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Pastoral visit to the Roman parish of San Pier Damiani ai Monti di San Paolo in Casal Bernocchi, Acilia

Questions from children and answers from the Holy Father

Meeting with the communities of the Neocatechumenal Way

Meeting with the poor

Homily of the Holy Father

This afternoon, Sixth Sunday of Easter, the Holy Father Francis paid a pastoral visit to the parish of San Pier Damiani ai Monti di San Paolo, in Casal Bernocchi, Acilia, in the southern outskirts of Rome.

Upon arrival at the Casal Bernocchi Sports Centre at 15.40, the Pope met with children, young candidates for confirmation and other young people who attend the Centre. During the meeting the Pope answered several questions posed by the children.

Then, after transferring by car to the parish, at 16.15, the Pope greeted the sick, the Neocatechumenal community and the poor people assisted by Caritas. Finally, he confessed four penitents.

At 17.55 the Pope presided, in the parish church, at the celebration of Holy Mass. After the proclamation of the Gospel, the Holy Father pronounced an off-the-cuff homily.

The following is the text of the questions from children and the Pope's answers at the Sports Centre and the transcript of the homily the Holy Father pronounced during the Holy Mass:

Questions from children and answers from the Holy Father

Questions

What can we children do to save the world?

How did you become aware of your priestly vocation?

What can we do to follow Jesus better?

Pope Francis, I would like to ask you what sport you practised at my age – I am 11. I would also like to know if you played football and, if so, in which position.

Pope Francis: It is a good question! You asked this: “What can we do to save, to help”. You said “to save the world”. But the world is large! Can a child – think, think carefully before answering – can a boy, a child, a girl, help in the salvation of the world? Can he or she do this, or not?

Children: He can't...

Pope Francis: Can't he do anything? Don't you count at all? Can you or not?

Children: Yes, we can!

Pope Francis: Good! A bit louder, I can't hear...

Children: [shouting] Yes, we can!

Pope Francis: And I would like to hear you, which of you is the best at answering this question. Think carefully: how can I help Jesus to save the world? How can I help Jesus to save the world? Raise your hands, those of you who want to answer. ... Raise your hand if you want to answer. [Someone says: “With prayer”]. With prayer can we help Jesus to save the world? Can we, or not?

Children: We can!

Pope Francis: But what is happening? Are you all asleep?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: Ah, the sun... the sun sends us to sleep. With prayer. Very good. Another thing. You...

Child: Respecting people.

Pope Francis: Respecting people. And people, should they be respected?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: Dad, mum, grandfather, grandmother: are they to be respected?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: And the people we do not know, are they to be respected?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: And the people who live on the street, the homeless, are they to be respected?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: Yes. Everyone, all people are to be respected. Shall we say it together?

Pope and children: All people are to be respected!

Pope Francis: And a person who isn't good to me, must I respect him?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: Are you sure?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: But wouldn't it be better just to give him a slap?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: Really?

Children: Yes.

Pope Francis: Good: even a person who is not good to me must be respected.

Pope and children: Even a person who is not good to me must be respected.

Pope Francis: And a person who has done me harm, think carefully about this: what must I do? If a person has done harm to me, can I do harm to him?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: No. It is not nice. Can I telephone the mafia to ask them to do something?

Children: No...

Pope Francis: You aren't convinced... Can we do this?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: Can we make agreements with the mafia?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: No! Even those [who do harm] must be respected. You have answered well. You see in how many ways we can help Jesus save the world. And this is good, it is very good! And if I have done my homework and my mother lets me go out and play with my friends, or have a match, is this good?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: Playing – think hard – playing, playing well, does this help Jesus save the world?

Children: Yes...

Pope Francis: You are not convinced...

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: Yes! Because joy helps Jesus save the world. Let us all say it together.

Children: Joy helps Jesus save the world

Pope Francis: Joy is something very beautiful, very beautiful. You, today, are you joyful?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: Yes? Are you joyful?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: And this is very good. And I think that with this I have answered to “what can I do to help Jesus save the world?”. And so think about it, later, always.

Then, when I was your age I used to play football, You know, I wasn't very good at football, and where I am from, those who are not good at football are called “*pata dura*” (“hard leg”). Have you understood? I was a *pata dura*, and so I was usually the goalkeeper, so I didn't have to move much: it was my position. It is not a curse, this, you can say it: *pata dura*, it is not a swear word.

Another question was: how did I become aware of my vocation. Every person has a place in life. Jesus wants one person to get married, to have a family; he wants another to be a priest, another to be a nun... But each one of us has a path in life. And for the majority it is for them to be like you, to be like everyone, to be like your parents: lay faithful who have a beautiful family, who raise their children, who make faith grow. ... And I was in a family: we were five brothers and sisters and we were happy. Father went to work, and came home from work – in that time there was work – and we played. Once – this will make you laugh, but do not do what I am telling you! – we had a competition to play at being parachutists, and we took an umbrella and went onto the terrace, and one of my brothers was the first to jump off, down from the terrace. He survived, only just! These are dangerous games. But we were happy. Why? Because father and mother helped us to get along, at school, and they were also concerned with us. It is very good, very good. Listen well: it is very good in life to be married, it is very good. And it is very good to have a family, a father and a mother, to have grandparents, aunts and uncles. Do you understand? It is very good, it is a grace. And each one of you has parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, a family. And why don't we greet them now? Let's applaud them, all of them [applause]. Your parents make sacrifices for you, to let you grow, and this is a good thing, a beautiful vocation: having a family.

But there is another vocation: being a nun, being a priest. And one day I felt – all of a sudden – I was sixteen and I felt that the Lord wanted me to be a priest. And here I am! I am a priest. This is the answer. You feel it in your heart: when a boy feels warmth in his heart, and then that warmth goes further, and he feels love for a girl, and

then they get engaged and then they marry, that is what it is like in your heart when the Lord says to you: "You must go ahead on the path to become a priest". And that is what I felt. Just as we feel the good things in life. Because it is a beautiful thing! Do you understand?

Good, you must be tired of staying here, the sun is strong.

Children: No!

Pope Francis: Now there is a bit of a breeze, but...

I don't remember: if someone is not good to me, must I give him a slap?

Children: No!

Pope Francis: Ah, I had forgotten. And must I pray for the people who hate me?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: Yes, yes: pray for those who are not good to me, for this... I must pray. And must I be obedient to my mother and father?

Children: Yes!

Pope Francis: I, or my neighbour?

Children: Everyone!

Pope Francis: Ah, everyone! Someone said "I".

Children: !!

Pope Francis: I must obey my mother and father: everyone!

Children: I must obey my mother and father.

Pope Francis: It is very important, because they make sacrifices for us. Do you understand?

Children: Yes.

Pope Francis: Very good. And now, what shall we do?

Well, let us pray. In the first question we spoke about prayer. Now let us pray for each other. Everyone, hold hands. Like brothers, like friends. Hold each other by the hand. And let us pray to Our Lady, who is our Mother: Ave O Maria...

And now I will give the blessing to all of you. In silence, each one of you, think of your parents, of your relatives, your friends; think also of your enemies, of the people who hate you or do not wish you well. And may this blessing descend upon them too, upon everyone.

[Blessing]

Thank you!

Meeting with the communities of the Neocatechumenal Way

Pastor:

Holy Father, welcome. A brief presentation. This brief encounter is with the Neocatechumenal Way, which was born here, in this parish, about 30 years ago. There have been several evangelizations: there are five communities plus two missionary communities, sent by your predecessor Benedict XVI eight years ago, and he sent them here to the outskirts of Rome to evangelize those who are distant from the Church. There are two communities: one from Piazza Bologna, so they travel fifty kilometres to come here, every Wednesday and Saturday; and another from San Leonardo del Murialdo: every Tuesday they go to homes to visit families, to pray with them, to offer them a word, to listen, and this has borne much fruit. Not many people attend this parish: you see many people now, today; but what we see today is, I think, the fruit of all that has been done in these years, by my predecessors before me and even from these facets of our parish. Indeed I am grateful to the Lord – I too come from the *Redemptoris Mater*, I attended the seminary there, I was itinerant first; I have been in this parish, as pastor, for 12 years now. I am happy. I have had difficulties – many of them – but also so many joys. I must say that these brothers witnessed faith – not only them, also – and they gave life and strengthened my vocation. When I was in crisis, in these years, they were – I am moved – they supported me, because I thought I should not be here. So I thank God, I am grateful to be a priest, to be a priest and to serve the Church of Rome. And obedience to you, as successor to Peter, first of all.

Pope Francis:

One of you said to me that if the Way was present in this parish, it is thanks to this person [the parish priest]. But there is a good thing: he did not say, “if the Way or this parish is strong, if we have many children, if we have this type of community and also missionaries it is because we have missionary priests – no. [He said that] You have been the missionaries. Because the grace of the mission comes from Baptism: it is Baptism that gives us the strength for the mission, and the laypeople, who are baptized, are those who must be missionaries. Then us, priests, nuns, even bishops, everyone. But the laypeople must go ahead. This is what the parish priest said: the fact of visiting families, listening to them... This is not in the canon law, but it is very important: “the apostolate of the ear”. Listening. “But Father, we waste so much time...”. No! You gain it. You listen, then, at a certain point you will say a word and that word will germinate, it will be a seed, it will go ahead. But first you need to listen. Today people need others to listen to them. Everyone speaks, we speak about everything... But let us think ... I will tell you about a personal experience – I too can give personal witness: you like testimonies, no? How often I have heard people who come to me to ask for advice, and I have remained silent, I have let them speak, speak, speak... and then they say, “Yes, you are right”. I didn’t speak! But there was the Spirit that they had within, that had spoken to them and they found the way. But they needed an ear, and all of you have this experience. And if someone starts to speak, do not say, “No, but this...”. Do not explain anything, until the moment at which the Spirit tells you, “Speak”. Remember the apostle Philip: he was baptizing, evangelizing, and the Spirit told him, “Go on that road”. And there he found a carriage carrying a man, minister of the economy of the Queen of Ethiopia. But he was Jewish and was reading the prophet Isaiah. And Philip did not say a word to him, he simply drew next to the carriage; the man looked at him, and Philip asked him, “Tell me, do you understand this?” “And how can I understand it if no-one explains it to me?”. He was the one who asked. Philip was in silence. He asked him to get into the carriage and he explained it... And, once he found a little water in the desert, he asked, “Why can I not be baptized?” Listen. At the beginning they listened, then they said a word. But if you go into a house, knock on the door, and when they answer the door, you say, “I come to announce the Gospel, Christ’s salvation”, they will kick you out and you will ruin the work of the Holy Spirit. Listen. Then, while you listen, prayer: “Lord, give me the right word”. This is the visits to the families does so much good: let the right word fall. But after they have expressed themselves, after they have explained themselves well. And then go ahead, in the

community, draw close to the people, who will feel good. This is how the mission is done. Jesus, one of the most beautiful images He uses for the mission, is that of the sower: sowing. You throw the seed of the Word ... And there is a passage of the Gospel that says, "Then, the sower falls asleep and nothing happens, but it is the Lord who makes it grow". Always work with the Lord, always. Please, do not be proselytizers, but rather evangelizers. It is ugly to go to a house in search of an extra member of the ecclesiastical firm: it is not this. "The Church does not grow by proselytism, but by attraction", that is, by witness, by service. Be servers of all, and in this way things are good.

Then, there are moments of crisis – the parish priest spoke about his own, the ones he has had. But I would want to ask you – I will not do it! – who among you has not had a crisis, raise your hand. We have all had one. Everyone. And always the Lord places next to us someone who has helped us. And when you are in crisis, let yourself be helped. Ask for help. Do not close up, ask for help. Ask for the alms of grace, and this will always come through a brother, a sister. Always. Because the Gospel is like this. Preaching is not done by angels: angels praise God and keep us, but who must preach? Us. All of us. This is the path.

I thank you for what you do. You are courageous. And also these jewels who are here, your children, are a promise for the future of the Church. Raise them to be good Christians. And I like how you sing! Before I give you my blessing, could you sing a hymn to Our Lady? When I entered, you were singing one. If you know another...

[hymn]

Thank you. Now I will give you my blessing.

[Blessing]

Please, pray for me: do not forget!

Meeting with the poor

Parish priest

Holy Father, I wanted to explain to you a little about how this initiative came about. It was born as the fruit of a diocesan convention, on the theme, "The Eucharist and the witness of charity". After our collaborators participated in this convention, and then from the meeting we had with you, there arose the desire on the part of our parish – our parishioners – to do something concrete. Here there was nothing.

We greeted you where they receive their meal. For a year, every other Saturday, every fifteen days, in collaboration with other parishes in our prefecture. We do the Saturday, another parish Sunday, so that we are more or less able to cover the week. They are – this is the fruit – they are the fruit, our jewels, in a certain sense, as you call them. And we are truly proud of this, but not for who knows what reason, but because many people participate, even if they do not come to the parish. They bring offerings, they make contributions, they bring me food... We make use of our "food bank. And then, we have fifty families, to whom we provide food in our parish. You can see that the situation is very varied. In these recent years it has worsened: we have had fathers who have lost their jobs, who have to support their family, or divorced people who cannot maintain their families. Many people have passed by, and each one of them has left a blessing for us. And here too there are those who collaborate, who serve: there are around fifteen people. Here we have the kitchen: we cook here. I did this against the regulations, as otherwise I would not have been able to do it, because what can we do? The bureaucracy... the plug socket must be placed in a certain way – yes, it has been done well! – but we just threw ourselves into it, and the parishioners encouraged me in this, and I am happy. And we offer this as a gift, to you.

Pope Francis:

Thank you. The parish priest used the word “jewels”: those who are in need, the most in need in a parish, are the jewels of the parish. Here in Rome you know the tradition of the deacon St. Lawrence, when in the first times of the persecutions, the authorities to negotiate promised they will save the life of all Christians and asked him – because he was the treasurer, the administrator – to take all the treasure of the diocese of Rome. The day he was supposed to take them, he went with all the poor of the city. The poor are the treasure of the Church. It is an ugly thing, very often one suffers, as the priest said, when there is nothing to eat, or a lack of work, or divorce, or many other things. ... And the Church must care for the poor because they are her treasure. A real treasure, real, living. It is true, Our Lady is our treasure, but in Heaven, and she helps us; Jesus in the Eucharist, in the tabernacle; and the poor are the living treasure of the Church. And when the Church, a church or a parish or a community, forgets about the poor, I would say that it celebrates the Eucharist badly, or does not truly celebrate it. It celebrates it, but does not understand that treasure of the Eucharist if it is not capable of understanding the treasure of the poor. It is true that poverty is a cross, but Jesus lived this: He was poor, He lived this. He was poor. He led the life of a poor man and the first Christians, for all their poverty, had faith in Jesus and followed Jesus. And in this way, since the poor are the treasure of the Church, Jesus also says: “Be careful, because there is another treasure: wealth, too much wealth. And this ruins the soul”. This is the Gospel. Not to be angry with a rich person, no. It is to pray for him. We must pray that he does not become corrupt, so that things can continue. But the devil enters through the pocket, always: he corrupts... The parish priest said that he made the kitchen how he could, because of bureaucracy... Bureaucracy... They say to you, “Yes, yes, we must do this, and this...” “But it is too complicated, isn’t there another way?” “Yes...” [gestures with hand]: bureaucracy is usually loosened with bribes. But see? [indicates the space of the room]. This is a good way, a good way... He [the parish priest] has done this, as he wanted to, and there were no problems. But I say this so that you will take care: it is true, not having the necessities is a hard cross to bear. It is true. But know that the poor man is the treasure of the Church, and that the Church, the priests, the bishops, the Pope, must take care of the poor, of those society discards. Today, how many people lose their jobs! How many people cannot put food on the table! And when a man, or a woman, who must bring food home, does not have a job, he or she feels without dignity: because work gives us dignity. The Church must be close to the poor ... Jesus was not born in Herod’s palace, He was born in a manger. And we must know this. And we must also pray for the rich, for the rich who have too much, who do not know what to do with their money and want more of it. Poor things. Jesus tells us, in the Gospel, about the rich man who held banquets and feasts, and at the door there was a poor man, and the poor man was with the dogs, there, and ate the things that fell from the table of the rich. Jesus tells us this. But we must not hate the rich: no, that is not Christian. We must pray for them, so that they make good use of their wealth, because wealth is not theirs: it is God’s, who gave it to them to administer. And the rich, those who do not understand this message, they put it in their pockets: and this is ugly. But there are people who have money and are generous, who help, administer and lead an austere life, a simple life, a life of work. We must not hate, no! Pray for those rich people who have not understood that their wealth is not for them, but it is to be given, to be managed. If they do not administer it, the devil will administer it, against them.

I bless you. I hope that the Lord stays close to you, that He is close to your sufferings, which are many. The best you can do is pray for those who can resolve your situation and who, out of selfishness or unawareness, do not know how to do so or do not want to.

[Blessing]

And please, pray for me.

Homily of the Holy Father

We have heard how Jesus bids farewell to his followers at the Last Supper, and asks them to observe the commandments, and promises that He will send them the Holy Spirit: “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth” (John 14: 16-17). And the Holy

Spirit is in us – in each one of us – and we have received Him in Baptism: we have received Him from Jesus and from the Father. In another part [of the New Testament], the Apostle tells us to safeguard the Holy Spirit, and adds: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 4:30), as if to say: “Be conscious that you have God Himself inside, the God Who accompanies you, Who tells you what you are to do and how you must do it; He Who helps you not to make mistakes, Who helps you not to slip into temptation; the Advocate: He who defends you against the evil one”. And this Spirit is what Peter, in the second Letter, says will help us “revere Christ” in our hearts (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). And how? With prayer of adoration and by letting the inspiration of the Holy Spirit emerge. It is He Who says to us, “This is good, this is not good, this is the wrong road, this is the right road...”: He leads us ahead. And when people ask for explanations, on why we Christians are as we are, Peter says: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). And how must you do this? Peter continues: “But do this with gentleness and respect” (v. 15). And here I would like to pause.

The language of Christians who safeguard the Holy Spirit, Who is given as a gift, of those who know they have the Spirit Who explains to them [the truth], this language is a special language. They do not have to speak in Latin: no, no. It is another language. It is the language of gentleness and respect. And this can help us to think about our attitude as Christians. Is it an attitude of respect, or of anger? Or is it bitter? It is so ugly to see people who say they are Christians but who are full of bitterness. ... With gentleness. The language of the Holy Spirit is gentle, and the Church calls Him the “gentle guest of the soul”, because He is gentle and gives us gentleness. And respect. Always respect others. He teaches us to respect others. And the devil, who knows how to weaken us in our service to God, and also how to weaken us in our safeguarding of the Holy Spirit Who is within us, does everything possible to make our language neither gentle nor respectful. Even within Christian communities.

Today I said, during the *Angelus* [*Regina Coeli*], and I would like to repeat: how many people are drawn to a parish, for example, in search of peace, this respect, this gentleness, and instead find internal battles between the faithful. Instead of gentleness and respect, they encounter gossip, slander, competition, rivalry, one against the other... They encounter that atmosphere not of incense, but of gossip. And then what do they say? “If these are Christians, I prefer to remain a pagan”. And they go away, disappointed. Because these people do not know how to conserve the Holy Spirit, and with this “language” they show ambition, envy, jealousy, many things that divide us and distance people. It is we who distance them. And we do not allow the job of the Spirit, that of attracting people, to continue. I always like to return to this topic, because I tell you, I tell you clearly, that this is the most common sin in our Christian communities.

When I offered incense to Our Lady, I lowered my gaze and saw the snake., the snake that Our Lady crushes, the snake with its mouth open and tongue out. It will be good for you, as a Christian community, to see in this a Christian community that does not conserve the Holy Spirit with gentleness and respect: it is like that snake, with its long tongue... A parish priest once said to me, speaking on this topic, “In my parish there are some who could take communion from the door: with the tongue they have, they arrive at the altar!” Some of you might say, “But Father, always the same topic!” But it is true. This destroys us. And we must conserve the Holy Spirit, and not the things that the snake, the devil, teaches us.

Excuse me if I always return to this, but I think that this is the enemy that destroys our communities: gossip. Perhaps it will be good for you, some today, some on another day, when you go to greet Our Lady, to look downwards and see that tongue [of the snake] and say to Our Lady, “Our Lady, save me: I do not want to be like this. I want to conserve the Holy Spirit as you conserved Him”. She conserved the Spirit, Who then came and made her Mother of the Son of God.

Sisters and brothers, truly: this hurts my heart, it is as if we threw stones at each other. And the devil enjoys this: it is a carnival for the devil, this! Let us ask for this grace: to conserve the Holy Spirit that is in us. Do not grieve Him, as the Apostle tells us. Do not grieve Him. And may our attitude to all – Christians and non Christians – be an attitude of gentleness and respect, so that the Holy Spirit may act in this way with us: with gentleness and respect.

