



The Holy See

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TO THAILAND AND JAPAN
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MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

Cathedral of Holy Mary (Tokyo)
Monday, 25 November 2019

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear Young Friends,

Thank you for coming, thank you for being here. Seeing and hearing your energy and enthusiasm gives me joy and hope. For this, I am thankful. I am also grateful to Leonardo, Miki and Masako for their words of testimony. It takes great courage to open your hearts and share as you did. I am sure that your voices echoed those of many of your classmates present here. Thank you! I know that there are young people from other nationalities among you, some of whom are seeking refuge. Let us learn to build together the society we want for tomorrow.

As I look out at you, I can see the cultural and religious diversity of the young people living in Japan today, and also something of the beauty that your generation holds for the future. Your friendship with one another and your presence here remind everyone that the future is not monochrome; if we are courageous, we can contemplate it in all the variety and diversity of what each individual person has to offer. How much our human family needs to learn to live together in harmony and peace, without all of us having to be the same! We were not mass-produced on an assembly line. Each one comes from the love of their parents and their family, and so each of us is

different, each one has a story to share. (When I say something that is not translated, he will translate, okay?). We need to grow in fraternity, in concern for others and respect for different experiences and points of view! Our meeting today is so joyful precisely because we are saying that the culture of encounter is possible, that it is not a utopia, and that you young people have the special sensitivity needed to carry it forward.

I was impressed by the questions you asked, because they reflect your concrete experiences, but also your hopes and dreams for the future.

Thank you, Leonardo, for sharing the experience of bullying and discrimination. More and more young people are finding the courage to speak up about experiences like yours. In my time, when I was young, we never spoke about things like the ones Leonardo spoke about. The cruellest thing about bullying is that it attacks our self-confidence at the very time when we most need the ability to accept ourselves and to confront new challenges in life. Sometimes, victims of bullying even blame themselves for being “easy” targets. They can feel like failures, weak and worthless, and end up in very tragic situations: “If only I were different...” Yet paradoxically, it is the bullies – those who carry out bullying – who are the truly weak ones, for they think that they can affirm their own identity by hurting others. Sometimes they strike out at anyone they think is different, who represents something they find threatening. Deep down, bullies are afraid, and they cover their fear by a show of strength. And in so doing, take note, when you sense, when you see that someone “needs” to hurt another person, to bully another, to harrass them: *he* is the weak one. The victim is not the weak one; it is the one who bullies someone weaker because he needs to feel like a big boy, the powerful one, in order to feel that is a human being. I said this to Leonardo a little while ago: “When they say you are fat, tell them: “It’s worse to be skinny like you!”. We must all unite against this culture of bullying, all of us together against this culture of bullying, and learn to say “Enough!” It is an epidemic, and together you can find the best medicine to treat it. It is not sufficient that educational institutions or adults use all the resources at their disposal to prevent this tragedy; it is necessary that among yourselves, among friends and among colleagues, you join in saying: “No! No to bullying, no to attacking another. That’s wrong”. There is no greater weapon against these actions than standing up in the midst of our classmates and friends and saying: “What you are doing – bullying – is wrong”.

A bully is fearful, and fear is always the enemy of goodness, and so it is the enemy of love and peace. The great religions, all the religions that we practice, teach tolerance, teach harmony, teach mercy; religions do not teach fear, division and conflict. For us Christians, we hear Jesus constantly telling his followers not to be afraid. Why? Because if stand with God and we love God and our brothers and sisters, this *love casts out fear* (cf. *1Jn* 4:18). For many of us, as Leonardo reminded us, looking to the life of Jesus gives us consolation, for Jesus himself knew what it was to be despised and rejected – even to the point of being crucified. He knew too what it was to be a stranger, a migrant, someone who was “different”. In a sense – and here I am speaking to Christians and non-Christians who can see him as a religious model – Jesus was the ultimate

“outsider”, an outsider who was full of life to give. Leonardo, we can always look at all the things we don’t have, but we can also come to see all the life that we can give and share with others. The world needs you. Never forget that! The Lord needs you, he needs you so that you can encourage all those people around us who are looking for a helping hand to lift them up. I would like to tell you something which will stand you in good stead for your lives: to look at someone with contempt, with scorn, is to look them up and down, that is to say: “I am superior and you are inferior”; but there is only fair and right way to look a person up and down: to help them to get up. If one of us, and that includes me, looks a person up and down, with contempt, it doesn’t amount to much. But if one of us looks a person up and down to give them a hand, to help them get up, that man or that woman is truly great. So, when you look someone up and down, ask yourselves: “Where is my hand? It is hidden or is it helping this person to get up?” and you will be happy. Okay?

Now this involves developing a very important but underestimated quality: the ability to learn to make time for others, to listen to them, to share with them, to understand them. Only then can we open our experiences and our problems to a love that can change us and start to change the world around us. Unless we are generous in spending time with others, in “wasting” time with them, we will waste time on many things that, at the end of the day, leave us empty and confused; “stuffed”, as they would say in my home country. So please make time for your family, dedicate time to your friends, and also make time for God through meditation and prayer, each one of us according to his or her own belief. And if you find it hard to pray, don’t give up. A wise spiritual guide once said: prayer is mostly just a matter of being there. Be still; make space for God to come in; let him look at you and he will fill you with his peace.

That is exactly what Miki talked about. Miki asked how young people can make space for God in a society that is frenetic and focused on being competitive and productive. More and more we see that a person, a community or even a whole society can be highly developed on the outside, but have an interior life that is impoverished and underdeveloped, lacking real life and vitality; they seem like ready-made dolls that have nothing inside. Everything bores them; there are young people who do not dream; a young person who does not dream is a terrible thing, one who does not make space for dreaming, for God to enter in, for dreams to enter in so that the person can live a fruitful life. There are men and women who have forgotten how to laugh, who do not play, who have no sense of wonder or surprise. They are like zombies; their hearts have stopped beating. Why? Because of their inability to celebrate life with others. Listen: you will be happy, you will be fruitful, if you maintain your ability to celebrate life with others. How many people throughout our world are materially rich, but live as slaves to unparalleled loneliness! I think of the loneliness experienced by so many people, young and old, in our prosperous but often anonymous societies. Mother Teresa, who worked among the poorest of the poor, once said something prophetic, something deep: “Loneliness and the feeling of being unloved is the most terrible form of poverty”. It might be good to ask ourselves: “For me, what is the worst form of poverty, what would be for me the greatest kind of poverty? And if we are honest, we will realise that the worst kind of poverty we could face is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved. Do you understand? Is this really

boring, or may I keep going? Is it boring? [Young people reply: No]. We don't have long to go.

Combating this spiritual poverty is a task to which we are all called, and in which you, the youth, have a special role to play, because it demands a major change in priorities, in our options. It means recognizing that the most important thing is not what I have or can acquire, but with whom I can share it. It is not so important to focus on *what* I live for, but *whom* I live for. Learn to ask yourselves this question: not *what* do I live for, rather, for *whom* do I live? With whom do I share my life? Things are important, but people are essential. Without them we grow dehumanized, we lose our faces, we lose our names, and we become just another object, perhaps better than everyone, but nothing more than an object, and we are not objects; we are people. The book of Sirach says: "Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter: whoever finds one has found a treasure" (6:14). That is why it is always essential to ask: "*For whom* do I live? Certainly, for God. But he has decided that you should also be for others, and he has given you many qualities, inclinations, gifts and charisms that are not for you, but to share with those around you" (*Christus Vivit*, 286), to share with others, not only to live your life but to share your life. Sharing life.

This is something beautiful that you can offer to our world. Young people need to give something to the world. Bear witness that a "social friendship", friendship among yourselves, is possible! Put your hope in a future based on the culture of encounter, acceptance, fraternity and respect for the dignity of each person, especially those most in need of love and understanding. Without sensing the need to attack or despise others, but learning instead to recognize their gifts.

One thought that can help us is that in order to stay alive physically, we have to keep breathing; it is something we do without realizing it; we all breathe automatically. To stay alive in the fullest sense of the word, we also need to learn how to breathe spiritually, through prayer and meditation, in an inward movement by which we can hear God speak to us in the depths of our heart. Yet we also need an outward movement, by which we reach out to others in acts of love and acts of service. This double motion is what enables us to grow, and to discover not only that we are loved by God, but that he has called each of us to a unique mission and vocation. We will discover this to the extent that we give ourselves to others, to specific persons.

Masako spoke about all this from her own experience as a student and a teacher. She asked how young people can be helped to discover their innate goodness and worth. Here again I would say to you that in order to grow, to discover our own identity, our own goodness and our own inner beauty, we cannot look at ourselves in a mirror. We have invented all sorts of gadgets, but we still can't take selfies of the soul. Thank God! Because to be happy, we need to ask others to help us, to have the photo taken by someone else. We need to go out of ourselves towards others, especially those most in need (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 171). I want to say something to you: don't look at yourselves too much; don't look too much at yourselves in the mirror, because you run the risk that by looking at yourselves the mirror will break!

And now I'm finishing: it was about time! In a special way, I ask you to extend the hand of friendship to those who come here, often after great sufferings, seeking refuge in your country. Indeed, a small group of refugees is present with us here, and your kindness to them will show that they are not strangers. Not in the least, for you regard them as brothers and sisters.

A wise teacher once said that the key to growing in wisdom is not so much finding the right answers but discovering the right questions to ask. Each of you should think: "Do I know how to respond to things? Do I know how to respond well to things, to give the right answers?" If someone says "yes", well done! But ask the next question: "Do I know how to ask the right questions? Do I have a restless heart that prompts me continually to ask myself about life, about myself, about others, about God? With the right answers, you pass an exam, but without the right questions you do not pass the exam of life! Not all of you will become teachers like Masako, but I hope that you will keep asking, and help others to ask, the right questions about the meaning of our life and about how we can shape a better future for those who are coming after us.

Dear young people, I thank you for your friendly attention, and thank you for your patience, for all of this time you have given me and for sharing something of your lives. Don't cover up your dreams! Don't set them aside. Give your dreams plenty of room, dare to glimpse vast horizons and see what awaits you if you aspire to achieve them together. Japan needs you, and the world needs you to be alert, not sleeping; it needs you to be generous, cheerful and enthusiastic, capable of making a home for everyone. I promise to pray for you, that you will grow in spiritual wisdom, that you will be able to ask the right questions, that you will forget the mirror and be able to look into the eyes of others.

To all of you, and to your families and friends, I extend my best wishes, my blessing, and I ask you to remember also to send me good wishes and your blessings.

Thank you very much.