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Pastoral visit of the Holy Father Francis to the archdiocese of Milan: encounter with confirmands and newly-confirmed youngsters

At 17.45 today, in the Meazza-San Siro Stadium, Milan, the Holy Father Francis met with newly-confirmed young people and those preparing for confirmation.

At the entrance to the Stadium he was welcomed by its president, Roberto Ruozi.

During the event, the Pope replied to a number of questions posed by one confirmand, a married couple and a catechist.

The following are the Holy Father's answers:

Holy Father's answers to questions

Question from a boy:

Hello, I am Davide and I am from Cornaredo. I would like to ask you a question: when you were our age, what helped your friendship with Jesus to grow?

Pope Francis: Good evening! David has asked a very simple question, to which it is easy to answer, because I just have to look back to the times in which I was your age. And your question is: "When you were our age, what helped your friendship with Jesus to grow?" There are three things, but there is a common thread that unites them all. The first thing was my *grandparents*. "But Father, grandparents can help our friendship with Jesus grow?" What do you think? Can they, or can't they?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: But grandparents are old!

Youngsters: No!

Pope Francis: No? Aren't they old?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: They are old ... Grandparents are from a different age: grandparents don't know how to use a computer, they don't have a mobile phone ... I ask you again, can grandparents help you grow in friendship with Jesus?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: And this was my experience: my grandparents spoke to me normally about things in life. One grandfather was a carpenter and taught me how, in his work Jesus learned the same trade, and so when I watched my grandfather, I thought of Jesus. The other grandfather used to tell me never to go to bed without saying a word to Jesus, without saying "goodnight" to Him. My grandmother taught me to pray, and also my mother; the other grandmother was the same. ... The important thing is this: grandparents have the wisdom of life. What do grandparents have?

Youngsters: The wisdom of life.

Pope Francis: They have the wisdom of life. And with that wisdom they teach us how to be closer to Jesus. They did this to me. First, grandparents. Some advice: speak with your grandparents. Speak, ask all the questions you like. Listen to your grandparents. It is important, in this time, to speak with your grandparents. Do you understand?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: And you, those who have living grandparents, will you make an effort to talk to them, to ask them questions, and to listen to them? Will you make the effort? Will you do this job?

Youngsters: Yes...

Pope Francis: You aren't very convinced. Will you do it?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: Grandparents. Then, it helped me a lot to *play with friends*, because playing well, playing and feeling the joy of playing with friends, without insulting each other, and thinking that Jesus played in this way... But, I ask you, did Jesus play? Or not?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: But He was God! God no, He cannot play ... Did Jesus play?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: You are convinced. Yes, Jesus played, and played with others. And it is good for us to play with friends, because when you play fair, you learn to respect others, you learn to be a team, and to work together.

And this unites us with Jesus. Playing with friends. But – it is something I think some of you have said – arguing with friends, does it help us to know Jesus?

Youngsters: No!

Pope Francis: What?

Youngsters: No?

Pope Francis: Good. And if we argue, because it is normal to argue, but then apologizes, the story is over. Is that clear?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: It helped me a lot to play with friends. And a third thing that helped me grown in friendship with Jesus was the *parish, the oratory*, going to the parish, going to the oratory and meeting with others: this is important! Do you like this, going to the parish?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: Do you like ... but tell me the truth ... do you like going to Mass?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: [laughs] I'm not sure ... Do you like going to the oratory?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: Ah, this yes, you like it. And these three things – truly, this is a piece of advice I am giving you – these three things will help you grow in friendship with Jesus: speaking with your grandparents, playing with friends and going to the parish and the oratory. Because, with these three things, you will pray more. [Applause]. And *prayer is that thread that unites the three things*. Thank you. [Applause].

Question from two parents:

Good evening. We are Monica and Alberto, parents of three, the youngest of whom will receive Holy Confirmation this October. The question we want to ask is this: how can we transmit the beauty of faith to our children? At times it seems so complicated to be able to speak of these things without being boring and dull, or worse still, authoritarian! What words should we use?

Pope Francis: Thank you. I had these questions earlier ... Yes, because you sent them to me, and to be clear in my answer, I made some notes, I wrote something, and now I would like to answer to Monica and Alberto.

a. I think that this is one of the key questions that touches our life as parents: the transmission of faith, and it touches our life also as pastors, as educators. The transmission of faith. And I would like to address this question to you. I invite you to remember who the people were who left an impression on your faith, and what impressed you most about them. What the children asked me, I ask you. Who were the people, the situations, the things that helped you grow in faith, the transmission of faith. I invite you as parents to become children again for a moment, in your imagination, and to remember the people who helped you to believe. "Who helped me believe?". Your father, your mother, grandparents, a catechist, an aunt, the parish priest, a neighbour, who knows... We all carry in our memory, but especially in our heart, someone who helped us to believe. Now I challenge you. Let us be silent a moment, and let each one of us think: who helped me to believe? And I will

answer for my part, and to answer, in truth, I have to return with my memory to Lombardy [applause]. I was helped to believe, to grow in faith, by a priest from Lodi, from the diocese of Lodi; a good priest who baptized me and then accompanied me until the novitiate [of the Jesuits]. And I owe this to you Lombards, thank you! [Applause]. And I will never forget that priest, never ever. He was an apostle of the confessional, an apostle of the confessional. Merciful, good, a hard worker. And in this way he helped me to grow.

Has each of you thought of their person? I have said who helped me.

You will ask what the point is of this little exercise. Our children look to us continually; even if we do not realize, they observe us all the time, and learn. "The Children are Watching Us": this is the title of a film by Vittorio De Sica, from 1943. Look for it, look for it. "The Children are Watching Us". And, in parenthesis, I would like to say that those Italian films from the post-war period and shortly after were generally a true "catechesis" on humanity. The children are watching us, and you cannot imagine the anguish of a child when their parents argue. They suffer! [Applause]. And when parents separate, they pay for it. [Applause]. When you bring a child into the world, you must be aware of this: we take on the responsibility of raising this child in faith. It will help you greatly to read *Amoris Laetitia*, especially the first chapters on love: when you argue, children suffer and they do not grow in faith. [Applause]. Children know our joys, our sadness and our worries. They manage to grasp everything and, since they are very intuitive, they reach their own conclusions and their own teachings. They know when we set traps for them and when we do not. They know. They are very astute. Therefore, one of the first things I would say to you is: care for them, care for their heart, their joy and their hope.

The little eyes of your children memorize and read with all the heart how faith is one of the greatest legacies that you have received from your parents, from your ancestors. They realize. And if you give the faith and live it well, there is transmission.

Show them how faith helps us go ahead, to face the many dramas we have, with a trustful rather than pessimistic attitude; this is the best testimony we can give them. There is a saying that words are carried away by the wind, but what is sown in memory, in the heart, remains for ever.

b. Another thing. In many places, many families have the very nice tradition of going together to Mass and then going to a park, taking the children to play together. In this way faith becomes a need for the family with other families. This is good, and helps us live the commandment of sanctifying feasts. Not just going to Church and praying, or sleeping during the homily – it happens! – not only this, but then going to play together. Now that the good weather is coming, for example, on a Sunday after going to Mass as a family, it is a good thing if you can go to a park or to the square, to play, to stay together a while. In my country this is called "dominguear", spending Sunday together. But our time is not a good time to do this, because many parents, to put food on the family table, have to work at the weekends too. And this is bad. I always ask parents, when they say to me that they lose their patience with their children, as a first question: "How many are there?" – "Three, four", they say. And then I ask them a second question: "Do you play with your children? Do you play?" And they don't know how to answer. Parents these days cannot, or have lost the habit of playing with their children, of "wasting time" with their children. Once a father said to me, "Father, when I leave to go to work, they are still in bed, and when I return in the evening they are already in bed. I only see them at the weekends". This is bad! And this is the life that takes away our humanity. But keep this in mind: playing with your children, "wasting time" with children, is also transmitting faith. It is the gratuitousness, the gratuitousness of God.

c. And a final thing: the family education in solidarity. This is transmitting faith with education in solidarity, in works of mercy. Works of mercy make faith grow in the heart. This is very important. I like to place emphasis on festivity, on gratuitousness, on seeking out other families and living faith as a space for family enjoyment; I think it is necessary also to add another element. There is no feast without solidarity. Just as there is no solidarity without feast, because if one is united with others, one is joyful and transmits joy.

I do not want to bore you; I will tell you something that I encountered in Buenos Aires. A mother was at lunch with her three children, who were six, four and a half and three years old; then, they had another two. Her husband was at work. They were having lunch and were eating *cotolette alla Milanese*, she told me, and each

child had one on his plate. There was a knock at the door. The eldest went to open the door, looked, and said, "Mama, there is a poor man, he is asking for something to eat". And the mother, wise, asked the question; "What shall we do? Shall we give something or not?" "Yes, mama, let's give him something!". There were other cutlets there. The mother said, "Ah, good, let's make two sandwiches: each one can cut his own in half and we'll make two". "But mama, there are the others!" "No, those are for dinner". And the mother taught them solidarity, but that which costs, not what is left over! For example, this would be enough, but the way this story ends will make you laugh. A week later, the mother had to go shopping in the afternoon, at around four o'clock, and she left all three children alone – they were good – for an hour. And she went. When she returned, there were no longer three of them – there were four! There were the three children and a homeless man, who had asked for alms, and they had let him in. They were drinking coffee and milk together. Educating in solidarity, that is, in the works of mercy. Thank you.

Question from a catechist

Good evening. I am Valeria, mother and catechist from a parish in Milan, in Rogoredo. You have taught us that it takes a village to educate a child; our archbishop too has urged us in these years to collaborate, so that there is collaboration among educators. So, we would like to ask for your advice on how to open up dialogue and exchange among all the educators who are in contact with our young people.

Pope Francis:

a. I would advise education based on "thought – feeling – action", that is an education involving the intellect, the heart and the hands, the three languages. Educating in harmony among the three languages, to the point that young boys and girls are able to think about what they feel and do, feel what they think and do, and do what they think and feel. Do not separate the three things: all three together. Do not educate only in terms of intellect: this is giving intellectual notions, which are important, but without the heart and without the hands it is useless. Education must be harmonious. But one may also say: educate with the content, the ideas, the attitudes of life and values. One may also say this. But never educate solely, for example, with notions, with idea. No. The heart too must grow in education; and also doing, the attitude, the way of behaving in life.

b. With reference to the previous point, I remember that once in a school there was a pupil who was phenomenal at playing football and a disaster in terms of conduct in class. A rule that they gave him was that if he did not behave well he would have to give up football, which he liked so much. Given that he continued to behave badly he did not play for two months, and things just got worse. Be careful when you punish: that boy worsened. It is true, I knew him, that boy. One day the coach spoke with the head teacher, and explained: "This isn't working; let me try", he said to the head, and he asked for the boy to resume playing football. "Let's try", she said. And the coach made him the captain of the team. That boy then felt that he was being considered, he felt that he could give the best of himself and he began not only to behave better, but also to improve his performance in school. This seems very important to me in education. Very important. Among our students there are some who are gifted in sport but not so much for science, and others who are better at art than mathematics, and others excel in philosophy rather than sport. A good teacher, educator or coach knows how to stimulate the good qualities of his or her pupils and not to neglect the others. And this gives rise to that pedagogical phenomenon known as *transference*: doing one thing well and with pleasure, the benefit transfers to other things too. Looking for where to give greater responsibility, what a child likes the best, and he will do well. And it is always good to stimulate them, but children also need to enjoy themselves and to sleep. Educating alone, without the space for gratuitousness, is not good.

And I will finish with this. There is an ugly phenomenon in our time, which worries me, in education: bullying. Please, be careful. [Applause]. And now, I ask you, confirmands. In silence, listen to me. In silence. In your school, in your neighbourhood, is there someone whom you tease, who you taunt because they have a flaw, because they are fat, they are thin, for this reason or another? Think about it. And do you like to shame them or even hit them for this? Think about it. Please, for the sacrament of Holy Confirmation, make a promise to the Lord never to do this, and never let it be done in your college, in your school, in your neighbourhood. Do you understand?

Youngsters: Yes! [Applause]

Pope Francis: Promise me: never, never tease or make fun of a schoolmate, someone in your neighbourhood. Will you promise me this, today?

Youngsters: Yes.

Pope Francis: The Pope isn't satisfied with your answer... Do you promise?

Youngsters: [loudly] Yes!

Pope Francis: Good. You have said this "yes" to the Pope. Now, in silence, think about how ugly this is, and think about how you are able to promise it to Jesus. Will you promise Jesus you will never bully?

Youngsters: Yes!

Pope Francis: To Jesus!

Youngsters: [loudly] Yes!

Pope Francis: Thank you. And the Lord bless you! My compliments to you [the young people responsible for choreography in the field]. You were very good!

Let us pray together. *Our Father...*

[Blessing]

Pope Francis: Please, I ask you to pray for me. And before I leave, a question: who must I speak with more, at home?

Youngsters: With grandparents!

Pope Francis: Good! And you, parents, what must you do a bit more of with your children?

Parents: Play!

Pope Francis: Play. And you, educators, how must you go ahead with education, with which language? With that of the head, that of the heart, and that of the hands!

Thank you, and goodbye!

At the end of the encounter, at 19.00, the Holy Father transferred to Milan-Linate airport where at 19.40 he received farewell greetings from the figures who had received him in the morning, to return to Rome. The aircraft carrying the Holy Father Francis landed at Rome-Ciampino airport at 20.45. The Pope returned to the Vatican at 21.15.
