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Greetings to young Italians in Krakow: conquer fear, ask for the grace of forgiveness and build bridges

Yesterday evening, via live link from the archbishop's residence of Krakow, Pope Francis greeted young Italians participating in World Youth Day, gathered in the St. John Paul II shrine, and answered three questions from them: the first on how to conquer fear, then on the difficulty of forgiveness, and finally on what young people can do to live and disseminate peace in the world.

The first question was from a girl who recalled one of the drivers who died in a train crash in southern Italy in mid July, in which dozens of people lost their lives. She takes the same train almost every day and is now afraid of returning to her daily routine.

Pope Francis answered, "What happened to you is an injury; some, in the accident, received bodily injuries, and you were harmed in your heart, and this injury is fear. And when you feel this, you feel the injury of a shock. You have undergone a shock, a shock that stops you from feeling well, which hurts you. But this shock also gives you the opportunity to exceed yourself, to overcome. And as always in life, when we are injured, we are left with bruises and scars. Life is full of scars, life is full of scars, full of them. And with this, there will always be the memory of Luciano [the train driver] or of others who are no longer with us as they were lost to us in the accident. And every day that you take the train you will have to feel the traces, let's say, of that injury, of that scar, of what makes you suffer. And you are young, but life is full of this. And wisdom, learning to be a wise man, a wise woman, is precisely this: carrying forward the good and the bad things in life. There are things that cannot go on, and there are things that are beautiful. But the opposite also happens: how many young people like you are not able to go ahead in their own lives with the joy of beautiful things, and prefer to give up, to fall under the sway of drugs, or let themselves be defeated by life? In the end, the game is like this: either you win or it defeats you, life! Win in life yourself, it's better! And do this with courage, even with suffering. And when there is joy, do it with joy, because you will lead you on and save you from an ugly illness, that of becoming neurotic".

Another girl spoke to him about the bullying she had suffered from her classmates for not being Italian, which led eventually to a suicide attempt. She subsequently understood that the problem lay not with her but rather with the others and, upon recovery, she asked how she could fully forgive those who had treated her so badly since she bore no hatred.

“You speak about a problem that is very common among children and even among those people who are not children: cruelty”, the Holy Father replied. “But you see that children too are cruel, at times, and they have a capacity to hurt you where it hurts you most: to hurt your heart, to hurt your dignity, to hurt your nationality as in your case, no? You did not understand Italian well and they made fun of you with language, with words. ... Cruelty is a human attitude that is right at the basis of all wars, all of them. The cruelty that prevents people from growing, that kills the other, that also kills the good name of another person. When a person speaks badly of another, this is cruel: it is cruel because it destroys that person’s reputation. But, you know, I like to repeat an expression when I speak about this cruelty of language: gossip is terrorism, the terrorism of gossip. The cruelty of language, or of what you felt, is like launching a bomb that destroys you or destroys anyone, and the one who throws it does not harm himself. This is a form of terrorism, it is something that we have to defeat. How can we defeat this? You have chosen the right path: silence and patience, and you finished with that beautiful word, forgiveness. But forgiving is not easy, because one may say: “Yes, I forgive but I do not forget”. And you will always carry this cruelty with you, this terrorism of ugly words, of words that harm and that try to exclude you from the community. There is a word in Italian that I did not know, which I learned when I first came to Italy: “extracomunitari”, which refers to people from other countries who come to live with us. But it is precisely this cruelty that ensures that you, who are from another country, become an “extracomunitario”. They drive you away from the community, they do not welcome you. It is something we must combat. You have been brave! But it is necessary to fight against this terrorism of language, this terrorism of gossip, of insults, of driving people away with insults or by saying things to them that hurt them in their heart”.

“Is it possible to forgive totally? It is a grace we must ask of the Lord. We, by ourselves, cannot: we make the effort, as you have done, but forgiveness is a grace that the Lord gives you. Forgiving your enemy, forgiving those who have hurt you and those who have done you harm. When Jesus in the Gospel tells us, ‘If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also’, it means this: leave this wisdom of forgiveness, which is a grace, in the hands of the Lord. But we must also do our part to forgive. And there is also another attitude that counters this terrorism of language, whether they may be gossip, or insults: it is the attitude of meekness. Stay silent, treat others well, do not respond with something else that is bad. Like Jesus: Jesus was mild of heart. And we live in a world where we are used to responding to an insult with another. We insult each other and there is a lack of meekness. Ask the grace of meekness, of meekness of heart. And there we also find the grace that opens the way to forgiveness”.

Finally, a boy explained that on the way to Krakow, he and his travelling companions had been obliged to turn back due to the attack in Munich, but had found the opportunity to resume his trip and wished to know, after all that he had experienced, what the young could do to spread peace in a world full of hatred.

“You said two words which are the key to understanding: peace and hatred”, remarked the Pope. “Peace builds bridges, whereas hatred is the builder of walls. You must decide, in life: either I will make bridges or I will make walls. Walls divide and hatred grows: when there is division, hatred grows. Bridges unite, and when there is a bridge hatred can go away, because I can hear the other and speak with the other. When you shake the hand of a friend, of a person, you make a human bridge. You make a bridge. Instead, when you strike someone, when you insult another person, you build a wall. Hatred always grows with walls. At times, it may happen that you want to make a bridge and you offer your hand, but the other party does not take it; these are the humiliations that we must suffer in life in order to do good. But always make bridges. And you have come here: you were stopped and sent home, then you took a risk on the bridge to try again: this is the right attitude, always. Is there a difficulty that prevents me from doing something? Go back and then go ahead, return and move on. This is what we must do: make bridges. Do not fall to the ground, do not say, ‘Oh, I can’t’, no: always look for a way of building bridges. You are there, with your hands, make bridges, all of you! Take each other by the hand. I want to see lots of human bridges. ... This is the plan for life: make bridges, human bridges”.
