



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 26 April 2017

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good morning!

“I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). These final words of the Gospel of Matthew recall the prophetic announcement that we find at the beginning: “‘his name shall be called Emmanuel’ (which means, God with us)” (Mt 1:23; cf. Is 7:14). God will be with us, every day, until the end of time. Jesus will walk with us, every day, until the end of time. The entire Gospel is enclosed within these two passages, words which communicate the mystery of a God whose name, whose identity is *to be with*. He is not an isolated God; he is a ‘God-with’. In particular, *with us*, namely, with human beings. Our God is not an absent God, confined to a far-off heaven; he is instead a God “impassioned” with man, so tenderly in love as to be incapable of being separated from him. We humans are experts at severing bonds and bridges. He, however, is not. If our heart cools, his remains ever incandescent. Our God accompanies us always, even if by mishap we should forget him. On the ridge that divides scepticism from faith, the discovery that we are loved and accompanied by our Father, that he never leaves us on our own, is decisive.

Our existence is *a pilgrimage, a journey*. Even those who are inspired by simply human hope, perceive the allure of the horizon, which urges them to explore worlds they do not yet know. Our spirit is *a migrant spirit*. The Bible is filled with stories of pilgrims and travellers. Abraham’s vocation begins with this command: “Go from your country” (Gen 12:1). The patriarch left that piece of the world he knew well and which was one of the cradles of civilization of his time. Everything conspired against the wisdom of that journey. Yet Abraham set out. We do not become mature men and women if we do not perceive the allure of the horizon: that boundary between earth and sky which demands to be reached by a people that walks.

On his earthly journey man is never alone. Above all, a Christian never feels abandoned, because Jesus assures us that he does not await us only at the end of our long journey, but accompanies us in each of our days.

How long will God's care for mankind endure? How long will the Lord Jesus, who walks with us, how long will he care for us? The Gospel response leaves no room for doubt: *to the close of the age!* The sky will wane; the earth will wane; human hope will be erased, but the Word of God is greater than all and will never wane. And he will be the God with us, the God Jesus who walks with us. There will never be a day in our life in which we cease to be a concern for the heart of God. But one could ask: "But what are you saying?". I am saying this: there will never be a day in our life in which we cease to be a concern for the heart of God. He is always concerned about us, and he walks with us. And why does he do this? Simply because he loves us. Is this understood? He loves us! And God will surely provide for all our needs; he will not abandon us in times of trial and darkness. This certainty seeks to settle in our soul so as never to be extinguished. Some call this certainty "Providence". That is, God's closeness, God's love, God's walking with us is also called the "Providence of God": He provides for our life.

It is no coincidence that among the symbols of Christian hope there is one that I really like: *the anchor*. It expresses the notion that our hope is not vague; it is not to be confused with the uncertain sentiment of those who wish to improve the things of this world in an unrealistic way, relying only on their own willpower. Indeed, Christian hope is rooted not in the allure of the future, but in the *certainty of what God has promised us and accomplished in Jesus Christ*. If he guaranteed he would never abandon us, if every vocation begins with a "Follow me", with which he assures us he is always before us, why should we be afraid? With this promise, Christians can walk everywhere. Even passing through parts of the wounded world, where things are not going well, we are among those who still continue to hope. The Psalm says: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me" (23[22]:4). It is precisely where darkness is rife that a light must be kept burning. Let us return to the anchor. Our faith is the anchor in heaven. We have anchored our life in heaven. What do we have to do? Hold fast to the rope: it is always there. And we go forward because we are certain that our life has an anchor in heaven, on that shore where we will arrive.

Of course, if we trusted only in our strengths, we would have reason to feel disappointed and defeated, because the world often shows itself immune to the laws of love. It prefers, so often, the laws of selfishness. But if the certainty survives in us that God does not abandon us, that God loves

us and this world tenderly, then it immediately changes our perspective. "*Homo viator, spe erectus*", the ancients used to say. Along the journey, Jesus' promise "I am with you" enables us to stand with hope, upright, trusting that the good God is already at work, accomplishing what humanly seems impossible, because the anchor is on heaven's shore.

The holy, faithful People of God are a people that stand — *homo viator* — and walk, but upright,

erectus, and they walk in hope. And wherever they go, they know that God's love has preceded them: there is no part of the world that escapes the victory of the Risen Christ. And what is the victory of the Risen Christ? The victory of love. Thank you.

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly the groups from England, Ireland, Denmark, Finland, Nigeria, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and the United States of America. 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!
