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The Pope praises Saint Aloysius Gonzaga in audience with the students of Visconti High School

This morning the Pope received in audience the students of the Visconti High School, which continues the history of the celebrated Roman College and is located in the building constructed at the behest of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and inaugurated by Pope Gregory XIII in 1583. Illustrious alumni include Eugenio Pacelli (who went on to become Pope Pius XII) and the Nobel laureate in economics, Franco Modigliani; its professors have included Frs. Clavio, Kircher and Secchi. One of its most famous alumni is Matteo Ricci, the Jesuit who, as the Holy Father recalled, was “one of the first to establish a bridge of friendship between China and the West, implementing a still-valid model of inculturation of the Christian message in the Chinese world”.

In the school building there is also the monumental Church of Saint Ignatius, where the remains of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga are conserved. This year is the Jubilee for the 450th anniversary of his birth, the occasion for which the Holy Father met the students and professors of the Visconti School.

In his address, the Pope said that “the school as such is a good for all and must remain a forge in which one is educated in inclusion, respect for diversity, and collaboration. ... Please, do not be afraid of diversity. The dialogue between different cultures and different people enriches a country, enriches the homeland and enables us to move ahead in mutual respect, enables us to go ahead looking at one earth for all, not just for some. It is a laboratory which anticipates what the collective should be in the future. And religious experience plays an important role in this, in which there enters all that is authentically human. The Church is committed, in the wake of Vatican Council II, to promoting the universal value of fraternity based on freedom, the honest search for the truth, and on the promotion of justice and solidarity, especially with regard to the weakest people. When there is no freedom, there is no education, and there is no future. When there is not an honest search for the truth but there is an imposed truth, that takes away capacity to seek the truth, there is no future: it annuls you as a person. And when there is no promotion of justice, we end up becoming a pusillanimous country, selfish, that works only for the few. Without attention to the search for these values, there cannot be a truly peaceful coexistence. When there is injustice, hatred begins to grow, and exchange will cease – we all know how it ends”.

Then, referring to Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, patron saint of youth, and also an alumnus of the same school, the Holy Father highlighted three aspects of his life. Firstly, his ability to “make important decisions for his life, without getting carried away by careerism and the god of money. There is a great need for young people who know how to act like this”, he added, “putting the common good before personal interests. To achieve this, it is

necessary to take care of one's inner life, through study, research, educational dialogue, prayer and listening to the conscience; and all this presupposes the capacity to forge spaces of silence ... This applies to everyone, to those who believe and those who do not believe. Only in inner silence can one grasp and distinguish the voice of conscience from the voices of selfishness and hedonism”.

“Free yourself from dependence on your mobile phone, please!” he exclaimed. “You have certainly heard of the drama of addiction. ... This one is very subtle. ... The mobile phone is a great help, it is a great advance; it must be used, and it is good that everyone should know how to use it. But when you become a slave to your mobile phone, you lose your freedom. The telephone is for communication ... it is very good to communicate between ourselves. But be careful, as there is the danger that, when the telephone is a drug, communication is reduced to simple ‘contacts’. But life is not for ‘contacting’, it is for communicating!”

Another distinctive feature of Saint Aloysius is his “capacity to love with a pure and free heart. Only those who love come to know God. In emotional life there are essentially two elements: modesty and fidelity. ... The sense of modesty refers to a vigilant conscience that defends the dignity of the person and authentic love, precisely so as not to trivialize the language of the body. Faithfulness, then, along with respect for the other, is an indispensable dimension of every true relationship of love, since one cannot play with feelings. But loving is not just an expression of the emotional bond of a couple or of a strong, beautiful and fraternal friendship. A concrete form of love is also given by commitment in solidarity towards others, especially the poorest. ... In this too Saint Aloysius is a model, as he died consumed by service to plague sufferers; that is, people who were on the margins of society and discarded by everyone else”.

The Pope thanked the students of the Visconti School for their voluntary work, “a sign of hope” and “one of the best and most beautiful things about Italy”, which they carry out every Saturday by serving the poor and excluded in a soup kitchen. “Do not let yourself be overcome in terms of generosity!” he exhorted. “Voluntary work always goes beyond, in generosity, it does not let itself be defeated”.

“Dear young students”, he continued, “never cease to dream of great things – this is a beautiful part of being young, dreaming on a large scale . and of wishing for a better world for all. Do not settle for mediocrity in relations between yourselves, in care for your inner life, in planning your future, in your commitment to a more just and beautiful world”.

Finally, before giving his blessing, the Holy Father, who improvised most of his address, spoke about the suffering caused by bullying, and invited those present to “fight against this aggressiveness, which is truly a seed of war”.
