



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO BULGARIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA

[5-7 MAY 2019] **ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS MEETING WITH YOUNG
PEOPLE** *ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS*

Pastoral Centre (Skopje)

Tuesday, 7 May 2019

Multimedia

Dear Friends,

Having these meetings always gives me joy and hope. Thank you for making this possible and offering me this opportunity. I am very grateful for your dance – so beautiful – and for your questions. I knew about these questions: I received them and thought about them, and so I have prepared some points to reflect with you on these questions.

I will begin with the last question: after all, as the Lord said, the last shall be first! Liridona, after you shared your hopes with us, you asked me: “Am I dreaming too much?” A very fine question, and I would like all of us to answer it together. What do you think? Is Liridona dreaming too much?

Let me tell you that one can never dream too much. One of the big problems people have today, including so many young people, is that they have lost their ability to dream. They don't dream, either much or little. When someone does not dream, when a young person does not dream, that empty space gets filled with complaints and a sense of hopelessness or sadness. “We can leave that to those who worship the ‘goddess of lament’... She is a false goddess: she makes you take the wrong road. When everything seems to be standing still and stagnant, when our personal issues trouble us, and social problems do not meet with the right responses, it does no good to give up” (*Christus Vivit*, 141). This is why, dear Liridona, dear friends, a person can never, never dream too much. Try to think of your greatest dreams, like Liridona's dream – do you remember it? To give hope to a weary world, together with others, both Christians and Muslims. This is certainly a very fine dream. She didn't think about little things, “on the ground level”, but she dreamed in a

big way and you, young people, should dream big.

A few months ago, a friend of mine, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, and I had a dream much like yours, that made us want to make a commitment and sign a document that says that faith must lead us believers to see other persons as our brothers and sisters. As brothers and sisters that we need to support and love, without letting ourselves be manipulated by petty interests.^[1] We are old and it's not the age to have dreams, but you, please dream and dream big!

This makes me think of what Bozanka told us. She said that, as young people, you like adventures. I am glad about that, for it is a beautiful way to be young: to experience an adventure, a good adventure. Young people do not fear making of their lives a good adventure. So I would ask you: what adventure requires more courage than the dream that Liridona shared with us, the dream of giving hope to a weary world? Our world is weary; our world has become old. The world is divided, and we can be tempted to keep it divided, and to become divided ourselves. There are those adults who want us to be divided; be on your guard. Yet how forcefully do we hear our Lord's words: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (*Mt 5:9*)! What can give us more excitement than being committed daily to becoming faithful builders of dreams, artisans of hope? Dreaming helps us to keep alive our certainty that another world is indeed possible, and that we are called to get involved, to help build that world through our work, our efforts and our actions.

In this country, you have a fine tradition of stonecarving, practised by artisans skilled at cutting stone and working it. We need to become like those craftsmen, to become expert carvers of our own dreams. We need to work at our dreams. A stonecarver takes a stone in his hands and slowly begins to shape and transform it with concentration and effort, and especially with a great desire to see how that stone, which no one thought was worth anything, can become a work of art.

"Our best dreams are only attained through hope, patience and commitment, and not in haste, like these artisans. At the same time, we should not be hesitant, afraid to take chances or make mistakes. No, do not be afraid. Rather, we should fear experiencing the paralysis of the living dead, who have no life because they are afraid to take risks. And young people who do not take risks are dead. Some don't want to take risks because they don't want to persevere in their commitments or they fear making mistakes. Even if you make mistakes, you can always get up and start over, for no one has the right to rob you of hope" (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 142). Don't allow yourselves to be robbed of hope. Dear young people, don't be afraid to become artisans of dreams and of hope! Agreed?

"Certainly, as members of the Church, we should not stand apart from others. All should regard us as friends and neighbours, like the apostles, who, as the Bible says, 'enjoyed the good will of all the people' (*Acts 2:47*; cf. *4:21.33*; *5:13*). Yet at the same time we must dare to be different, to point to ideals other than those of this world, testifying to the beauty of generosity, service, purity,

perseverance, forgiveness, fidelity to our personal vocation, the beauty of prayer, the pursuit of justice and the common good, the beauty of love for the poor, and social friendship” (*ibid.*, 36)”.

Think of Mother Teresa: when she lived here, she could not have imagined where her life would have ended up. Yet she kept dreaming and tried to see the face of her great love, Jesus, and to discover it in all those people on the sides of the road. She dreamed in a big way, and this is why she also loved in a big way. She had her feet firmly planted here, in her native land, but she didn’t stand still. She wanted to be “a pencil in the hands of God”. This was the dream she crafted. She offered it to God, she believed in it, she suffered for it, and she never gave it up. And God began to write new and amazing pages of history with that pencil; a woman from your land, who dreamed, who wrote great things. It is God who wrote them but she dreamed and allowed herself to be guided by God.

Each of you is called, like Mother Teresa, to work with your hands, to take life seriously and make something beautiful of it. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of our dreams (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 17); be on your guard. Let us not deprive ourselves of the newness that the Lord wants to give us. You will encounter many, many unexpected twists and turns in life, but it is important to face them and find creative ways of turning them into opportunities. But never alone! No one can fight alone. As Dragan and Marija told us: “our communion gives us strength to face the challenges of today’s society”.

Taking up what Dragan and Marija said: “Our communion gives us the strength to face the changes of contemporary society”. Here is a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation; no one can live the life of faith or realize his or her dreams alone, without leaving home, without being part of a community, alone at heart or at home, enclosed and isolated behind four walls. We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead.

How important it is to dream together! Just as you are doing today: everyone together, here in one place, without barriers. Please, dream together, not by yourselves; dream with others, never against others! Dream with others and never against others! By yourselves, you risk seeing mirages, seeing things that are not there. Dreams are built together.

A few minutes ago we saw two children playing here. They wanted to play, to play together. They didn’t go to play on their computers, they wanted to play for real! We observed them: they were happy, content. Because they dreamed of playing together, with one another. Did you see this? Yet, at a certain point, one of them realized that the other was stronger, and instead of dreaming *with* the other, began to dream against the other, and tried to overcome the other. And that joy changed as we saw the weaker one in tears, on the floor. You saw how we can pass from dreaming *with* others to dreaming *against* others. Never dominate others! Build up community with others: this is the joy of moving ahead. This is very important. Dragan and Marija have told us how

difficult this can be, when everything conspires to isolate us and deprive us of the opportunity to encounter one another, the opportunity of “dreaming with others”. Now at my age (and I am not young!), do you want to know what I think was the best lesson I ever learned? It was how to talk to people “face-to-face”. We have entered into the digital age, but actually we know very little about communication. Many contacts, but we communicate little. We are all “connected”, but not really “involved” with one another. Getting involved requires life; it calls for being there and sharing the good times but also the not so good times. At last year’s Synod on young people, we were able to have the experience of meeting one another face to face, both the young and the not-so-young. We were able to listen to one another, to dream together and to look to the future with hope and gratitude. That was the best antidote to discouragement and manipulation, to too many contacts without communication, to the culture of the ephemeral and to all those false prophets who proclaim only misfortune and destruction. The antidote is listening, listening to one another. And now, let me tell you something I feel very strongly about: give yourselves a chance to share and enjoy a good “face-to-face” with everyone, but especially with your grandparents, with the elderly of your community. Perhaps some of you have heard me say this, but for me that is an antidote to those who would lock you up in the present, overwhelming you with pressures and demands, all in the name of an alleged happiness, as if the world is about to end and you have to experience everything right away. In the long run, this creates anxiety, dissatisfaction and a sense of hopelessness. For a heart tempted by hopelessness, there is no better remedy than listening to the experiences of older people.

Dear friends, spend time with the elderly, listen to their stories, which may sometimes seem a bit unreal but in fact are full of rich experiences, eloquent symbols and a hidden wisdom waiting to be discovered and appreciated. Those stories take time to tell (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 195). Don’t forget the old saying that a little person can see further by standing on the shoulders of a giant. In this way, you will gain a new and broader vision. Enter into the wisdom of your people, your community, enter without shame or hesitations, and you will discover an unexpected source of creativity which will prove most fulfilling. It will let you perceive paths where others see barriers, possibilities where others see threats, resurrection where so many proclaim only death.

For this reason, dear young people, I tell you to speak with your grandparents and with your elders. They are your roots, the roots of your history, the roots of your people, the roots of your families. You should hold on tight to your roots to receive the sap that will make the tree grow, flourish and bear fruit, but always holding onto your roots. I do not say that you should go underground with those roots: no, not this. But you should journey and listen to these roots and take from them the strength needed to grow, to move forward. If a tree’s roots are cut off, that tree dies. If your roots as young people are cut off, which are the roots of the history of your people, you will die. Yes, you will live, but without bearing fruit: your country, your people will not be able to bear fruit because you have removed yourselves from your roots.

When I was a child, we were told at school that when the Europeans went to discover America,

they took with them coloured glass. This was shown to the Indians, to the indigenous peoples, and they were enthralled by the coloured glass which they had never seen before. And these Indians forgot their roots and bought this glass in exchange for gold. So gold was robbed by means of coloured glass. The glass was a novelty and they gave everything to have this novelty which was worth nothing. You, young people, please be on your guard, because today also there are those who want to conquer, those who want to colonize, offering you coloured glass: this is ideological colonization. They will come to you and say: “No, you must be a more modern people, more advanced, take these things and take a new path, forget older things: progress ahead!” And what should you do? *Discern*. What this person is bringing to me, is it a good thing, something in harmony with the history of my people? Or is it “coloured glass”? In order for you not to be tricked, it’s important to speak to the elderly, speak to those who will pass onto you the history of your people, the roots of your people. Speak to the elderly, in order to grow. Speak to our history in order to make it develop. Speak to our roots in order to produce flowers and fruits.

And now I have to finish, because we are running out of time. But I want to confess this to you: from the beginning of this meeting with you, I have been distracted by something. I was looking at this lady here in front of me; she is expecting a baby. She is waiting for a baby to be born, and perhaps one of you could think: “What a hardship, poor woman, how great will be her work!” Does any of you think this? No. No one thinks: “Oh she will have sleepless nights due to her crying child...” No. That child is a promise, look ahead! This lady has taken risks in order to bring an infant into the world, because she looks forward, she looks at history. Because she feels the strength of the roots that help her bring forth life, her country and her people.

And let us conclude together applauding all the young people, all the courageous women who bring forth history. And thankyou to the interpreter who is been really good!

DO YOU NEED MY HANDS, LORD? (*Prayer of Mother Teresa*)

Do you need my hands, Lord,
to help the sick and the poor
who are in need today?
Lord, this day I offer you my hands.

Do you need my feet. Lord,
to lead me today
to those who need a friend?
Lord, this day I offer you my feet.

Do you need my voice, Lord,
so that I can speak to all those
who need a word of love?

Lord, this day I offer you my voice.

Do you need my heart, Lord,
so that I can love everyone,
without exception?

Lord, this day I offer you my heart.

[1] *Document on Human Fraternity*, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019.