

Pope speaks to young people at Notre Dame College in Bangladesh



Pope Francis met with young people at Dhaka's Notre Dame College on the final day of his Apostolic Visit to Bangladesh, listening to their testimonies and warmly encouraged them to continue in their Catholic faith.

Please find below the Pope's prepared remarks:

Address to Young People

Dhaka, Notre Dame College

Saturday, 2 December 2017

Dear Young Friends, good evening!

Here we are together at last! I am grateful to all of you for your warm welcome. I thank Bishop Gervas [Rozario] for his kind words, and Upasana and Anthony for their testimonies. There is something unique about young people: you are always full of enthusiasm, and I feel rejuvenated whenever I meet with you. Upasana, you spoke about this in your testimony; you said you are all “very enthusiastic” and I can see and feel this. This youthful enthusiasm is linked to a spirit of adventure. One of your national poets, Kazi Nazrul Islam, expressed this by referring to the youth of the country as “fearless”, “used to snatching light out of the womb of darkness”. Young people are always ready to move forward, to make things happen and to take risks. I encourage you to keep moving with this enthusiasm in the good times and the bad times. Keep moving, especially in those moments when you feel weighed down by problems and sadness, and when you look out and God seems to be nowhere on the horizon.

But as you move forward, make sure that you choose the right path. What does this mean? It means “journeying” through life, and not “wandering aimlessly”. Our life is not without direction, it has a purpose given to us by God. He guides and directs us with his grace. It is as if he placed within us a

computer software, which helps us to discern his divine programme and, in freedom, to respond. But like all software, it too needs constantly to be updated. Keep updating your programme, by listening to God and accepting the challenge of doing his will.

Anthony, you referred to this challenge in your testimony when you said that you are young men and women who are “growing up in a fragile world that cries out for wisdom.” You used the word “wisdom” and in doing so you gave us the key. Once you move from “journeying” to “wandering aimlessly”, all wisdom is lost! The one thing that directs and guides us on to the right path is wisdom, the wisdom born of faith. It is not the false wisdom of this world. It is the wisdom we see in the eyes of our parents and grandparents who put their trust in God. As Christians, we can see the light of God’s presence in their eyes, the light that they have discovered in Jesus, who is the very wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 1:24). To receive this wisdom we have to look at the world, our situations, our problems, everything, with the eyes of God. We receive that wisdom when we start to see things with God’s eyes, listen to others with God’s ears, to love with God’s heart, and to judge things by God’s values.

This wisdom helps us to recognize and reject false promises of happiness. A culture that makes these false promises cannot deliver; it only leads to a self-centredness that fills the heart with darkness and bitterness. The wisdom of God helps us to know how to welcome and accept those who act and think differently than ourselves. It is sad when we start to shut ourselves up in our little world and become inward-looking. We use the “my way or the highway” principle, and we become trapped, self-enclosed. When a people, a religion or a society turns into a “little world”, they lose the best that they have and plunge into a self-righteous mentality of “I am good and you are bad”. Upasana, you highlighted the consequences of this way of thinking: “We lose direction and get lost” and “life becomes meaningless to us”. The wisdom of God opens us up to others. It helps us to look beyond our personal comforts and the false securities which blind us to those grand ideals which make life more beautiful and worthwhile.

I am happy that, together with Catholics, we also have with us many young Muslim friends and those from other religious backgrounds. In gathering here today you show your determination to foster an environment of harmony, of reaching out to others, regardless of your religious differences. This reminds me of an experience I had in Buenos Aires, in a new parish located in an extremely poor area. A group of students were building some rooms for the parish and the priest had invited me to visit them. So I went, and when I arrived the parish priest introduced them to me one after the other, saying: “This is the architect. He’s Jewish. This one is Communist. This one is a practicing Catholic” (cf. Address to Students, Havana, 20 September 2015). Those students were all different, yet they were all working for the common good. They were open to social friendship and were determined to say no to anything that would detract from their ability to come together and to help one another.

God’s wisdom also helps us to look beyond ourselves to see the goodness in our cultural heritage. Your culture teaches you to respect the elderly. As I said earlier, the elderly help us to appreciate the continuity of the generations. They bring with them memory and the wisdom of experience, which help us to avoid the repetition of past mistakes. The elderly have the “charism of bridging the gap”, in that they ensure that the most important values are passed down to their children and grandchildren. Through their words, love, affection and presence, we realize that history did not begin with us, but that we are part of an age-old “journeying” and that reality is bigger than we are. Keep talking to your parents and grandparents. Do not spend the whole day playing with your phone and ignoring the world around you!

Upasana and Anthony, you ended your testimonies with expressions of hope. The wisdom of God reinforces the hope in us and helps us to face the future with courage. We Christians find this wisdom in our personal encounter with Jesus in prayer and in the sacraments, and in our concrete encounter

with him in the poor, the sick, the suffering and the abandoned. In Jesus we discover the solidarity of God, who constantly walks by our side.

Dear young friends, when I look at your faces I am filled with joy and hope: joy and hope for you, for your country, for the Church and for your communities. May God's wisdom continue to inspire your efforts to grow in love, fraternity and goodness. As I leave your country today, I assure you of my prayers that all of you may continue to grow in love of God and neighbour. And please, do not forget to pray for me!

God bless Bangladesh! [*Ísshór Bangladeshké ashirbád korún!*]

Pope Francis poses a photo with Bangladeshi youth during a meeting with young people at Notre Dame College in Dhaka on December 2, 2017. (Photo by AFP)