



The Holy See

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MEETING WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Kasarani Stadium, Nairobi (Kenya)
Friday, 27 November 2015

[Multimedia]

Thank you for the rosary which you prayed for me! Thank you for your presence and your enthusiasm. Thank you, Linette and Manuel, for your reflections.

There is a deeper question behind all the questions which Linette and Manuel asked me: “Why do there have to be divisions, fighting, wars, death, fanaticism and destructiveness among young people? Why do we have this thirst for self-destruction? On the first pages of the Bible, after all those wonderful things God did, a brother kills his brother. The spirit of evil leads to destructiveness; the spirit of evil leads us to disunity, to tribalism, to corruption, to drug addiction... It leads us to destruction through fanaticism.

Manuel asked me: “What can be done to prevent ideological fanaticism from robbing us of a brother or a friend?” There is a word which might seem uncomfortable, but I don’t want to avoid it because you yourselves already used it: you used it when you brought me all the rosaries which you prayed for me. The Bishop used it too, when he introduced you and said that you prepared for my visit by *prayer*. The first thing I would say, then, is that a man or a woman loses the best part of themselves, of their humanity, when they stop praying, because then they feel all-powerful, because then they don’t feel the need to ask help from the Lord in the face of all these tragedies.

Life is full of problems, but there are two ways to look at problems. You can see them as an obstacle, something which ruins you and holds you back, or else you can see them as an

opportunity. It's up to you. Do I see this problem as the path to ruin, or as an opportunity to better myself, my own situation and that of my family, my community, my country?

Dear young friends, we don't live in the clouds; we live in this world. And this world is full of problems, of temptations to go down the wrong path. But there is something which all of you have, something you will have for a while, and that is the ability to choose which path you want to take, which of these two things you want to choose. Will I let myself be overcome by problems or will I turn my problems into new opportunities, and win in the end?

Some of the problems you raised are real challenges. So that is my first question: do you want to overcome these challenges, or let yourselves be overcome by them? Are you going to be like those athletes who come here to the stadium in order to win, or like those who sold out, let the other side win, and then pocketed the money? You decide!

One of the challenges Linette mentioned is *tribalism*. Tribalism destroys a nation; tribalism is when you keep your hands behind your back, a stone in each one, ready to hurl against someone else. Tribalism is overcome only with the *ear*, the *heart* and the *hand*. With the *ear*, by listening: What is your culture? Why are you the way you are? Why does your tribe have this custom or way of doing things? Does your tribe feel superior or inferior? With the *heart*: After hearing your answer with my ears, I open my heart and hold out my hand so we can keep talking. Unless you dialogue and listen to one another, there will always be tribalism eating away at society like woodworms. Yesterday – you are celebrating it today – was set aside as a day of prayer and reconciliation. I would now ask all of you young people, and you, Lynette and Manuel, to come here, to hold hands with one another. Let us stand up and take each other's hand as a sign of opposition to tribalism. We are all one nation! Let us all be one nation! That is the way we should feel, where our heart should be. Overcoming tribalism is more than just lifting up our hands today; it is a desire but also a decision. Overcoming tribalism calls for daily effort. It is something we do with our *ear*: listening to others; with our *heart*: being open to others; and with our *hands*: holding out a hand to others... And now let us hold hands with one another... "No to tribalism!"

Another question that Linette asked was about *corruption*. Deep down, she was asking me: "Can corruption be justified simply because everyone is involved in wrongdoing, everyone is corrupt? How can we be Christians and fight the evil of corruption?"

I remember, in my own country, a young person, about twenty years old, who wanted to get involved in politics. He studied, he was enthusiastic, he went from place to place, and he got a job in a government office. One day he had to make a decision about purchasing something. He had three estimates, so he reviewed them and he chose the best one. Then he went to his boss to have it approved. "Why did you choose this one?" "Because it was best for the country's finances". "No, no, you have to choose the one which will put more money in your pocket!" This young person told his boss: "I got into politics to help my country!", and the boss's answer was: "I got into

politics to steal!" This is just one example. There is corruption not just in politics but in every institution, even in the Vatican. Corruption is something which creeps in. It's like sugar: it's sweet, we like it, it's goes down easily. And then? We get sick! We come to a nasty end! With all that easy sugar we end up as diabetics, and our country becomes diabetic!

Whenever we take a bribe, or pocket a kickback, we destroy our heart, we destroy our personality, we destroy our country. Please, don't get used to the taste of this "sugar" which is corruption. "But Father, I see corruption everywhere, I see so many people selling themselves for a handful of money without any concern for the lives of others..." As in everything, you have to make a start. If in your heart you don't like corruption, if you do not want corruption in your life in your country, then start now! If you don't start, your neighbour won't start either. Corruption also steals our joy. It robs us of peace. A corrupt person is not at peace.

Once in my city – this is a true story – a man died. Everybody knew he was a big crook. A few days later, I asked what the funeral was like. One lady who had a good sense of humour told me: "Father, they couldn't even close the coffin, because he tried to bring with him all the money he had stolen!" Whatever you steal by corruption will stay behind and somebody else will use it. But it will also stay behind – and we need to keep this in mind – in the hearts of all those men and women who were hurt by your example of corruption. It will stay behind in all the good you could have done but never did. It will stay behind in the children who are sick or hungry because the money that was meant for them was used for your own enjoyment, because you were corrupt. Dear young people, corruption is not the way to life. It is a path which leads to death.

There was also a question about *how to use the communications media* to spread Christ's message of hope and to help people see how right it is. The primary means of communication is the word, a gesture, a smile. The first gesture of communication is going up to someone, seeking their friendship. If you speak well of one another, if you laugh, if you draw close to one another as brothers and sisters even though you belong to different tribes, if you are close to those in need, the poor, the lonely, the elderly whom no one visits... If you are close to them, those little signs of communication are more influential than any television network.

In answering all these questions, I said something which I hope can help you. Turn often to Jesus in prayer; ask the Lord to give you the strength to eliminate tribalism, and to be brothers and sisters to one another. Pray for the courage not to be corrupted, to want to treat one another as brothers and sisters with a smile, a good word, a gesture of help, by your closeness.

Manuel too, in his witness talk, asked some hard questions. I'm concerned about the first thing he said: "What can we do to stop the *recruitment* of our family and friends? What can we do to make them come home? To answer this, we need to know why a young person, full of dreams and hopes, would want to be recruited or try to be recruited. He leaves his family, his friends, his tribe, his country. He cuts himself off from life because he learns to kill... This is a question which you

will also have to ask your leaders. If a young person, if a boy or girl, if a man or a woman, has no job, and cannot study, what can he or she do? They can get involved in crime, or forms of addiction, or even kill themselves – in Europe, they do not publish statistics on suicides – or they can sign up for something which gives them a purpose in life, however deceptive...

The first thing we have to do to prevent a young person from being recruited, or attempting to recruit, is *education and employment*. If a young person does not have work, what future is in store for him or her? That is where the idea of being recruited comes from. If a young person has no chance to receive an education, or even a little training for ordinary jobs, what can he or she do? That's where the danger lies! It is a danger for society, one bigger than ourselves, even bigger than the country, because it depends on an international system which is unjust, which is centred on economy and not people, on mammon, the god of money. What can I do to help them or to make them come back? First of all, pray. But pray hard! God is more powerful than any recruitment campaign. Then what? Speak to that person with affection, with kindness, with love and patience. Invite him to see a football game, to take a walk, be part of the group. Don't leave him out. This is the first thing that comes to my mind.

Certainly, there are – and this is your second question – there are some ways of acting which are harmful, where we run after fleeting pleasures but end up getting hurt. The question you asked me, Manuel, sounds like the question of a theology professor: "How can we realize that God is our Father? How can we see God's hand in the tragedies of life? How we find God's peace?" This question is asked by men and women the world over in one way or another. And they don't come up with an answer. There are some questions to which, no matter how hard we try, we never seem to find an answer. "How can I see the hand of God in one of life's tragedies?" There is only one answer: no, there is no answer. There is only a way: *to look to the Son of God*. God delivered his Son to save us all. God let himself get hurt. God let himself be destroyed on the cross. So when the moment comes when you don't understand, when you're in despair and the world is tumbling down all around you, *look to the cross!* There we see the failure of God; there we see the destruction of God. But there we also see a challenge to our faith: the challenge of hope. Because that story didn't end in failure. There was the *resurrection*, which made all things new.

I'll tell you a secret – but aren't you hungry? It's already noon! No? – well then, I'll tell you a secret. In my pocket I always carry two things: a rosary, to pray, and something else which may seem a little odd... What is it? It's the story of God's failure: it is a little Way of the Cross, the story of how Jesus suffered from the time he was condemned to death until his burial. With these two things, I try to do my best. But thanks to these two things I don't lose hope.

One final question from Manuel, our "theologian": "What do you have to say to those young people who have not experienced love in their own families? How can they move beyond this?" Everywhere there are young people who were abandoned, either at birth or later on, by their family, their parents, and so they have never known the love of a family. That is why families are

so important. Protect the family! Defend it always. All around us, there are not only abandoned children, but also abandoned elderly persons, who have no one to visit them, to show them affection... How do you overcome this negative experience of being abandoned, of not being loved? There is only one remedy: to give what you have not received. If you have not received understanding, then show understanding to others. If you have not received love, then show love to others. If you have known loneliness, then try to be close to others who are lonely. Flesh is cured with flesh! And God took flesh in order to heal us. So let us do the same with others.

Well, then, before the referee blows the whistle for the end of the game, I think it is time to conclude. I thank you from my heart for being here and for letting me speak to you in my mother tongue... I thank you for all those rosaries you prayed for me. And please, keep praying for me, because I need it very much! Now, before we leave, I ask you please to stand, all of you, and together we can pray to our heavenly Father, who only has one flaw: he can't help but be our Father!

Our Father....