



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St Peter's Basilica and Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 16 March 2022

[Multimedia]

Italian students from "La Zolla" Institute in Milan - *St Peter's Basilica*

Catechesis of the Holy Father - *Paul VI Audience Hall*

Prayer

GREETING OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO ITALIAN STUDENTS FROM "LA ZOLLA" INSTITUTE IN MILAN

St Peter's Basilica

I am pleased to welcome you here and I offer a cordial welcome to you, to your parents, to your teachers, to your grandparents: there are many grandparents here. It is very important for you young people and children to talk to your grandparents: very important to speak with grandparents. It is important. Your school of Christian inspiration is a precious reality for the area of Milan and it offers a valuable educational service in collaboration with families. It is important to build an educational community in which, together with teachers, parents can be the protagonists

of the cultural growth of their children. This is the educational pact, dialogue between parents and teachers. There is always dialogue, for the good of young people, of children. We must always take care of this educational pact which has been broken several times. Dialogue and also working together, as you do, parents and teachers. It is important to build an educational community This is very important.

To you boys and girls, I would like to leave two keywords that come from my heart: sharing and welcoming, *Sharing* and *welcoming*, let us say them together: “sharing and welcoming”. Only the boys and girls, not the grown-ups! Say it: sharing and welcoming, all together! [the kids repeat: sharing and welcoming]. Good, learn them well. Sharing: do not tire of maturing together with the people around you: classmates, parents, grandparents, educators, friends. There is a need to “team up”, to grow not only in knowledge, but also in weaving bonds to build a more united and fraternal society. Because peace, which we need so much, is built by hand through sharing. There are no machines to build peace, no; peace is always made by hand. Peace in families, peace in schools... And how do I handcraft it? With my work, with my sharing.

The second word: welcome. Today’s world puts so many barriers between people. And the result of these barriers is exclusion, rejection. This is dangerous, if you reject anyone. Even at school — listen to this carefully boys and girls — at school sometimes there is a classmate who is a bit strange, a bit ridiculous or who we do not like: never reject him or her! No bullying: no, please, no bullying, no, we are all equal. Even if a classmate is a bit unpleasant, poor thing, I approach him or her with friendliness. Always build bridges, do not reject anyone, please! Do not reject. Because rejection always cause wars. The result of barriers is exclusion and rejection. There are barriers between States, between social groups, but also between people. And often even the phone you keep looking at becomes a barrier that isolates you in a world that you have at your fingertips. How beautiful it is instead to look people in the eye, to listen to their story, to welcome their identity; to create, through friendship, bridges with brothers and sisters of different traditions, ethnic groups and religions. Only by doing this will we build, with God’s help, a future of peace. I like your motto — “*Stupiti*” (amazed): it’s beautiful. Always amazed, seeing beauty, amazed and grateful. But be careful, because there is a danger of becoming stupid: no, no! Amazed, not stupid (Ed. the Holy Father jokes on the meaning of the two words in Italian: *stupiti* which means amazed and *stupidi* which means stupid) Understood?

Thank you for this encounter, thank you for your witness. I pray for you and you, please do not forget to pray for me. And now I ask you to think, to spare a thought: let us think of the many boys and girls, the young people who are at war, who are suffering today in Ukraine. They are like us, like you: six, seven, ten, 14 years old and you have a future ahead, a social security of growing up in a peaceful society. Instead these little ones, even very small ones, have to flee from bombs. They are suffering so much. With the cold there is there ... Let us think of it. Each of us think of these children, these girls, these boys, these young people. Today they are suffering; today, 3,000 kilometres from here. Let us pray to the Lord. I will pray and you will do so with your heart, with

your mind, pray with me:

“Lord Jesus, I ask you for the boys, the girls, the young people who are living under the bombs, who see this terrible war, who have nothing to eat, who must flee by leaving home, everything. Lord Jesus, look at these children, these young people: look upon them and protect them. They are the victims of our pride, of us adults. Lord Jesus, bless these children and protect them”.

Together let us pray to Our Lady to protect them: Hail Mary...

And now, in our silence, let us receive the blessing of the Lord: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And thank you for this encounter: thank you, thank you. And do not forget, don't forget: amazed and grateful. All together: amazed and grateful.

CATHECHESIS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Catechesis on Old Age – 3. Old Age, A Resource for Lighthearted Youth

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The Bible narrative — with the symbolic language of the time in which it was written — tells us something shocking. God was so embittered by the widespread wickedness of humans, which had become a normal lifestyle, that he thought he had made a mistake in creating them and decided to eliminate them. A radical solution. It might even have a paradoxical twist of mercy. No more humans, no more history, no more judgment, no more condemnation. And many predestined victims of corruption, violence, injustice would be spared forever.

Does it not happen to us too sometimes — overwhelmed by the sense of powerlessness against evil or demoralized by the “prophets of doom” — that we think it would be better if we had not been born? Should we give credit to some recent theories, which denounce the human species as an evolutionary detriment to life on our planet? All negative?

Indeed, we are under pressure, exposed to opposing demands that confuse us. On the one hand, we have the optimism of an eternal youth, kindled by the extraordinary progress of technology, that depicts a future filled with machines that are more efficient and more intelligent than us, that will cure our ills and devise for us the best solutions to avoid dying: the world of robots. On the other hand, our imagination appears increasingly concentrated on the representation of a final

catastrophe that will extinguish us. What happens with an eventual nuclear war. The “day after” this — if there will still be days and human beings — we will have to start again from scratch. Destroying everything to start again from scratch. I do not want to trivialize the idea of progress, naturally. But it seems that the symbol of the flood is gaining ground in our subconscious. After all, the current pandemic puts a heavy weight on our carefree representation of what matters, in life and its destiny.

In the Bible story, when it comes to saving life on earth from corruption and from the flood, God entrusts the task to the fidelity of the eldest of all, the “righteous” Noah. Will old age save the world, I wonder? In what sense? And how will old age save the world? And what is the prospect? Life after death or just survival until the flood?

A word of Jesus, that evokes “the days of Noah”, helps us to explore more deeply the meaning of the bible passage we have heard. Speaking about the end times, Jesus says, “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Lk 17:26-27). Indeed, eating and drinking, taking a wife or husband, are very normal things and do not seem to be examples of corruption. Where is the corruption? Where is the corruption there? In reality, Jesus stresses the fact that when human beings limit themselves to enjoying life, they lose even the perception of corruption, which mortifies dignity and poisons meaning. When the perception of corruption is lost, and corruption becomes something normal: everything has its price, everything! Opinions, acts of justice, are bought and sold. This is common in the world of business, in the world of many professions. And even corruption is experienced in a carefree way, as if it were part of the normality of human well-being. When you go to do something, and it is slow, that process of doing things is a bit slow, how often do you hear: “Yes, but if you give me a tip, I will speed it up”. Very often. “Give me something and I will take it further”. We are well aware of this, all of us. The world of corruption seems to be part of human being’s normality, and this is bad. This morning I spoke with a man who told me about this problem in his homeland. The goods of life are consumed and enjoyed without concern for the spiritual quality of life, without care for the habitat of the common home. Everything is exploited, without concern for the mortification and dejection that many suffer, and not even for the evil that poisons the community. As long as normal life can be filled with “well-being”, we do not want to think about what makes it empty of justice and love. “But I am fine! Why should I think about problems, about wars, about human suffering, all that poverty, all that evil? No, I am fine. I don’t care about others”. This is the subconscious thought that leads us towards living in a state of corruption.

Can corruption become normal, I wonder? Brothers and sisters, unfortunately, yes. We can breathe the air of corruption just as we breathe oxygen. “But it is normal; if you want me to do this faster, what will you give me?” It is normal! It is normal, but it is a bad thing, it is not good! What paves the way for this? One thing: the carefreeness that turns only to self-care: this is the gateway to the corruption that sinks the lives of all of us. Corruption benefits greatly from this no good

carefreeness. When everything is going well for someone, and others do not matter to him or her: this thoughtlessness weakens our defences, it dulls our consciences and it turns us — even involuntarily — into accomplices. Because corruption is not solitary: a person always has accomplices. And corruption always spreads, it spreads.

Old age is in a good position to grasp the deception of this normalization of a life that is obsessed with enjoyment and empty of an inner reality: life without thought, without sacrifice, without beauty, without truth, without justice, without love: this is all corruption. The special sensibility of us old people, of old age, for the attention, thoughts and affections that make us human, should once again become the vocation of many. And it will be a choice of the elderly's love for the new generations. We will be the ones to sound the alarm, the alert: "Be aware, this is corruption, it will bring you nothing". There is a great need today for the wisdom of the elderly to counteract corruption. The new generations expect from us, the elderly, a word that is prophecy, that opens the doors to new perspectives outside that carefree world of corruption, of the habit of corrupt things. God's blessing chooses old age, for this charism that is so human and humanizing. What is the meaning of my old age? Each one of us elderly people can ask ourselves this. The meaning is this: being a prophet of corruption and saying to others: "Stop, I have taken this path and it does not lead you anywhere! Now I will tell you about my experience". We, the elderly, should be prophets against corruption, just as Noah was the prophet against the corruption of his time, because he was the only one in whom God trusted. I ask you all — and I also ask myself: is my heart open to being a prophet against today's corruption? It is a bad thing, when the elderly do not mature, and become old people with the same corrupt habits of the young. Let us think of the bible story of the judges of Susanna: they are the example of a corrupt old age. And we, with this type of old age, would not be capable of being prophets for the young generations.

And Noah is the example of this generative old age: it is not corrupt, it is generative. Noah does not preach, he does not complain, he does not recriminate, but rather he takes care of the future of the generation that is in danger. We seniors must take care of the young, of children who are in danger. He builds the ark of acceptance and lets people and animals enter it. In his care for life, in all its forms, Noah obeys God's command, repeating the tender and generous gesture of creation, which in reality, is the very thought that inspires the command of God: a new blessing, a new creation (cf. Gen 8:15-9, 17). Noah's vocation remains ever relevant. The holy patriarch must once again intercede for us. And we, women and men of a certain age — not to say old, as some will be offended — let us not forget that we have the possibility of wisdom, of saying to others: "Look, this path of corruption leads nowhere". We must be like the good wine that, once aged, can give a good message, not a bad one.

I appeal today to all the people who are of a certain age, not to say old. Be careful: you have the responsibility to denounce the human corruption in which we live and in which this way of living of relativism proceeds, completely relative, as if everything were legitimate. Let us move forward. The world needs strong young people, who move forward, and wise elders. Let us ask the Lord for

the grace of wisdom.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from Denmark, Jerusalem, Norway and the United States of America. May our Lenten journey bring us to celebrate Easter with hearts purified and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Upon each of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in Christ our Redeemer.

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to *the elderly*, to *the sick*, to *young people* and to *newlyweds*. In this Lenten period, even in this very painful time of war, I invite you to look to Christ and to draw strength from him for a faithful commitment to Christian life.

I offer my blessing to all of you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters: In our continuing catechesis on the meaning and value of old age, viewed in the light of God's word, we now consider the vital role of the elderly in handing on to new generations life's true and sustaining values. In the very first pages of the Bible, God entrusts to the elderly Noah the task of restoring the goodness of his creation, which had become corrupted by the spread of violence and wickedness. Jesus himself speaks of the "days of Noah" in warning us of the need for conversion in view of the imminent coming of God's Kingdom, which brings mankind definitive salvation and spiritual renewal. In every age, as in the days of Noah, we can be tempted to accept sin and corruption as normal, to avert our eyes from the unjust suffering of the poor and the destruction of our natural environment. In our own day, these are the fruits of a materialistic, self-centred and spiritually empty culture of waste. The elderly, like Noah, can warn us of this danger and remind us of our God-given call to be guardians and stewards of his creation. May Noah's example and prayers inspire our elderly to appreciate this, their special charism, and help to build a new "ark" of welcome, care and hope, for the future of our world and the dawn of the new creation.

PRAYER

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in the midst of suffering from this war, let us say a prayer together, asking the Lord for forgiveness and for peace. We will recite a prayer written by an Italian Bishop.

Forgive us for war, O Lord. / Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us sinners! / Lord Jesus, born in the shadows of bombs falling on Kyiv, have mercy on us! / Lord Jesus, who died in a mother's arms in a bunker in Kharkiv, have mercy on us! / Lord Jesus, a 20-year-old sent to the frontlines, have mercy on us! / Lord Jesus, who still behold armed hands in the shadow of your Cross, have mercy on us! / Forgive us, O Lord. / Forgive us, if we are not satisfied with the nails with which we crucified Your hands, as we continue to slake our thirst with the blood of those mauled by weapons. / Forgive us, if these hands which You created to tend have been transformed into instruments of death. / Forgive us, O Lord, if we continue to kill our brother. / Forgive us, if we continue like Cain to pick up the stones of our fields to kill Abel. / Forgive us, if we continue to justify cruelty with our labours, if we legitimize the brutality of our actions with our pain. / Forgive us for war, O Lord. Forgive us for war, O Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, we implore You! Hold fast the hand of Cain! / Illumine our consciences. / May our will not be done. / Abandon us not to our own actions! / Stop us, O Lord, stop us! / And when you have held back the hand of Cain, care also for him. He is our brother. / O Lord, put a halt to the violence! / Stop us, O Lord!

Amen