



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE BOLLETTINO

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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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General audience: counsel the doubtful and instruct the ignorant

This Wednesday's general audience took place in the Paul VI Hall, and the Holy Father, before beginning his catechesis, commented that although the Jubilee had come to an end and "normality" has returned, he wished nevertheless to continue to examine the works of mercy. Those he chose to reflect on today are closely linked to one another: counselling the doubtful and instructing the ignorant.

"They are works that can be lived both in a simple, family dimension, within reach of all, and also – especially the second, that of instructing – on a more institutional and organised level", he observed. "Let us think, for example, of how many children still suffer as a result of illiteracy or a lack of education. It is a condition of great injustice that attacks the very dignity of the person. Without education one easily falls prey to exploitation and to the various forms of social hardship".

"The Church, throughout the centuries, has felt the need to make efforts within the field of education because her mission of evangelisation involves the commitment to restoring dignity to the poorest. From the first example of a 'school' founded right here in Rome by St. Justin, in the second century, so that Christians could have a better knowledge of the Sacred Scripture, to St. Joseph Calasanctius, who opened the first popular free schools in Europe, we have a long list of saints who in different ages took education to the most disadvantaged, knowing that by this route they would have been able to overcome poverty and discrimination".

"How many Christians, laypeople, consecrated brothers and sisters, and priests have devoted their lives to educating children and the young!" he exclaimed, inviting those present to render homage to them with applause. "These pioneers of education fully understood this work of mercy and had turned it into a lifestyle able to transform society itself. Through simple work and a few structures, they were able to restore dignity to many people. And in this way many diverse professional schools arose, enabling work while educating in human and Christian values. Education, therefore, is truly a specific form of evangelisation".

"The greater the education, the more people acquire certainty and knowledge, which we all need in life. A good education teaches us critical method, which also includes a certain form of doubt, useful for posing questions and confirming the results obtained, with a view to greater knowledge. But the work of mercy of counselling the doubtful does not relate to this type of doubt. Expressing mercy towards the doubtful corresponds to alleviating

that pain and suffering that comes from the fear and anguish that are the consequences of doubt. It is therefore an act of true love with which it is intended to support a person in the weakness provoked by uncertainty”.

“I think that some might ask me, ‘Father, I have many doubts about faith, what must I do? Have you ever had doubts?’ Certainly, there are moments when doubts come to all of us! The doubts that regard faith, in a positive sense, are a sign that we want to know God, Jesus and the mystery of His love for us more deeply. It is therefore good that we pose questions to ourselves about our faith, because in this way we are driven to deepen it. Doubts, however, must be overcome. For this reason it is necessary to listen to the Word of God, and to understand what it teaches us. An important approach that helps many people in this is catechesis, by which the proclamation of faith reaches us in the practical aspects of personal and community life. At the same time, another path, equally important, which is living faith as far as possible. We do not turn faith into an abstract theory where doubts multiply. Instead we make faith our life. We seek to practice it in service to our brothers, especially those most in need. And in this way many doubts disappear, because we feel the presence of God and the truth of the Gospel in the love that, without our merit, abides in us and which we share with others”.

“As we can see, dear brothers and sisters, also these two works of mercy are not far from our life”, he concluded. “Each one of us can make efforts to live them, to put into practice the word of the Lord when He says that the mystery of God’s love was not revealed to the wise and the understanding, but to the little ones. Therefore, the most profound teaching we are called to transmit is the surest certainty for leaving doubt behind: the love of God with which we have been loved. A great love, given freely and for ever, and we must strongly feel the responsibility to be witnesses to it, offering mercy to our brothers”.
