

Pope Francis speaks to young people from Lithuania



MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Square in front of the Cathedral (Vilnius, Lithuania)

Saturday, 22 September 2018

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO LITHUANIA, LATVIA AND ESTONIA

Good evening to all of you!

Thank you, Monica and Jonas, for your witness. I listened to it as a friend, as if we were sitting close to one another in some bar, telling one another about our lives as we drink a beer or a *girá* after going to the *jaunimo teatras*.

But your lives are not a piece of theatre; they are real and concrete, like those of everyone else gathered here today in this beautiful square situated between two rivers. Perhaps all this helps us to think back on your stories and to find in them the footprint of God... for God is always passing through our lives. He is always passing by. A great philosopher said: "I am afraid when God passes by! Afraid that I do not notice him!"

Like this Cathedral, you have times when you think you are falling apart, fires from which you think you can never rebuild. Think of all the times this Cathedral went up in flames and fell apart. Yet there were always people ready to start rebuilding; they refused to let themselves be overwhelmed by

hardship: they never gave up. There is a lovely Alpine song that goes like this: “In the art of climbing, the secret lies not so much in not falling down, but in not staying fallen down”. Always start over again, always, and that’s how you will climb. Just like this Cathedral. The freedom of your nation, too, was won by men and women who did not flinch before terror and misfortune. Monica, your father’s life, his condition and his death, and your illness, Jonas, could have been devastating for you. Yet here you are, sharing your experience, seeing it with the eyes of faith, and helping us to see that God gave you the grace to be strong, to lift yourselves up and to keep moving forward in life.

I ask myself: how was it that God’s grace was poured out on you? Not from the air, not magically; there is no magic wand for life. This happened through persons whose paths crossed your lives, good people who nourished you by their experience of faith. There are always people in life who give us a hand to help us pick ourselves up. For you, Monica, your grandmother and your mother, and the Franciscan parish, were like the confluence of these two rivers; just as the Vilnia flows into the Neris, you let yourself be carried along by that current of grace. Because the Lord saves us by making us part of a people. The Lord saves us by making us part of a people. He places us within a people, and our identity in the end, will be through our belonging to a people. No one can say, “I am saved on my own”. We are all interconnected, we are all “networked”. God wanted to enter into this web of relationships and he draws us to himself in community; he gives to our lives the deepest sense of identity and belonging (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 6). Jonas, you too found in others, in your wife and in the promise that you made on your wedding day, the reason to keep going, to fight, to live.

So don’t let the world make you believe that it is better to do everything on your own. On your own, you never get there. Yes, you can manage to arrive at success in your life, but without love, without companions, without belonging to a people, without that beautiful experience of taking risks together. You can’t move forward on your own. Don’t yield to the temptation of getting caught up in yourself, only looking after yourself, being tempted to become selfish or superficial in the face of sorrow, difficulty or temporary success. Let us say once again, “Whatever happens to others happens to me”. Let us swim against the current of that individualism which isolates us, makes us egocentric and makes us become vain, concerned only for our image and our own well-being. Concerned with our image, with how we look. Life in front of the mirror is no good, it is no good. On the other hand, life is beautiful with others, in our families, with friends, with the struggles of my people... That’s how life is beautiful!

We are Christians and we want to aim for holiness. Aim for holiness through your encounters and your fellowship with other people; be attentive to their needs (*ibid.*, 146). Who we really are has to do with our being part of a people. Identity is not the product of a laboratory; that does not exist; it is not concocted in a test tube; a “pure blood” identity: this does not exist. An identity *does* exist in walking together, of struggling together, of loving together. Identity does exist in belonging to a family, to a people. An identity does exist that gives you love, tenderness, concern for others... An identity does exist that gives you the strength to struggle and at the same time the tenderness to caress. Each one of us knows how beautiful it is to belong to a people, but also how tiring it is – it is great that young people get tired; it is a sign they are working – and even, at times, painful; you know this. But that is the basis of our identity; we are not rootless. We are not rootless people!

The two of you also spoke about your experience in a choir, praying in the family, Mass and catechism, and helping those in need. These are powerful weapons that the Lord gives us. *Prayer and song* keep us from getting caught up in this world alone: in your desire to know God you went out from yourselves and were able to see what was going on in your heart through God’s eyes (cf. *ibid.*, 147). In embracing music, you became open to listening and the interior life; in this way, you developed sensitivity, and that always opens the way to discernment (cf. *Instrumentum Laboris, Synod for Youth*, 162). Prayer can certainly be an experience of “spiritual warfare”, but it is in prayer that we learn to listen to the Spirit, to discern the signs of the times and to find renewed strength for proclaiming the Gospel each day. How else could we fight the temptation to become discouraged by our frailties and our difficulties, and those of others, and by all the dreadful things that happen in

our world? What would we do if prayer did not teach us to believe that everything depends on us, when we are alone and wrestling with adversity? As Saint Alberto Hurtado used to say, “Jesus and I are an absolute majority!” Don’t forget this; a saint used to say it! The encounter with Christ, with his word, with the Eucharist, reminds us that it makes no difference how strong the opponent is. It makes no difference whether *Žalgiris Kaunas* or *Vilnius Rytas* are in first place [laughter] ... By the way, let me ask you: which one is in first place? It does not matter who is first, what matters is not the result, but the fact that the Lord is at our side.

Both of you also found support in life through the experience of *helping others*. You realized that all around us there are people experiencing troubles even worse than our own. Monica, you told us about working with children with disabilities. Seeing the frailty of others gives us perspective; it helps us not to go through life licking our wounds. It is no good living by complaining, it is just no good. It is no good living to lick our wounds. How many young people leave home for lack of opportunities, and how many are victims of depression, alcohol and drugs! You know all this, of course. How many of the elderly are lonely, without anyone to share the present, and fearful that the past will return! You, young people, can respond to these challenges by your presence, by your encounter with others. Jesus invites us to step out of ourselves and to risk a face-to-face encounter with others. It is true that believing in Jesus can often demand taking a leap of blind faith, and this can be frightening. At other times, it can make us question ourselves, and force us to abandon our preconceptions. That can involve anguish and we can be tempted to discouragement. But stand firm! Following Jesus is a passionate adventure that gives meaning to our lives and makes us feel part of a community that encourages us, a community that accompanies us, and commits us to the service of others. Dear young people, following Christ is something worthwhile, it is worthwhile! Do not be afraid to take part in the revolution to which he invites us: the revolution of tenderness (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 88).

If life were a theatre piece or a video game, it would be limited to a precise time, and have a beginning and an end, when the curtain falls or one team wins the game. But life measures time differently, not with the time of a theatre piece or a video game; it follows God’s heartbeat. Sometimes it passes quickly, while at other times it goes slowly. We are challenged to take new paths; things change. We grow indecisive mostly out of fear that the curtain will fall, or that the stopwatch will eliminate us from the game or prevent us from advancing. But life always involves moving forward, life moves forward, it does not stand still; life always involves moving forward, seeking the right way without being afraid to retrace our steps if we make a mistake. The most dangerous thing is to confuse the path with a maze that keeps us wandering in circles without ever making real progress. Please, as young people, don’t let yourselves get trapped in a maze, but follow a path that leads to the future. No mazes; only move forward!

Don’t ever be afraid to put your trust in Jesus, to embrace his cause, the cause of the Gospel, the cause of humanity, of human beings. Because he never jumps off the ship of our life; he is always there at life’s crossroads. Even when our lives go up in flame, he is always there to rebuild them. Jesus gives us plenty of time, lots of room for failure. Nobody has to emigrate from him; he has a place for everyone. There are many people out there who want to capture your hearts. They want to sow weeds in your field, but if, in the end, we entrust our lives to the Lord, the good grain will always prevail. In your testimony, Monica and Jonas, you spoke of your grandmother, your mother... I would like to say to you – and here I will stop, don’t worry! – I would like to say to you: don’t forget the roots of your people. Think of the past, speak with the elderly: it is not boring to speak with the elderly. Go and find the elderly and let them tell you about the roots of your people, their joys, their sufferings, their values. In this way, by drawing on your roots, you will carry your people forward, the history of your people, for greater fruitfulness. Dear young people, if you want a people who are great and free, take their memory from the roots of the past and carry your people forward. Thank you very much!

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