

## **The Church Belongs to Everyone**

### **Holy Father says Church is not only for good people but a "feast of unity"**

VATICAN CITY, November 05, 2013 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)) - A [Vatican Radio summary](#) of Pope Francis' morning homily, Nov. 5:

At the heart of Christianity is an invitation to the Lord's feast. That was Pope Francis' message at Mass this morning at the Casa Santa Marta this morning. The Pope said that the Church is "not only for good people;" the invitation to be a part of it concerns everyone. And he added that, at the Lord's feast we must "participate fully" and with everyone; we can't pick and choose. Christians, he said, can't be content with simply being on the guest list – not participating fully is like not joining in.

The readings of the day, the Pope said, the identity of the Christian. He emphasized that "first of all, the Christian essence is an invitation: we only become Christians if we are invited." It is a "free invitation" from God to participate. You can't pay to get into the feast, he warned: "either you are invited or you can't come in." If "in our conscience," he said, "we don't have this certainty of being invited" then "we haven't understood what a Christian is".

"A Christian is one who is invited. Invited to what? To a shop? To take a walk? The Lord wants to tell us something more: You are invited to join in the feast, to the joy of being saved, to the joy of being redeemed, to the joy of sharing life with Christ. This is a joy! You are called to a party! A feast is a gathering of people who talk, laugh, celebrate, are happy together. I have never seen anyone party on their own. That would be boring, no? Opening the bottle of wine . . . That's not a feast, it's something else. You have to party with others, with the family, with friends, with those who've been invited, as I was invited. Being Christian means belonging, belonging to this body, to the people that have been invited to the feast: this is Christian belonging."

Turning to the Letter to the Romans, the Pope then affirmed that this feast is a "feast of unity." He underlined the fact that all are invited, "the good and the bad." And the first to be invited are the marginalized:

"The Church is not the Church only for good people. Do we want to describe who belongs to the Church, to this feast? The sinners. All of us sinners are invited. At this point there is a community that has diverse gifts: one has the gift of prophecy, another of ministry, who teaching. . . We all have qualities and strengths. But each of us brings to

the feast a common gift. Each of us is called to participate fully in the feast. Christian existence cannot be understood without this participation. 'I go to the feast, but I don't go beyond the antechamber, because I want to be only with the three or four people that I familiar with. . .' You can't do this in the Church! You either participate fully or you remain outside. You can't pick and choose: the Church is for everyone, beginning with those I've already mentioned, the most marginalized. It is everyone's Church!"

Speaking about the parable in which Jesus said some who were invited began to make excuses, Pope Francis said: "They don't accept the invitation! They say 'yes,' but their actions say 'no.'" These people, he said, "are Christians who are content to be on the guest list: chosen Christians." But, he warned, this is not sufficient, because if you don't participate you are not a Christian. "You were on the list," he said, but this isn't enough for salvation! This is the Church: to enter into the Church is a grace; to enter into the Church is an invitation." And this right, he added, cannot be purchased. "To enter into the Church," he added, "is to become part of a community, the community of the Church. To enter into the Church is to participate in all the virtues, the qualities that the Lord has given us in our service of one for the other." Pope Francis continued, "To enter into the Church means to be responsible for those things that the Lord asks of us." Ultimately, he said, "to enter into the Church is to enter into this People of God, in its journey towards eternity." No one, he warned, is the protagonist of the Church: but we have ONE," who has done everything. God "is the protagonist!" We are his followers . . . and "he who does not follow Him is the one who excuses himself" and does not go to the feast:

The Lord is very generous. The Lord opens all doors. The Lord also understands those who say to Him, 'No, Lord, I don't want to go to you.' He understands and is waiting for them, because He is merciful. But the Lord does not like those who say 'yes' and do the opposite; who pretend to thank Him for all the good things; who have good manners, but go their own way and do not follow the way of the Lord: those who always excuse themselves, those who do not know joy, who don't experience the joy of belonging. Let us ask the Lord for this grace of understanding: how beautiful it is to be invited to the feast, how beautiful it is to take part in it and to share one's qualities, how beautiful it is to be with Him and how wrong it is to dither between 'yes' and 'no,' to say 'yes,' but to be satisfied merely with being a nominal Christian.