



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO KENYA, UGANDA AND THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
(25-30 NOVEMBER 2015)

MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Kololo Air Strip, Kampala (Uganda)
Saturday, 28 November 2015

[Multimedia]

I listened with a sad heart to what Winnie and Emmanuel told us. But as I was listening, I started to think: “Can a negative experience prove meaningful in our lives? The answer is “Yes!” Both Emmanuel and Winnie had bad experiences. Winnie thought she had no future, that life had put up a wall in front of her, and yet Jesus helped her to realize that in life a great miracle can take place: a wall can turn into a horizon, a horizon which opens up the future before me.

When we have a negative experience – and many people here, many of us here, have had negative experiences – it is always possible to open up a horizon, to open it up by the power of Jesus. Today, Winnie has turned her depression, her bitterness, into hope. This is not magic; it is the work of Jesus, because Jesus is the Lord. Jesus can do anything. Jesus himself suffered the most negative experience of all: he was insulted, he was rejected, and he was killed. But by God’s power Jesus rose from the dead. He can do the same for each of us, with our negative experiences, because he is Lord.

I can imagine – let us all try to imagine – how Emmanuel suffered when he saw his classmates tortured and killed. Emmanuel was brave, he took heart. He knew that if they found him on the day he escaped, they would kill him. He took a risk, he trusted in Jesus and he escaped. And today, fourteen years later, here he is, a graduate in administrative sciences. There is always a way. Our life is like a seed: to live, we have to die; at times even physically, like Emmanuel’s companions, like Charles Lwanga and the Ugandan martyrs. But this death brings life, a life for all. If I turn

something negative into something positive, I win! But that can only happen with the grace of Jesus. Do you believe this? ... I don't hear anything... Do you believe this? [the young people respond: "Yes!"] Are you ready to change everything negative in your life into something positive? ["Yes!"] Are you ready to turn hatred into love? ["Yes!"] Are you ready to want to turn war into peace? ["Yes!"] Never forget that you are a people of martyrs, that the blood of martyrs runs through your veins, and that is why you have the faith and the life which are yours. And this faith and this life, beautiful as they are, make this "the pearl of Africa".

It looks like the microphone was not functioning properly. Sometimes we don't function so well either. Yes or no? [Yes!] And when we don't function well, to whom should we go to ask for help? I can't hear! Louder! To Jesus! Jesus can change your life. Jesus can tear down all the walls in your path. Jesus can make your life a form of service to others.

Some of you may ask me: "Is there a magic wand for all this?" If you want Jesus to change your life, just ask him for help. And this is called praying. Do you understand this? Pray! Let me ask you: do you pray? Really? Pray to Jesus, because he is the Saviour. Never stop praying! Prayer is the most powerful weapon a young person has. Jesus loves us. Let me ask you: does Jesus love some people and not others? [No!] Does Jesus love everyone? [Yes!] Does Jesus want to help everyone? [Yes!] Well then, open the door of your heart and let him come in! Let Jesus into your life. And when Jesus enters your life, he is going to fight for you. He is going to fight all those problems that Winnie mentioned. He is going to fight depression and AIDS. Ask him to help you overcome these situations, but always keep fighting. Fight with hope and with prayer. Are you ready to fight? [Yes!] Are you ready to desire the best for yourselves? [Yes!] Are you ready to pray, to ask Jesus to help you in the fight? [Yes!]

There is a third thing which I want to tell you. All of us are in the Church, we belong to the Church. Right? [Yes!] And the Church has a Mother. What is her name? I can't hear you... [Mary!] Pray to Mother Mary. When a child falls, he feels sorry for himself, and starts crying and looks for his mother. When we have a problem, the best thing that we can do is go to our Mother and pray to her. Right? [Yes!] Do you pray to Our Lady, to our Mother? [Yes!]

So then, three things: overcome problems; change the negative into the positive; and pray. Pray to Jesus who can do everything, to Jesus who comes into our hearts and changes our life, to Jesus who came to save me and who gave his life for me. Pray to Jesus because he alone is Lord. And because in the Church we are not orphans, but have a Mother, pray to our Mother. And what is our Mother's name? [Mary!] Louder! [Mary!]

Thank you very much for listening. I thank you because you want to turn the negative into the positive; because you want to fight evil with Jesus at your side; and above all, because you want to keep praying. And now I invite you to join me in praying to our Mother for her protection. Can we do this? [Yes!] All together? [Yes!]

And please, one last request. Pray for me, I need it. Don't forget to pray for me!

Prepared address by the Holy Father:

Holy Father: Omukama Mulungi! (God is good!)

Young people: Obudde bwonna! (For ever and ever!)

Dear Young Friends,

I am happy to be here and to share these moments with you. I greet my brother bishops and the civil authorities present, and I thank Bishop Paul Ssemogerere for his words of welcome. The testimonies of Winnie and Emmanuel confirm my impression that the Church in Uganda is alive with young people who want a better future. Today, if you will allow me, I want to confirm you in your faith, encourage you in your love, and in a special way, strengthen you in your hope.

Christian hope is not simply optimism; it is much more. It is rooted in the new life we have received in Jesus Christ. Saint Paul tells us that hope will not disappoint us, because God's love was poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit at our baptism (cf. *Rom 5:5*). This hope enables us to trust in Christ's promises, to trust in the power of his love, his forgiveness, his friendship. That love opens the door to new life. Whenever you experience a problem, a setback, a failure, you must anchor your heart in that love, for it has the power to turn death into life and to banish every evil.

So this afternoon I would invite you, first of all, to pray for this gift to grow within you, and for the grace to become messengers of hope. There are so many people around us who experience deep anxiety and even despair. Jesus lifts these clouds, if we allow him to.

I would also like to share with you a few thoughts about some of the obstacles which you may encounter on our journey of hope. All of you want a better future, employment, health and prosperity. This is good. You want to share your gifts, your aspirations and your enthusiasm with others, for the good of the nation and of the Church. This too is very good. But when you see poverty, when you experience lack of opportunity, when you experience failure in your lives, sometimes a feeling of despair can grow. You can be tempted to lose hope.

Have you ever seen a little child who stops in front of a dirty puddle on the path ahead of him? A puddle he cannot leap over or go around? He may try but then he stumbles and gets soaked. Then, after many attempts, he calls out to his father, who takes his hand and swings him over to the other side. We are like that child. Life presents us with many dirty puddles. But we don't have to overcome all those problems and hurdles on our own. God is there to take our hand, if only we call on him.

What I am saying is that all of us have to be like that little child, even the Pope! For it is only when we are small and humble that we are not afraid to call out to our Father. If you have experienced his help, you know what I am speaking about. We need to learn to put our hope in him, knowing that he is always there for us. He gives us confidence and courage. But – and this is important – it would be wrong not to share this beautiful experience with others. It would be wrong for us not to become messengers of hope for others.

There is one particular puddle which can be frightening to young people who want to grow in their friendship with Christ. It is the fear of failing in our commitment to love, and above all, failing in that great and lofty ideal which is Christian marriage. You may be afraid of failing to be a good wife and mother, failing to be a good husband and father. If you are looking at that puddle, you may even see your weaknesses and fears reflected back to you. Please, don't give in to them! Sometimes these fears come from the devil who does not want you to be happy. No! Call out to God, extend your hearts to him and he will lift you in his arms and show you how to love. I ask young couples in particular to trust that God wants to bless their love and their lives with his grace in the sacrament of marriage. God's gift of love is at the heart of Christian marriage, not the costly parties which often obscure the deep spiritual meaning of this day of joyful celebration with family and friends.

Finally, one puddle that we all have to face is the fear of being different, of going against the grain in a society which puts increasing pressure on us to embrace models of gratification and consumption alien to the deepest values of African culture. Think about it! What would the Uganda martyrs say about the misuse of our modern means of communication, where young people are exposed to images and distorted views of sexuality that degrade human dignity, leading to sadness and emptiness? What would be the Uganda martyrs' reaction to the growth of greed and corruption in our midst? Surely they would appeal to you to be model Christians, confident that your love of Christ, your fidelity to the Gospel, and your wise use of your God-given gifts can only enrich, purify and elevate the life of this country. They continue to show you the way. Do not be afraid to let the light of your faith shine in your families, your schools and your places of work. Do not be afraid to enter into dialogue humbly with others who may see things differently.

Dear young friends, when I look at your faces I am filled with hope: hope for you, hope for your country, and hope for the Church. I ask you to pray that the hope which you have received from the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire your efforts to grow in wisdom, generosity and goodness. Don't forget to be messengers of that hope! And don't forget that God will help you to cross whatever puddles you meet along the way!

Hope in Christ and he will enable you to find true happiness. And if you find it hard to pray, if you find it hard to hope, do not be afraid to turn to Mary, for she is our Mother, the Mother of Hope. Finally, please, do not forget to pray for me! God bless you all!

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