



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE ROMANIAN YOUTH INVOLVED IN THE NGO EDUCATION PROGRAMME
"FDP PROTAGONISTI NELL'EDUCAZIONE"**

Thursday, 4 January 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear children, dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for this encounter, and for the confidence with which you have asked me your questions, in which one feels the reality of your life.

I have here your questions, which I have read previously. But before responding to you I would like to thank the Lord with you because you are here; because with the cooperation of many friends, he has helped you to go forward and to grow. And together let us remember so many children and young people who have gone to heaven: let us pray for them; and let us pray for those who live in situations of great difficulty, in Romania and in other countries of the world. Let us entrust to God and to the Blessed Mother all the boys and girls who are suffering from illness, war and modern forms of slavery.

Now I would like to respond to your questions. I will do as best I can, because one can never fully answer a question that comes from the heart. In these questions the word you used the most is “why?”. There are many “whys?”. I can give a response to some of these “whys?”; to others, I cannot: God alone can do so. In life there are many “whys?” to which we cannot respond. We can only look, hear, suffer and weep.

*Why is life so difficult and why do we argue so often amongst ourselves; and mislead each other?
You priests tell us to go to Church, but as soon as we leave we make mistakes and commit sins.
So why did I go to Church? If I consider that God is in my soul, why is it important to go to Church?*

Your “whys?” have an answer: it is sin, human selfishness: for this — as you say — “we argue often”, “we hurt each other”, “we mislead each other”. You yourself recognized it: that even if we

go to Church, we still make mistakes; we remain forever sinners. And so you rightly wonder: what is the use of going to Church? It serves to place us before God as we are, without “putting on makeup”, just as we are before God, without makeup. To say: “Here I am, Lord; I am a sinner and I ask your forgiveness. Have mercy on me”. If I go to Church to pretend to be a good person, this does not help. If I go to Church because I like listening to the music or because I feel good, this is no use. It is helpful if at the beginning, when I enter the church, I can say: “Here I am, Lord. You love me and I am a sinner. Have mercy on us”. Jesus tells us that if we do so, we return home forgiven; caressed by him, more loved by him in feeling this caress, this love. Thus, step by step, God transforms our heart with his mercy, and also transforms our life. We do not always stay the same, but are “formed”. God shapes our heart; it is he, and we are molded like clay in the potter’s hands; and God’s love takes the place of our ego. This is why I think it is important to go to Church: not only to look at God, but to let ourselves be looked at by him. This is what I think. Thank you.

Why are there parents who love their healthy children, but not those who are sick or who have problems?

Your question is about parents, their attitude toward healthy or sick children. I would say this to you: in the face of the frailties of others, such as disease, there are some adults who are weaker; they do not have enough strength to bear frailties. And this is because they themselves are frail. If I have a big rock I cannot set it on top of a cardboard box, because the rock will crush the box. There are parents who are frail. Do not be afraid to say this, to think this. There are parents who are frail, because they are still men and women with their limitations, their sins and their frailties that they carry inside, and perhaps they did not have the good fortune to be supported when they were little. And so they go on in life with those weaknesses, because they were not supported; they did not have the opportunity that we have had in finding a person, a friend who takes us by the hand and teaches us to grow and become strong in order to overcome that weakness. It is difficult to get support from frail parents and at times it is we who must support them. Rather than blaming life for giving me frail parents, [whereas] I am not so frail, why not change things and say ‘thank you’ to God, ‘thank you’ to life because I can support my parents’ frailty so that the rock does not crush the cardboard box. Do you agree? Thank you.

Last year one of our friends who was left in an orphanage died. He died during Holy Week, on Holy Thursday. An Orthodox priest told us that he died a sinner and therefore he will not go to Paradise. I do not believe it is so.

Perhaps that priest did not know what he was saying; perhaps that day that priest was not well; he had something in his heart that made him respond like that. None of us can say that a person has not gone to heaven. I will tell you something that might surprise you: we cannot even say it about Judas. You recalled your friend who died. And you recalled that he died on Holy Thursday. To me what you heard that priest say seems very curious; one should try to understand better; perhaps

he was not well understood.... However, I tell you that God wants to lead everyone to Paradise, no one excluded, and during Holy Week we celebrate precisely this: the Passion of Jesus, who like the Good Shepherd gave his life for us, who are his sheep. And should one of his sheep get lost, he goes to search for it until he finds it. It is so. God does not remain seated; he moves, as the Gospel shows us. He is always on the move to find that sheep, and is not frightened when he finds us, even if we are in a state of great fragility, if we are stained by sin, if we are abandoned by everything and by life, he embraces us and kisses us. The Good Shepherd did not have to come but he came for us. And if a sheep gets lost, when he finds it he places it on his shoulders and joyfully carries it home. I can tell you one thing: I am certain, knowing Jesus, I am certain that this is what the Lord did with your friend during that Holy Week.

Why did we have this destiny? Why? What does it mean?

You know, there are “whys?” that have no answer. For example: why do children suffer? Who can answer this? No one. Your “why?” is one of those that has no human response, only divine. I do not know why you have had “this destiny”. We do not know “why” in the sense of the *reason*. What did I do wrong to have this destiny? We do not know. But we do know “why” in the sense of the *purpose* that God wants to give to your destiny, and the purpose is healing — the Lord always heals — healing and life. Jesus says so in the Gospel when he encounters the man blind from birth. And surely this man wondered: “But why was I born blind?”. The disciples ask Jesus: “Why is he like this? By his fault or that of his parents?”. And Jesus responds: “No, it was not his fault, nor his parents’, but he is like this so that the works of God might be made manifest in him” (cf. Jn 9:1-3). It means that God, before so many bad situations in which we can find ourselves from childhood, wants to heal them, restore them; he wants to bring life where there is death. Jesus does this, and Christians who are truly united with Jesus do this too. The “why” is an encounter that heals pain, sickness, suffering, and gives the embrace of healing. But it is a “why” for later on; it cannot be known at the beginning. I do not know “why”; I cannot even imagine it; I know that those “whys?” have no response. But if you have experienced the encounter with the Lord, with Jesus who heals, who heals with an embrace, with caresses, with love, then after all the bad that you may have experienced, in the end you will find this. This is the “why”.

It happens that I feel lonely and I do not know what meaning my life has. My daughter is in foster care and some people have judged that I am not a good mother. But I believe that my daughter is well and that I made the right decision, also because we see each other often.

I agree with you that foster care can be helpful in certain difficult situations. The important thing is that everything be done with love, with care for the people, with great respect. I understand that you often feel lonely. I advise you not to close yourself off, to seek companionship in the Christian community: Jesus came to form a new family, his family, where no one is alone and we are all brothers and sisters, sons of our heavenly Father and of the Mother that Jesus has given us, the Virgin Mary. And in the family of the Church we can all find each other, healing our wounds and

overcoming the lack of love that there often is in our human families. You said yourself that you believe your daughter is well in the foster home because you know that there they care for the child and also for you. And then you said: "We see each other often". Sometimes the community of Christian brothers and sisters helps us in this way. Entrusting ourselves to one another. Not just the children. When one feels something at heart he or she shares it with a friend and expels that pain from the heart. Entrusting ourselves fraternally to one another: this is beautiful and Jesus taught us this. Thank you.

When I was two months old my mother abandoned me in an orphanage. At 21 I looked for my mother and I spent two weeks with her but she did not behave well with me and so I left. My father is dead. What fault do I have that she does not want me? Why does she not accept me?

I understand this question well because you asked it in Italian. I want to be honest with you. When I read your question, before giving the instructions for writing the discourse, I wept. I was close to you with my tears. Because I do not know, you gave me so much; the others as well, but perhaps you caught me with my defences down. When one speaks of mothers there is something ... and in that moment you made me weep. Your "why?" resembles the second question, about parents. It is not a matter of fault; it is a matter of the great frailty of adults, due in your case to a great deal of misery, to many social injustices that crush the small and the poor, and also to much spiritual poverty. Yes, spiritual poverty hardens hearts and causes what seems impossible: that a mother abandon her own child: this is the fruit of material and spiritual poverty, fruit of an incorrect, inhuman social system, which hardens hearts, which causes mistakes to be made, which prevents us from finding the right path. But you know, this will take time: you sought something very deep in her heart. Your mother loves you but does not know how to do so; she does not know how to express it. She cannot because life is hard; it is unjust. And that love that is locked up within her, she does not know how to say it and how to caress you. I promise you I will pray that one day she will be able to show you that love. Do not be sceptical; have hope.

Simona Carobene (in charge of the initiative): I have begun to ask myself if perhaps the moment has arrived to take another step forward in my life, of welcoming and sharing. It is a wish that is growing in my heart and that I would like to take place in the next period. What are the signs to look at in order to understand what the plan is for me? What does it mean to fully live the vocation of poverty?

Simona, thank you for your witness. Yes, our life is always a journey, a journey after the Lord Jesus, who, with patient and faithful love, never stops teaching us, making us grow according to his plan. And at times he gives us surprises, so as to break up our framework. Your desire to grow in sharing and in evangelical poverty comes from the Holy Spirit: this cannot be bought or rented; only the Spirit can do this and he will help you to go forward on this path on which you and your friends have done so much good. You have helped the Lord to perform his works for these youth.

Thanks again to all of you. Meeting you has done me so much good. I shall keep you in my prayers. And please, you pray for me too, because I need it! Thank you!