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Audience with young people from the diocese of Brescia

At midday today, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience young people from the diocese of Brescia.

The following is the Pope's address to the participants in the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear boys and girls, welcome!

I thank you for your festive welcome. I thank your bishop for his introduction and the people who accompanied you on this pilgrimage. Thank you all!

I was struck by the words of that young man whom the bishop has just quoted: "Do the bishops really believe that young people can help the Church to change?". I do not know if that young man, who asked this question, is here among you ... Is he here? ...

But in any case I can tell him and all of you that this question is very dear to me too. It is very important to me that the next Synod of Bishops, which relates to "Young people, faith and vocational discernment", is prepared by *truly listening* to the young. And I can testify that this is being done. You also demonstrate this to me, with the work that is going on in your diocese. And when I say "*truly listening*" I also mean the willingness to change something, to walk together, to share dreams, as that young man said.

But I want to ask you a question, too. You rightly ask yourself if we bishops are willing to really listen to you and change something in the Church. And I ask you: are you willing to *listen to Jesus* and *change something about yourself*? If you are here, I think it is so, but I can not and I do not want to take it for granted. Each of you, reflect on this within yourself, in your heart: Am I willing to make Jesus' dreams my own? Or am I afraid that His dreams

can “disturb” *my* dreams?

And what is Jesus’ dream? Jesus’ dream is what in the Gospels is called the *Kingdom of God*. The Kingdom of God means love with God and love among us, forming a great family of brothers and sisters with God as the Father, Who loves all His children and is full of love when one who was lost returns to the fold. This is Jesus’ dream. Are you willing to make it your own? Are you willing also to change to embrace this dream?

Jesus is very clear. He says, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself”. Why does He use this phrase that sounds a bit ugly, “deny himself”? How come? In what sense it is to be understood? It does not mean disdain for what God Himself has given us: life, wishes, the body, relationships... No, God wanted all this and He wants it for our good. Yet Jesus says that anyone who wants to follow Him must “deny himself”, because there is in every one of us an “old man”, a selfish “I” that does not follow God’s logic, the logic of love, but follows the opposite logic, that of selfishness, of serving one’s own interest, often masked with a good face, to conceal it. Jesus died on the cross to free us from this slavery that is not external, but rather is within us. It is sin, which makes us die inside. Only He can save us from this evil, but it takes our collaboration, for us to say: “Jesus, forgive me, give me a heart like Yours, humble and full of love”.

Do you know? A prayer like that, Jesus takes seriously! Yes, and to those who challenge Him, He gives surprising experiences. For example, to feel a new joy when reading the Gospel, the Bible, a sense of beauty and of the truth of His Word. Or rather, to feel attracted to attending Mass, that for a young person is not very common, is it? and instead to feel the desire to be with God, to stay in silence before the Eucharist. Or rather, He makes us feel His presence in people who are suffering, sick, excluded... Or He gives us the courage to carry out His will by going against the grain, but without pride, without presumption, without judging others... All these things are His gifts, which make us feel increasingly empty of ourselves and increasingly full of Him.

The saints show us all this. Saint Francis of Assisi, for example: he was a young man full of dreams, but they were the dreams of the world, not those of God. Jesus spoke to Him on the cross, in the little Church of Saint Damian, and His life changed. He embraced Jesus’ dream, he denuded himself of his old man, he rejected the selfish I and welcomed the I of Jesus, humble, poor, simple, merciful, full of joy and of admiration for the beauty of the creatures.

And let us think also of Giovanni Battista Montini, Paul VI: we are accustomed, rightly, to remembering him as a Pope, but first he was a young man, a boy like you, from a village in your land. I would like to give you a piece of “homework”: discover what Giovanni Battista Montini was like as a young man, how he was in his family, as a student, in the oratory... what were his “dreams”... So, try to find this out.

Dear boys and girls, I thank you for this visit, which gives me so much joy. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady accompany you on your path. And remember: do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
