



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 18 September 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Let us continue the catechesis on the Acts of the Apostles. To the Jews' prohibition against teaching in the name of Christ, Peter and the Apostles bravely respond that they cannot obey those who wish to impede the Gospel's journey in the world.

The Twelve thus demonstrate their possession of that "obedience of faith" that they will then bring about in all men (cf. Rom 1:5). Beginning at Pentecost, indeed, they are no longer men "alone". They experience that special synergy that makes them decentralize themselves and enables them to say: "we and the Holy Spirit" (cf. Acts 5:32) or "to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). They feel they cannot say "I" alone; they are men decentralized from themselves.

Strengthened by this alliance, the Apostles do not allow anyone to intimidate them. They have tremendous courage! Let us remember that these men were cowards: everyone ran away; they fled when Jesus was arrested. But, from cowards they became so courageous. Why? Because the Holy Spirit was with them. The same thing happens to us: if we have the Holy Spirit within, we have the courage to go forth, the courage to win many battles, not by ourselves but by the Spirit who is with us. They do not regress in their march as intrepid witnesses to the Risen Jesus, like the martyrs of all times, including ours. Martyrs give their lives; they do not hide being Christian. Let us consider, a few years ago — today too there are so many — but let us consider four years ago, those Coptic Orthodox Christians, true workers, on the beach in Libya: all their throats were cut. But the last word they said was "Jesus, Jesus". They did not sell out their faith, because the Holy Spirit was with them. These are today's martyrs! The Apostles are the "megaphones" of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Risen One to spread quickly and without reservation the Word that gives salvation.

And truly, this determination causes trepidation in the Jewish "religious system", which feels threatened and responds with violence and death sentences. The persecution of Christians is

always the same: people who do not want Christianity feel threatened and thus they condemn Christians. But in the middle of the Sanhedrin, the voice of a different Pharisee is heard, one who chooses to curb the reaction of his people: his name was Gamaliel, a prudent man, “a teacher of the law, held in honour by all the people”. At his school, Saint Paul had learned to observe “the law of our fathers” (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel takes the floor and shows his brothers how to practise *the art of discernment* when faced with situations that go beyond the usual context.

Referring to several people who passed themselves off as the Messiah, he demonstrates that every human plan may enjoy a consensus at first and then fail, whereas all that comes from on High and bears God’s “signature” is destined to endure. Human designs always fail. They have a season, like us. Think of the many political projects, and how they change from one side to the other in all countries. Think of the great empires; think of the dictatorships of the last century. They felt very powerful; they thought they could dominate the world. And then they all collapsed. Think today too, of today’s empires. They will collapse if God is not with them because the power that men have within them is not long-lasting. Only God’s power endures. Let us think of the history of Christians, even the history of the Church with the many sins, the many scandals, with many bad things, throughout these two millennia. And why did she not fall? Because God is there. We are sinners and often we too cause scandal. But God is with us. And God saves us first, and then them, but the Lord always saves. The strength is “God with us”. Referring to some characters who had passed themselves off as the Messiah, Gamaliel demonstrates that every human project can enjoy consensus at first and then fail. Therefore, Gamaliel concludes that if the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth believed in an imposter, they were destined to disappear into nothing; if instead they follow one who comes from God, it is better to quit fighting them; and he admonishes: “You might even be found opposing God!” (Acts 5:39). He teaches us to make this discernment.

They are calm and farsighted words that allow us to view the Christian advent in a new light, and they offer parameters that “echo the Gospel” because they invite us to recognize the tree by its fruits (cf. Mt 7:16). They touch our hearts and achieve the desired effect: the other members of the Sanhedrin follow his advice and forego the intention of death, that is, to kill the Apostles.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to act within us so that both personally and communally, we may achieve the *habitus* of discernment. Let us ask him to help us always be able to recognize the unity of salvation history through the signs of God’s passage in our time and on the faces of those who are near us so that we may learn that time and human faces are messengers of the Living God.

Appeal and Special greetings

This upcoming 21 September is World Alzheimer’s Day, a disease that affects many men and women who, due to this disease, are often victims of violence, mistreatment and abuse that infringe upon their dignity. Let us pray for the conversion of hearts and for those who suffer from

Alzheimer's, for their families and for those who lovingly care for them. I also join in my prayer the memory of those who are affected by cancer, that they too may always be more supported, both in the prevention and in the care of this disease.

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Canada and the United States of America. In particular, I greet the members of the American Academy of Neurological Surgeons present in Rome for their annual meeting. Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord. May God bless you!

I address a particular thought to *young people, the elderly* and *newlyweds*. Next Saturday is the Feast of Saint Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist. May you imitate his willingness to promptly follow Jesus. May his conversion be an example for all, so that like him we may live as true disciples of the Lord, able to abandon worldly calculations.