

Faith is an adventure, Pope Francis tells Chilean youth



MEETING WITH THE YOUTH

National Shrine of Maipú, Santiago. Wednesday, 17 January 2018

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Ariel, I too am happy to be with you. Thank you for your words of welcome in the name of all present. I am truly grateful to share this time with you, which as I read there: “You got off the couch, and put on your shoes”. Thank you! I consider it important for me that we meet and walk with one another for a while. Let’s help each other to look ahead! And for you I think it’s important too. Thank you.

And I am happy that this meeting is taking place here in Maipú. In this land where the history of Chile began with a fraternal embrace, in this Shrine that rises at the crossroads of north and south, that joins the snow and the sea, and is a home to both heaven and earth. A home for Chile, a home for you, dear young people, where Our Lady of Carmel waits for you and welcomes you with an open heart. And just as she accompanied the birth of this nation and has accompanied so many Chileans over the span of these two hundred years, so too she wants to keep accompanying the dreams that God places in your hearts: dreams of freedom, dreams of joy, dreams of a better future: the desire, as you said, Ariel, “to be protagonists of change”. To be protagonists. Our Lady of Mount Carmel accompanies you so that you can be protagonists for the Chile of which your hearts dream. I know that the hearts of young Chileans dream, and that they dream big dreams, not only when they are a little tipsy, no, they always dream big; for these lands have given rise to experiences that spread and multiplied across the diverse countries of our continent. And who inspired those dreams? It was young people like yourselves, who were inspired to experience the adventure of faith. For faith excites in young people feelings of adventure, an adventure that beckons them to traverse unbelievable landscapes, rough and tough terrain... but, then again, you like adventures and challenges, except those you didn’t manage to take off the couch. Get them off quickly! That’s how we can keep going; you are experts at this for they make you put your shoes on. After all, you get bored when there are no challenges to excite you. We see this, for example, whenever there is a natural disaster. You have an amazing ability to mobilize, which is a sure sign of the generosity of your hearts. Thank you.

I wanted to begin with this reference to the motherland, for the way forward, the dreams that must be made real, with our gaze always facing the horizon, we must act with our feet on the ground of our motherland, our country. If you do not love your country, I do not believe that you will be able to love Jesus and love God. Love for one's country is love for a mother, we call her "Mother Land", because we are born here, and she teaches us, as every mother does, to walk, and she is entrusted to us so that she may survive for future generations. This is why I wanted to begin with this reference to the Mother, to our motherland. If you are not patriots – not isolationist patriots – real patriots, you are not going to achieve anything in life. May you love your land, young men and women, love Chile; may you give your best for this Chile of yours.

In my work as a bishop, I came to see how many good ideas there are in young people, in their minds and hearts. And this is true, you are restless; you are seekers and idealists. Do you know who has problems? The problem we adults have is that, when we hear about those ideals, when we hear about these worries of the youth, like know-it-alls, we say: "They think that way because they are young; they still have to grow up", or worse, "they'll be corrupted". And it's true: behind those words "they still have to grow up", concealed against all the eagerness and dreams, there is the tacit "They'll be corrupted". Watch out for that! Maturing means growing and letting dreams grow and letting aspirations grow, not lowering your guard and allowing yourself to be bought for peanuts; that's not growing up. So when we adults think like that, don't pay any attention. As if in this phrase "they still have to grow up" said by us grown-ups, where it seems that we have thrown a wet blanket at you to make you keep quiet, there lies hidden the idea that growing up means accepting injustice, believing that nothing can be done, that this is the way things have always been: "Why should we change if it was always this way, if this is always how people have done things?" That is corruption. Growing up, real maturity means carrying on with your dreams, together, sharing ideas, not letting your guard down, not selling your aspirations and such like. Is this clear? [They answer: "Yes!"]

Realizing how important young people and their experiences are, that is why we are calling... [he stops, because one of those in attendance is feeling unwell...] Let's just wait a moment for our sister who has feeling unwell, and let's accompany her with a small prayer that she can recover quickly. It is for your reality, the youth, that I wanted to tell you I have called together a Synod for your faith and your discernment. And, in addition, the youth meeting; for we Bishops, we are the ones holding the Synod; we are thinking about the youth, but, you know, I worry about "filtering", because sometimes in order to get young people's opinions to Rome, you have to make several connections, and so the suggestions can arrive very "filtered", not because of the airline companies, but because of those who transcribe the suggestions. That's the reason I want to listen to the youth, and that's why we are having the meeting of young people, a meeting where you are going to the protagonists, young people from the whole world, Catholic and non-Catholic youth, Christian youth and youth from other religions, and young people who do not know if they believe or do not believe. All of them, to listen to you, to hear you directly, because it is important that you speak; do not let yourselves be silenced. It is up to us to help you be clear in what you are saying; that is the work we are going to help you with. But if you do not speak, how are we going to help? Speak courageously, and say what you feel. And so you are going to be able to do this in the week of meeting prior to Palm Sunday; delegations of young people are going to come from the whole world, so that we can help the Church have a young face. One of you, a little while back, said to me: "I do not know whether to speak of Holy Mother Church – he was speaking about a specific place – or Holy Grandmother Church". No, the Church must have a young face, and you have to give it to us. However, a young face is real, full of life, not by applying cosmetics. No, that's no good; rather she is young by letting herself be challenged deep down, and this is what we, what Holy Mother Church, needs from you today: that you challenge us. And so afterwards, get your answer ready, but we do need you to challenge us; the Church needs you to throw away the old-age identity card, the spiritually grown-upness, and have the courage to tell us: "I like that; this is the way I think we need to go; this doesn't work, this is not a bridge but a wall, and so forth". Tell us what you feel, what you think and develop this between yourselves and in groups at the meeting. Then this will go to the Synod where you will be certainly represented, reflecting all. So get ready for that meeting. To those going to the meeting, offer them your ideas,

your concerns, what you feel in your heart. How much the Church in Chile needs you to “shake the ground beneath our feet” and help us draw closer to Jesus! This is what we ask of you, that you shake the ground beneath our fixed feet, and help us to be closer to Jesus. Your questions, wanting to know about you, your desire to be generous, are all necessary for us to draw closer to Jesus. All of us are invited, ever anew, to draw near to Jesus. If an activity, a pastoral plan, if this meeting does not help us to get closer to Jesus, we are wasting our time, wasting an afternoon and hours of preparation: may you help us get closer to Jesus. And we ask this of the one who can take us by the hand, let us look to our Mother; everyone in their heart tell her with words, tell her who is the first disciple, may she help us get closer to Jesus, from the heart, each one of us.

Let me share a story with you. Chatting one day with a young man, I asked him what sort of things made him unhappy. What makes you unhappy?” The context was right for this question. He said to me: “When my cellphone battery runs down or I lose my internet connection”. I asked him: “Why?” He answered: “Father, it’s simple; I miss out on everything that’s going on, I am shut off from the world, stuck. In those moments, I jump up and run to find a charger or a Wi-Fi network and a password to reconnect”.

That reply taught me something. It made me think that the same thing can happen with our faith. We are all enthusiasts, faith is renewed, be it through a retreat, a homily, a meeting, a Pope’s visit; faith grows. But after a while on the journey or after an initial spurt, there are moments when, without even realizing it, our “bandwidth” begins to fade, slowly, and that enthusiasm, that desire to stay connected to Jesus begins to also fade, and we start to lose our connection, our power; then we become unhappy and we lose our faith, we feel depressed and listless, and we start to view everything in a bad light. When we lack this “connection” that charges our dreams, our hearts begin to falter. When our batteries are dead, we feel the way the song describes it – “The background noise and the loneliness of the city cut us off from everything. The world turns backwards, tries to overwhelm me and drown all my thoughts and ideas”.^[1] Has this ever happened to you? No, let each of you answer within their heart, I don’t want to embarrass those who have not felt this. It has happened to me.

Without a connection, a connection to Jesus, we end up drowning our thoughts and ideas, our dreams and our faith, and, naturally, we get frustrated and annoyed. As protagonists, which we are and we want to be – we can get to the point of feeling that it makes no difference whether or not we do anything. Why are you going to spend your energy? Look at the young pessimist. He says: “have a good time, leave all those things for we know how they end; the world doesn’t change, have it with soda and go ahead”. We start feeling that we are “shut off” from reality, and from what is happening in the world. We remain shut off from the world, in “my little world” where I am peaceful on my sofa. It worries me that, once they have lost their “connection”, many people think they have nothing to offer; they feel lost. Stop there! You all have something to offer. Don’t look at things as a disaster. “I try to study, to have an academic title, get married, but enough, I don’t want hassles, it all ends up wrong”. This happens when you lose the connection. Never think that you have nothing to offer or that nobody cares about you. “Many people need you; think this”. Each of you think in your heart: “Many people need me”. The thought, “No one needs me”, as Alberto Hurtado used to like to say, “is the voice of the devil”, “no one needs me”. The devil wants to make you feel you are worthless... and to keep things the way they are. That’s why he makes you feel worthless, so that no one changes, because the only one that can make changes in society is the young person, each of you. We are already on the other side. [Another youth faints]. Thank you, because these youths fainting is a sign of what many of you are feeling. How long have you been here? [They reply]. Thank you! All of us are necessary and important and all of us have something to offer. With a little silence, each of you ask yourself: “What can I offer in life?” And how many of you want to say: “I don’t know”. You don’t know what you can offer? You have it inside but do not recognize it. Try to find it in order to offer it. The world needs you, the country needs you, society needs you, you do have something to give, don’t lose the connection.

The young people in the Gospel we heard today wanted that “connection”, they sought that connection to help them keep the flame alive in their hearts. Those young people that were there with John the Baptist, wanted to know how to charge the power cells of their heart. Andrew and the other disciple – whose name is not given, so we can imagine that each of us can be that “other” disciple – were looking for the password to connect with the one who is “the way, and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). It was John the Baptist who showed them the way. I believe that you too have a great saint who you can be your guide, a saint who made his life into a song: “I am happy, Lord, I am happy”. Alberto Hurtado had a golden rule, a rule for setting his heart ablaze with the fire that keeps joy alive. For Jesus is that fire; everyone who draws near to it is set ablaze.

Hurtado’s password to reconnect and keep the signal was quite simple – surely none of you brought your phones? Really? I’d like you to key this into your phone, I’ll dictate it to you. Hurtado asks himself, and this is the password: “What would Christ do in my place?” Key this in: “What would Christ do in my place?” At school, at university, when outdoors, when at home, among friends, at work, when taunted: “What would Christ do in my place?” When you go dancing, when you are playing or watching sports: “What would Christ do in my place?” This is the password, the power source that charges our hearts, ignites our faith and makes the sparkle in our eyes never fade. That is what it means to be a protagonist of history. Our eyes sparkle, for we have discovered that Jesus is the source of life and joy. Protagonists of history, for we wish to pass on that sparkle to hearts that have grown so cold and gloomy that they have forgotten what it means to hope, to all those hearts that are “deadened” and wait for someone to come and challenge them with something worthwhile. Being protagonists means doing what Jesus did. Wherever you are, with whomever you are with, and whenever you get together: “What would Jesus do?” “Did you key in the password?” [They reply: “yes”] The only way not to forget the password is by using it, otherwise it might happen that... I’ll tell you something from my time, not yours, but you might recognize some truth in it. It’s what happened to three mad persons in that film where there is a robbery, the safe and everything is thought out. But when they get there they forget the password, they forget the key. This is what happens when the password is not used over and over again. If you don’t use it, you forget it. What was the password? [They reply: “What would Jesus do in my place?”] That’s the password. Repeat it but also use it! What would Christ do in my place?” Use it every day. The time will come when you know it, and the day will come when, without realizing it, your heart will beat like Jesus’ heart.

It is not enough to hear a sermon or learn an answer from the catechism; we want to live the way Jesus lived. What would Jesus do in my place? To translate Jesus into my life. To do that, the young people in the Gospel asked: “Lord, where do you live?” (Jn 1:38). How do you live? Do I ask Jesus this? We want to live like Jesus, with that “yes” that thrills our hearts.

It thrills the heart and sets you on a risky path. To put oneself on the line, to run risks. Dear friends, be courageous, go out straightaway to meet your friends, people you don’t know, or those having troubles. Go out with the only promise we have: that wherever you are – in the desert, on the journey, amid excitement, you will always be “connected”; there will always be a “power source”. We will never be alone. We will always enjoy the company of Jesus, his Mother and a community. Certainly, a community is not perfect, but that does not mean that it does not have much to love and to give to others. What was the password? [They reply: “What would Christ do in my place?”] That’s good. You still have it.

Dear friends, dear young people, I ask you please, “Be young Samaritans, who never walk past anyone lying on the roadside. In your heart, another question: “Have I ever left someone lying on the roadside? A relative, a friend? Be Samaritans, never abandon the person left lying on the roadside. Be young Simons of Cyrene who help Christ carry his cross and help alleviate the sufferings of your brothers and sisters. Be like Zacchaeus, who turned his dwarfed spirituality into greatness and allowed Jesus to transform his materialistic heart into one of solidarity. Be like young Mary Magdalene, passionately seeking love, who finds in Jesus alone the answers she needs. Have the

heart of Peter, so that you can abandon your nets beside the lake. Have the love of John, so that you can rest all your concerns in him. Have the openness of our Mother, the first disciple, so that you can sing for joy and do God's will.[2]

Dear friends, I would have liked to stay longer. Those of you who have a cellphone hold it in your hand; a sign to not forget the password. What was it? [They reply: "What would Christ do in my place?"] Get connected in this way and don't ever lose the signal. I would like to stay longer. Thank you for the meeting and thank you for your joyfulness. Thank you and I ask you please to not forget to pray for me.

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