SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO
HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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Audience with lower middle school pupils participating in the “Grail” or “The Knights” Christian educational experience

At midday today, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the lower middle school pupils participating in the “Grail” or “The Knights” Christian educational experience.

The following are the Pope’s answers to the questions posed by the children during the meeting:

Holy Father’s answers to questions

Marta:

Dear Pope Francis, my name is Marta. In this period I am very worried by the fact that, since I am in the third year of middle school [eighth grade], next year I will not see most of my best friends and I am afraid of the change from middle school to high school. I am happy as I am now, with the friends I have now. Why must everything change? I can’t and I don’t want to imagine my life and everything that will happen to me without those friends I love. What shall I do?

Pope Francis:

Thank you, Marta. I will tell you this. Life is a continuous “hello” and “goodbye”. Very often they are small things, but many times it is a “goodbye” for years or forever. We grow up, meeting each other and bidding each other farewell. If you do not learn to say goodbye well, you will never learn how to meet new people. What you say here is a challenge, it is the challenge of life. It is true, your companions will not be the same – maybe you will see them, you will talk to them ... but there are new companions you must meet, and that is the challenge. And in life we must get used to this journey: to leave something and to meet new things. And that is also a risk. There are people who are very afraid – you used the word, “I'm afraid” – to take a step, who always stay still, too calm, and do not grow. When a boy, a girl, a man, a woman says “enough” and – as the parish priest recalled – “gets

comfortable on the couch", he or she does not grow. He or she closes the horizon of life. And here I use another word ... See, look at that wall: what's behind the wall? But do not you see what's behind the wall? Tell me, tell me ... come to the microphone ...

Marta:

I don't know…

Pope Francis:

You don't know… That is how it is when someone doesn't want to grow: he has a wall in front of himself, he doesn't know what there is. But if you go out, into the countryside – think – what do you see? Where there are no walls, what do you see?

Marta:

I see everything…

Pope Francis:

Everything. You see the horizon. We must learn to look at life, looking at horizons, always more, always more, always ahead. And this is meeting new people, encountering new situations. Do not forget the others, no! There is always a good memory, and usually we meet old companions, we say hello to each other … But we must always journey on, to grow. It is true that you used the word "afraid": "I am afraid to grow", "I am afraid of going ahead"… but use instead the word "challenge": do I rise to the challenge, or do I let myself be defeated by the challenge? Do you understand? Look at the wall and think about how it is in the countryside, on the horizon. And this is the choice you must make. You cannot see what is behind the wall; with the horizon, you go ahead, and the farther you go… the horizon never finishes! And we must grow on the horizon. I don't know if I have explained myself. And I said a word: remember the friends from before, all those you must leave to take another road. Remember them, call them at times, meet up with them… But live with the new ones, and follow the path with the new ones. In this way you will grow up. But you have been good! Because you could not tell me what was behind the wall, and this is a very good thing, because you cannot see behind the wall, and you were able to tell me that when you are in the countryside and look at the horizon you can see everything. Well done! Keep going!

Marta:

Thank you.

Giulia:

Dear Pope Francis, my name is Giulia and I would like to ask you what we young people can do in a concrete way to change the world around us a bit, in view of everything that is happening…

Pope Francis:

We can think of calling a fairy that comes with a magic wand and changes the world. Can this be done? How does the world change? Is it possible to change the world? All of you answer, is it possible? [Children]: "Yes!" Is it easy to change the world? [Children]: "No!". Is it difficult to change the world? [Children]: "Yes!" If it is difficult for grown-up people, for people who have studied, for people who have the capacity to govern the countries, it must be even harder for a boy or a girl, mustn't it? It's difficult. But I would like to ask you, all of you, a question: you, can you change the world? [Children]: "Yes...". You're not very sure, are you? Can you or can you not?

[Children]: “Yes!” Good, that’s better. But how? With the things that are around you. For example, always, when I meet children – you are a little bigger, but children – I ask this question: if you have two candies, and a friend comes along, what do you do? Almost everyone says, “I’ll give one to him and keep one for me”. Some do not say it, but they think, “I’ll keep them both in my pocket and eat them afterwards when he goes away”. The first is a positive attitude: one for you, one for me. The other is an egoistic, negative attitude: everything for me. Look at your hands. Everyone, look at your hands and make this gesture. Positive gesture: how is your hand? Let’s all do it together: *take it, yes* ... *let’s share*. Negative attitude: how is your hand? Closed. Let’s do the gesture. To change the world, do you want your hand closed? [Children]: “No!”. What does it take? Let me see… There! Yes, it takes an open hand. But the hand is a symbol for the heart, we cannot do this with the heart here, it would be difficult… But it is a symbol of the heart: *open heart*. You can begin to change the world with an open heart. Now for the other question I always ask children. And if you have just one candy, and a friend comes along, what do you do? It’s not easy. Most answer, “Half and half!” And this is like this or like that [*gestures*] half and half. And some say, “I put it in my pocket and eat it by myself”. This, how is it? Like this or like that? [*gestures*] Let’s see… The world is changed by opening the heart, listening to others, accepting others, sharing things. And you can do the same. If you have a companion, a friend, a schoolmate, a schoolmate you don’t like, who isn’t very nice… If you go to others to gossip about that person, how is this, like this or like that? [*gestures*]. Good. Instead, if you let it pass – “But, I don’t like it, I won’t say anything” – how is that? Good. You have understood. Changing the world with little everyday things, with generosity, with sharing, creating these attitudes of brotherhood. If someone insults me and I insult him, how is this? Instead, if someone insults me and I do not answer, how is that? Have you understood? Never repay evil with evil! [*Applause from the children*]. Never. Do you hurt me? And what did Jesus teach us about this? Listen: pray for everyone; pray for your friends and pray also for your enemies, for those who make you suffer. And Jesus says: like “the Father Who is in heaven … [Who] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good”. Yes: pray for everyone. Prayer for everyone, and do not wish bad things on others. In this way we can change the world. There is no magic wand, but there are little everyday things that we must learn. And I will make you a proposal. In a group, for about half an hour, speak about this. Little groups, when you are all together. If they do this to me, what must I do? If I am faced with this choice, what must I do? Speaking about things which are like “this” and things which are like “that” [*gestures*], with the heart. Thank you for your question.

Tanio:

Dear Pope Francis, my name is Tanio, I was born in Bulgaria and in the first month of my life my parents left me in an orphanage. At the age of five I was adopted by a new Italian family. After a year, however, my mother died. I have lived so far with my father and my grandparents. This year my grandparents died too. The Knights are a gift, a great gift, for me: because they are close to me and support me in every moment of my life. However, this question comes to me: how can you believe that the Lord loves you, when He makes you lose people or makes things happen that you would never want?

Pope Francis:

How can you believe that the Lord loves you, when He makes you lose people or makes things happen that you would never want? Let us think a bit, all together, with our imagination, of any hospital with children. How can we think that God loves children and lets them get sick, lets them die, very often? Think of this question: why do children suffer? Why are there children in the world who suffer from hunger, while in other parts of the world there is great waste? Why? You know, there are questions – like the one that you have asked – that we cannot answer with words. Tanio, you have asked this question and there are no words to explain. Only, you will find some explanation – not “why”, but “para que” [“for what purpose”] – in the love of those who care for you and support you. There is no explanation for why these things happen, but there are people who accompany you. I say to you sincerely, and you will understand this well: when I, myself, ask in prayer, “why do children suffer?”, I usually do so when I go to children’s hospitals and I leave – I tell you the truth – with my heart not destroyed, but very pained, the Lord does not answer me. I look only to the Crucified Jesus. If God let His only Son suffer so for us, there must be something that has a meaning. But, dear Tanio, I cannot explain that meaning to you. You will find it yourself: further along in life, or in the other life. But explanations, like how we explain a mathematical theorem or an historical question, I cannot give you, nor can anyone else. There are, in life – you understand this well! – there are in life questions and situations that cannot be explained. One of those is what you have

experienced, your suffering. But behind this, there is always God's love. "Ah, how do you explain it?" It cannot be explained. I cannot explain it. And if someone says, "Come, come, I will explain it to you!", doubt him. Only those who support you, who accompany you and help you grow, will make you feel God's love. Thank you for asking this question, because it is important that you, boys and girls, at this age, begin to understand these things, because this will help you to grow well and to go ahead. Thank you, Tanio.

And taking a little of the pain of the last question, let us turn to our Mother, our Mother in heaven, to the Mother: She understands pain, like all mothers, and let us pray the consecration together.

[*Prayer of consecration*]: "Jesus, my Lord and King…"

[*Blessing*]

And before finishing, to be able to go ahead in life and to have a generous heart, how must our heart be? With the hand…

Children:

Open!

Pope Francis:

To go backwards… to go backwards: how do you go backwards? With the heart, how?

Children:

Closed!

Pope Francis:

Closed. And other question: can all situations in life be explained?

Children:

No!

Pope Francis:

I haven't understood, I can't hear…

Children, more loudly:

No!

Pope Francis:

Good. Let's keep going ahead!