path of faith which begins with an event witnessed by Jesus' first disciples. Paul summarises it like this: Jesus died for our sins, he was buried, and on the third day He rose and appeared to Peter and to the twelve [apostles]. (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5). This is the fact: He died, He was buried, He rose and He appeared. That is, Jesus is alive! This is the heart of the Christian message.

In announcing this event, which is the central nucleus of faith, Paul insists, above all, on the last element of the Easter mystery, that is, on the fact that Jesus is Risen. If in fact everything had ended with his death, we would have in Him, an example of supreme self-denial, but this would not be able to generate our faith. He was a hero! He died, but He is Risen because faith arises from the Resurrection. Accepting that Christ is dead and that He died crucified is not an act of faith. It is a historical fact. Believing he is Risen, on the other hand, is. Our faith begins on Easter morning. Paul makes a list of the people to whom the Risen Jesus appeared (cf. vv. 6-7). We have here a short

summary of all the Easter narratives and of all the people who came into contact with the Risen One. At the top of the list are: Cephas, that is Peter, the group of 12 [Apostles] and then "500 brethren" many of whom could still have borne witness. Then James is cited. The last on the list —

as the least worthy of all — is himself. Paul says of himself: “as to one untimely born” (v 8).

Paul uses this expression because his personal history is dramatic. He was not an altar boy, but a persecutor of the Church, proud of his convictions. He felt he was a successful man with a very clear idea of what life was about and its duties. But, in this perfect picture, — everything was perfect for Paul, he knew everything — in this perfect view of life, one day something absolutely unexpected happens: the meeting with the Risen Jesus on the way to Damascus. There was not just a man who fell to the ground. There was a person seized by an event that would overturn the meaning of [his life]. And the persecutor becomes an apostle. Why? Because I saw Jesus alive! I saw the Risen Jesus Christ! This is the foundation of Paul’s faith, as well as of the faith of the other apostles, as well as the faith of the Church, as well as of our faith.

How beautiful it is to think that Christianity is essentially this! It is not so much our search for God — a search which in truth is tenuous —, but rather God’s search for us. Jesus took us, grasped us, won us over, never more to leave us. Christianity is grace. It is surprise and, for this reason, it implies a heart that is capable of amazement. A closed heart, a rationalist heart is incapable of amazement and cannot understand what Christianity is because Christianity is grace, and grace can only be perceived, and furthermore, it happens in the amazement of the encounter.

So, even if we are sinners — we all are —, if our good intentions are only “on paper”, or if on appraising our life we realize we have accumulated many failures..., on Easter morning, we can be like those people of whom the Gospel speaks: going to the Sepulchre of Christ, seeing the large overturned stone and thinking that God is preparing an unexpected future for them and for all of us; going to our sepulchre: we all have some of this inside us. To go there and see how God is capable of rising again from there. Here, there is happiness; there is joy and life, where everyone thought there was only sadness, defeat and darkness. God makes His most beautiful flowers grow in the midst of the most arid of stones.

To be Christian means not starting from death, but rather, from God’s love for us which has defeated our most bitter enemy. God is greater than nothingness, and a lit candle is enough to overcome the darkest of nights. Echoing the prophets, Paul cries, “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?”(v. 55). We carry this cry in our heart in these days of Easter. And if they should ask the reason for the smile we give and our patient readiness to share, then we will be able to answer that Jesus is still here, that he continues to be alive among us, that Jesus is here, in the Square, with us: Alive and Risen.

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly the groups from England, Sweden, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Canada and the United States

of America. I offer a particular greeting to the newly-ordained deacons from the Pontifical Irish College, together with families and friends. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Dear young people, especially you from the *Professione di fede* of the Dioceses of Milan and Cremona, may you experience fully the Easter message, bearing witness everywhere to the Risen Christ's gift of peace. Dear *sick people*, look constantly to the One who has overcome death and helps us to accept suffering as a privileged moment of redemption and salvation. Dear *newlyweds*, may you live your daily family experience in the awareness of the life giving presence of Jesus in your home.