



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Children's Day

Friday, 14 November 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 47, 21 November 2014)

A scaled-down version of Youth Day in Rome, but even better — Children's Day, complete with a lively catechism lesson, up close and personal with the Bishop of Rome. This was the experience had by a group of children from the parish of Santa Maria Madre della Provvidenza, who attended Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning. Presiding at the Mass, Pope Francis said that in order “to pass the faith on” to kids today, we need people who don't just talk but “set an example”.

Their presence at Mass didn't go unnoticed. “When I look to that side it seems like Youth Day!”, the Pontiff said at the start of his homily. He confided that, for him, it was like celebrating what they call “Children's Mass” in the parishes. “It's nice to see children”, he remarked, because it's like “looking at the future, looking at a promise, looking at the world that's to come”.

Then Francis began questioning the adults, the teachers: “What are we leaving the children? What example are we setting?”. Most of all, referring to what had just been read from the Second Letter of St John (1:3-9), he asked: “Do we teach what we heard in the First Reading: to walk in love and in truth? Or do we teach them with words, but our life goes another way?”. This is why the Pope took care to repeat that “for us, watching children is a responsibility”. In fact “a Christian has to take care of kids, of children and pass on the faith, to pass on what they live, what's in his/her

heart: we can't ignore the little plants that are growing".

For this very reason the Pope recommended that "today it will do us good to consider what my attitude is with children, with teenagers, with young people". He proposed an examination of conscience by way of several questions: "What is my attitude like? Is it the attitude of a brother, father, mother or sister who helps him/her grow, or is it an attitude of detachment?". Or do we have the attitude, he asked, that "they grow, I live my life...?".

It's important to really recognize our conduct in this regard, he explained. Indeed, "all of us have a responsibility to give the best we have. And the best we have is the faith: give it to them but give it by example", not with words. "Words are useless. Today words are useless. In this world of the image, all of these [kids] have cell phones, and words are useless. What truly counts is setting an example". Therefore, the decisive question to ask ourselves about the education of the youngest is: "what do I give them?".

At this point, looking toward the pews where the children from the Roman parish were seated, the Holy Father turned directly to them, weaving a dialogue of questions and answers: "Why have you come to Mass? Do you know? Who dares to say it? Why have you come to Mass? Are you afraid to speak? Why? Don't be afraid!". And after greeting the parish priest, he again called on the children to answer out loud in response to his question about their attendance. "To see you!", said one boy, reading the minds of his friends. "To see me! Thank you, thank you so much!", the Pope replied immediately, adding: "I like it! I like seeing you too! And what you said is important: to see a person, who is the bishop of the city, who is the Pope, who we see on TV, but whom we want to see up close". This, he indicated is what the boy's answer, "to see you", really means.

However, he advised them, "it's also important that you are used to seeing adults, people who set a good example for you". That is, "to see the parish priest, priests, nuns at home, with the family: to see what they are like and how they live life, the Christian life".

Francis then returned to speaking with the children: "Have all of you made your First Communion? Yes? Everyone? And Confirmation? No one has made Confirmation?". Listening to the answers of each one, the Pope commented: "You haven't made it? You haven't either? Who else hasn't made First Communion? You? Has anyone made Confirmation?". Among the kids present there were a few who were to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation the very next week: "Now, so soon. Fantastic!", Francis encouraged them.

After all, he noted to his young interlocutors, "this is a path, a journey of Christian life that is beginning". And then he asked: "Which sacrament does Christian life begin with?". The response from the kids was immediate: "With Baptism!". And the Pontiff: "Good! With Baptism the door to Christian life opens and then", as St John said in the First Reading: "Walk in truth and in love". This, Francis explained, "is Christian life: to believe the truth and to love, to love God and love

others". Then, he pointed out, "First Communion is on this journey, Confirmation, Marriage...". It is a "lifelong journey" and it is "important to know how to live it, to know how to live it like Jesus".

But the Pope's questions didn't stop there: "In these sacraments, I'm asking you, is prayer a sacrament? No, prayer isn't a sacrament, but we have to pray". Continuing his lively conversation with the children, Francis then asked: "Don't you know how to pray? There, good: yes!". It's important "to pray to the Lord, pray to Jesus, pray to Our Lady, that they help us on this journey of truth and love".

He then resumed the initial thread which he had begun with the boy who confided having come to Santa Marta to see the Pope. "You came to see me, which of you said this? You! It's true, but you also came to see Jesus, agreed? Or do we set Jesus aside?". And he added: "Now Jesus is coming to the altar and we will all see Him: it's Jesus!". So, "in this moment we have to ask Jesus to teach us to walk in truth and in love: shall we say it together? To walk in truth and in love". The Pontiff wanted "only the kids" to repeat these words several times, with increasingly louder voices. Then, kidding them, he asked why they had been afraid to speak at first: perhaps because, seeing the time, they weren't "awake yet". Concluding, again along with the children, Francis asked "Jesus to give us this grace to walk in truth and in love".