



# The Holy See

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**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

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***Continuation of Jesus' saving mission  
in human history through the Church***

1. After considering the total salvation accomplished by Christ the Redeemer, we would now like to reflect on its progressive realization in human history. In a certain sense, it is precisely this problem that the disciples ask Jesus about before the Ascension: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (*Acts 1:6*).

Put this way, the question shows how they are still influenced by the prospect of a hope that conceives of God's kingdom as an event closely linked to Israel's destiny as a nation. During the 40 days between the Resurrection and the Ascension, Jesus had spoken to them of "the kingdom of God" (*Acts 1:3*). But only after the great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost will they be able to grasp its profound aspects. In the meantime, Jesus corrects their impatience spurred by their desire for a kingdom still too political and earthly, by inviting them to trust in God's mysterious designs: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority" (*Acts 1:7*).

2. Jesus' admonition concerning "God's times" proves more significant than ever after 2,000 years of Christianity. As we face the rather slow growth of God's kingdom in the world, we are asked to trust in the plan of the merciful Father who guides all things with transcendent wisdom. Jesus invites us to admire the "patience" of the Father, who adapts his transforming action to the slowness of human nature wounded by sin. This patience was already revealed in the Old Testament, in the long history which prepared Jesus' coming (cf. 3:25). It continues to be revealed after Christ, in the growth of his Church (cf. 2 Pt 3:9).

In his response to the disciples, Jesus speaks of "times" (*chrónoi*) and "seasons" (*kairoí*). These two words for time in biblical language have two nuances which are worth recalling. *Chrónos* is time in its ordinary course and is also under the influence of divine Providence, which governs everything. But into this ordinary flow of history God makes his special interventions, which give a particular saving value to specific moments. These are precisely the *kairoí*, God's seasons, which man is called to discern and by which he must allow himself to be challenged.

3. Biblical history is full of these special moments. The most fundamentally important was the time of Christ's coming. It is also possible, in the light of this distinction between *chrónoi* and *kairoí*, to reread the Church's 2,000 years of history.

Sent to all humanity, the Church experiences different moments in her growth. In some places and periods she encounters special problems and obstacles; in others her progress is much faster. Long periods of waiting are recorded in which her intense missionary efforts seem ineffective. These are times which test the power of hope, directing it to a more distant future.

Nevertheless, there are also favourable moments when the Good News is warmly welcomed and conversions increase. The first and fundamental moment of the most abundant grace is Pentecost. Many others have followed and there are still more to come.

4. When one of these moments occurs, those who have a special responsibility for evangelization are called to recognize it, to make the best use of the opportunities offered by grace. But it is impossible to know their date in advance. Jesus' reply (cf. *Acts 1:7*) is not limited to restraining the disciples' impatience, but emphasizes their *responsibility*. They are tempted to expect that Jesus will take care of everything. Instead, they receive a mission which calls them to make a generous commitment: "You shall be my witnesses" (*Acts 1:8*). Although at the Ascension he disappears from their sight, Jesus still wants to continue his presence in the world precisely through the disciples.

To them he entrusts the task of spreading the Gospel throughout the world, spurring them to abandon their narrow vision limited to Israel. He broadens their horizons, inviting them to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (*Acts 1:8*).

Thus everything will happen in Christ's name, but everything will also come to pass through the personal work of these witnesses.

5. The disciples could shrink from this demanding mission, judging themselves incapable of assuming such a serious responsibility. But Jesus shows them the secret that will enable them to fulfil this task: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (*Acts 1:8*). With this power the disciples will succeed, despite human weakness, in being authentic witnesses of Christ throughout the world.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit fills each of the disciples and the entire community with the abundance and diversity of his gifts. Jesus reveals the importance of the gift of power (*dýnamis*), which will sustain their apostolic work. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary at the Annunciation as "the power of the Most High" (cf. *Lk* 1:35), bringing about the miracle of the Incarnation in her womb. The very power of the Holy Spirit will work new marvels of grace in the task of evangelizing the nations.

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*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:*

I extend a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at this Audience, especially those from Denmark, Australia, the Philippines, Japan, Canada and the United States of America. Upon you and your families I cordially invoke the blessings of almighty God.

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