



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO ASSISI

MEETING WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF UMBRIA

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Square in front of the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels, Assisi

Friday, 4 October 2013

THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUESTIONS FOR THE HOLY FATHER

1. FAMILY: Nicola and Chiara Volpi (*Perugia-Città della Pieve*)

“We young people live in a society where feeling good, having fun and thinking of oneself is central. Living married life as young Christians is complex, and being open to life is often challenging and frightening. As a young couple, we feel the joy of living out our marriage, but we also experience its daily struggles and challenges. How can the Church help us, how can our pastors support us, and what steps are we called to make?”

2. WORK: Danilo Zampolini (*Spoletto-Norcia*) and David Girolami (*Foligno*)

In Umbria the general economic crisis of recent years has resulted in hardship and poverty. The future seems uncertain and threatening. Along with economic security, there is the risk of losing hope. How should a young Christian look to the future? Which roads should he take toward building a society worthy of God and worthy of man?”

3. VOCATION: Benedetto Fattorini (*Orvieto-Todi*) e Chiaroli Maria (*Terni-Narni-Amelia*)

“What should I do with my life? How and where should I invest the talents which the Lord has given me? Sometime the idea of the priesthood or consecrated life attracts me, but then fear immediately arises. And then, such a commitment for “forever”? How do we recognize God's call? What counsel would you give to someone who wants to dedicate their life to the service of God and their brothers and sisters?”

4. MISSION: Luca Nassuato (*Assisi-Nocera Umbra-Gualdo Tadino*), Mirko Pierli (*Città di Castello*) and Petra Sannipoli (*Gubbio*)

“It is beautiful to be here with you and to listen to your words, which encourage us and warms our hearts. The Year of Faith which concludes in just a few weeks time has proposed to all believers the urgency of preaching the Gospel. We, too, would like to participate in this exciting adventure. But how can we? What may we contribute? What should we do?”

THE HOLY FATHER'S RESPONSE

Dear young people of Umbria, Good evening!

Thank you for coming, thank you for this celebration! This is truly a celebration! And thank you for your questions.

I am glad that *the first question* came from a *young married couple*. What a beautiful witness! Two young people who have chosen, who have joyfully and courageously decided to form a family. Yes, it is so true that it takes courage to form a family. It takes courage! And your question, young spouses, is linked to *the question of vocation*. What is marriage? It is *a true and authentic vocation*, as are the priesthood and the religious life. Two Christians who marry have recognized the call of the Lord in their own love story, the vocation to form one flesh and one life from two, male and female. And the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony envelops this love in the grace of God, it roots it in God himself. By this gift, and by the certainty of this call, you can continue on assured; you have nothing to fear; you can face everything together!

Let us think about our parents, about our grandparents and great grandparents: they married in much poorer conditions than our own. Some married during wartime or just after a war. Some like my own parents emigrated. Where did they find the strength? They found it in the certainty that the

Lord was with them, that their families were blessed by God through the Sacrament of Matrimony, and that the mission of bringing children into the world and educating them is also blessed. With this assurance they overcame even the most difficult trials. These were simple certainties, but they were real; they were the pillars that supported their love. Their lives were not easy; there were problems, many, many problems. However, these simple assurances helped them to go forward. And they succeeded in having beautiful families, and in giving life and in raising their children.

Dear friends, this moral and spiritual foundation is necessary in order to build well in a lasting way! Today, this foundation is no longer guaranteed by family life and the social tradition. Indeed, the society in which you were raised favours individual rights rather than the family — these individual rights. It favours relationships that last until difficulties arise, and this is why it sometimes speaks about relationships between couples, within families and between spouses in a superficial and misleading way. It is enough to watch certain television programs to see these values on display! How many times parish priests — sometimes I myself also heard it — hear a couple that comes to get married say: “But you both know that marriage is for life?” “Ah, we love each other so much, but... we'll stay together as long as the love lasts. When it ends, we'll each go our separate way”. This is selfishness: when I feel like it, I'll end the marriage and forget the “one flesh” that cannot be separated. It is risky to get married: it is risky! It is this egoism which threatens it, because we each have within us this possibility of a dual personality: the one that says, “I am free, I want this ...” and the other which says, “I, me, to me, with me, for me ...”. Selfishness always returns and does not know how to open up to others. The other difficulty is this culture of the temporary: it seems as though nothing is definitive. Everything is provisional. As I said before: love, as long as it lasts. I once heard a seminarian — a good person — say: “I want to become a priest, but for ten years. Then I'll rethink it.” This is the culture of the temporary, and Jesus didn't save us temporarily: he saved us definitively!

However, the Holy Spirit is always stirring up new answers to new needs! Thus, programs for engaged couples, marriage preparation courses, parish groups for young couples and family movements have been multiplying in the Church. They are an immense wealth! They are reference points for everyone: young people searching, couples in crisis, parents having difficulties with their children or vice versa. They help everyone! And then there are the different forms of acceptance: foster care, adoption, family homes of various kinds. The imagination — if I may use that word — the imagination of the Holy Spirit is infinite but very practical! And so I wish to tell you to *not be afraid to take definitive steps*: do not be afraid to take them. How many times I have heard mothers tell me: “But, Father, I have a son who is 30 years old and he won't get married. I don't know what to do! He has a beautiful girlfriend, but he won't make up his mind”. Well, Madame, stop ironing his shirts! That's how it is! Do not be afraid to take steps which are permanent, like getting married: deepen your love by respecting its seasons and expressions, pray, prepare yourselves well; and then trust that the Lord will not leave you alone! Let him come into your home like one of the family, He will always sustain you!

Family life is the vocation that God inscribed into the nature of man and woman and there is another vocation which is complementary to marriage: *the call to celibacy and virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven*. It is the vocation that Jesus himself lived. How does one recognize it? How does one follow it? It was the *third question* you asked me? ... But perhaps some of you are thinking: what a great bishop! We asked him questions and he has answers all ready prepared and written down. I received these questions a few days ago. That is why I am familiar with them.... I will respond with two essential elements on how to recognize the vocation to the priesthood and to consecrated life. *Praying and walking in the Church*. These two go together, they are intertwined. A powerful experience of God is always at the origin of every vocation to consecrated life, an unforgettable experience that you remember for the rest of your life! This is what happened to Francis. And this is not something we can calculate or plan. God always surprises us! It is God who calls; however, it is important to have a daily relationship with him, to listen to him in silence before the Tabernacle and deep within ourselves, to speak with him, to draw near to the sacraments. Having this familiar relationship with the Lord is like keeping the window of our lives open so that he can make us hear his voice and hear what he wants us to do. It would be beautiful to hear from you, to hear from the priests who are present, from the sisters... It would be very beautiful, because each story is unique. However, they all begin with an encounter that illumines one deeply within, that touches the heart and engages the whole person: affections, intellect, senses, everything. A relationship with God does not only involve one part of us, it involves everything. It is a love so great, so beautiful, so true, that it deserves everything, and it deserves all our trust. And there is one thing I would like to tell you forcefully, especially today: virginity for the Kingdom of God is not a “no”, it is a “yes”! Of course it involves the renunciation of the marriage bond and of having a family of one's own, but at its foundation and core there is a “yes”, as a response to Christ's total “yes” to us, and this “yes” makes us fruitful.

But here in Assisi there is no need for words! We have Francis, we have Clare, let them speak! Their charism continues to speak to many young people all over the world: young men and women leave everything in order to follow Jesus on the way of the Gospel.

Here it is, the Gospel. I would take up the word “gospel” to answer the *other two questions* that you asked me, the *second* and the *fourth*. One concerns our social obligation during the current crisis that is threatening hope; and the other concerns evangelization, bringing the message of Jesus to others. You asked me: what can we do? How may we contribute?

Here in Assisi, close to the Portiuncola, I seem to hear the voice of St Francis repeating: “The Gospel, the Gospel!”. He says it to me as well; indeed, he says it to me first: Pope Francis, be a servant of the Gospel! If I do not succeed in being a servant of the Gospel, my life is worth nothing!

However, dear friends, the Gospel does not only concern religion. It concerns man, the whole of man; it concerns the world, society and human civilization. The Gospel is God's message of

salvation for mankind. When we say “message of salvation”, this is not simply a way of speaking, these are not mere words or empty words like so many today. Mankind truly needs to be saved! We see it everyday when we flip through newspapers or watch the news on television; but we also see it around us, in people, in situations; and we see it in ourselves! Each one of us needs to be saved! We cannot do it alone! We need to be saved! Saved from what? From evil. Evil is at work, it does its job. However, evil is not invincible and a Christian does not give up when confronted by evil. And you young people, do you want to give up in the face of evil, injustice and difficulty? Do you want to or not? [*Young people reply: No!*] Ah, good. I like this. Our secret is that God is greater than evil: this is true! God is greater than evil. God is infinite love, boundless mercy, and that Love has conquered evil at its root through the death and Resurrection of Christ. This is the Gospel, the Good News: God’s love has won! Christ died on the cross for our sins and rose again. With him we can fight evil and conquer every day. Do we believe this or not? [*Young people respond: Yes!*] But that ‘yes’ has to become part of life! If I believe that Jesus has conquered evil and saved me, I must follow along the path of Jesus for my whole life.

The Gospel, then, this message of salvation, has two destinations that are connected: the first, to awaken faith, and this is evangelization; the second, to transform the world according to God’s plan, and this is the Christian animation of society. But these are not two separate things, they form one mission: to carry the Gospel by the witness of our lives in order to transform the world! This is the way: to bring the Gospel by the witness of our lives.

Let us look to Francis: he did both of these things, through the power of the one Gospel. Francis made faith grow and he renewed the Church, and at the same time he renewed society, he made it more fraternal, but he always did it with the Gospel and by his witness. Do you know what Francis once said to his brothers? He said: “Always preach the Gospel and if necessary use words!” But how? Is it possible to preach the Gospel without words? Yes! By your witness! First comes witness, then come words!

Young people of Umbria: you must also do something! Today, in the name of St Francis, I say to you: I have neither gold nor silver to give you, but something far more precious, the Gospel of Jesus. Go forward with courage! With the Gospel in heart and hands, be witnesses of faith by your lives: bring Christ into your home, preach him among your friends, welcome and serve him in the poor. Young, give Umbria a message of life, peace and hope! You can do it!

He recites the Lord’s Prayer and the Blessing.

And, please, I ask you: pray for me!

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