



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHL
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 180219d

Monday 19.02.2018

Audience with Romanian children assisted by the NGO “FDP protagonists in education”

On 4 January, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a group of young Romanians from an orphanage assisted by the NGO “FDP protagonists in education”, which has worked in Romania for years.

The following are the Pope’s answers to the questions from the Romanian children:

Answers of the Holy Father

Dear children, dear brothers and sisters,

I thank you for this meeting, and for the trust with which you have asked me your questions, in which one is able to feel the reality of your life.

I have here your questions, which I have already read. But before answering, I would like to thank the Lord with you because you are here, because He, with the help of many friends, has helped you to move forward and grow. And together we remember so many children and young people who have gone to heaven: we pray for them; and we pray for those who live in situations of great difficulty, in Romania and in other countries of the world. We entrust to God and to the Virgin Mother all the boys and girls, boys and girls who suffer from diseases, wars and slavery today.

And now I would like to answer your questions. I will do it as well as I can, because you can never fully answer a question that comes from the heart. In these questions the word that you use the most is “why?”. There are many “whys?”. To some of these “whys?” I can give an answer, to others no, only God can. In life there are many “whys?” to which we cannot give an answer. We can only look, feel, suffer and cry.

First question: *Why is life so difficult, and why do we friends often argue amongst ourselves? And do we deceive ourselves? You priests tell us to go to church, but as soon as we go out we make mistakes and commit sins. So*

why did I go into Church? If I consider that God is in my soul, why is it important to go to church?

Pope Francis: Your “whys” have an answer: it is sin, human selfishness: therefore, as you say, we often argue, we hurt ourselves, we deceive ourselves. You yourself recognize this, that even if we go to Church, we then make mistakes again, we still remain sinners. And then you justly wonder: what is the point in going to Church? The point is to put ourselves before God as we are, without embellishing ourselves, as we are before God, “without make-up”. To say, “Here I am, Lord, I am a sinner and I ask you for forgiveness. Have pity on me”: If I go to church to pretend to be a good person, there is no point. If I go to church because I like to hear the music or even because I feel good, this is pointless. It is useful if, at the beginning, when I enter the church, I can say, “Here I am, Lord. You love me and I am a sinner. Have pity on us. Jesus tells us that if we do this, we return home forgiven. Caressed by Him, more loved by Him, feeling this caress, this love. We do not always stay the same, but need to be “worked on”. God works on our heart, it is Him, and we are moulded like clay in the hands of the potter; and God’s love takes the place of our selfishness. This is why I think it is important to go to church: not only to look at God, but to let ourselves be looked at by Him. This is what I think. Thank you.

Second question: *Why are there parents who love healthy children, but not those who are sick or who have problems?*

Pope Francis: Your question relates to parents, and their attitude to healthy and sick children. I would say this to you: faced with the fragility of others, such as illnesses, there are some adults who are weaker, who do not have enough strength to bear these fragilities. And this is because they are fragile themselves. If I have a big rock, I cannot place it on a cardboard box, because the stone will crush the cardboard. There are parents who are fragile. Do not be afraid of saying this, of thinking this. There are parents who are fragile, because they are still men and women, with their limits, their sins and their fragilities that they carry within them, and perhaps they did not have the good fortune to be helped when they were little. And in this way, with those fragilities, they go ahead in life, because they have not been helped, they have not had the opportunity we have had to find a friendly person who can take us by the hand and teach us to grow, and to make us strong to conquer that fragility. It is difficult to receive help from fragile parents, and at times we are the ones who have to help them. Instead of rebuking life for giving me fragile parents when I am not so fragile, why not change this and say thank you to God, thank you to life because I can help the fragility of a parent, so that the stone does not crush the cardboard box? Do you agree? Thank you.

Third question: *Last year, one of our friends who remained in the orphanage died. He died during Holy Week, on Holy Thursday. An orthodox priest told us that he had died a sinner and therefore will not go to Heaven. I don’t believe that is true.*

Pope Francis: Perhaps that priest did not know what he was saying, perhaps on that day, that priest was not well, he had something in his heart that made him answer in this way. None of us can say that a person will not go to Heaven. I will say something that will perhaps surprise you: we cannot say this even of Judas. You remembered your friend who died. And you recalled that he died on Holy Thursday. It seems very strange to me, what you heard from that priest; we would need to understand better, maybe this has not been understood correctly. ... However I tell you that God wants to take us all to Heaven, no-one excluded, and that in Holy Week we celebrate exactly this: the Passion of Jesus, Who as Good Shepherd gave His life for us, we who are His little sheep. And if a sheep is lost, He goes looking for it until He finds it. That’s how it is. God does not stay seated, He goes, as the Gospel shows us: He is always on the way to find that little sheep, and is not shocked when He finds us, even if we are in a state of great fragility, if we are soiled with sins, if we are abandoned by everything and by life, He embraces us and kisses us. He could not come but the Good Shepherd came for us. And if a sheep is lost, when He finds it, he puts it on his back and full of joy, brings it home. I can tell you something: I am sure, knowing Jesus, I am sure that this is what the Lord did in that Holy Week with your friend.

Fourth question: *Why have we had this fate? Why? What is the point in it?*

Pope Francis: You know, there are many “whys” that have no answer. For example: why do children suffer? Who can answer this? No-one. Your “why” is one of those that do not have a human answer, only a divine one. I

cannot tell you why you have had “this fate”. We do not know why in the sense of a *reason*. What have I done to deserve this fate? We do not know. But we know why in the sense of the *purpose* that God wishes to give to your fate, and the purpose is healing – the Lord always heals – healing and life. Jesus says so in the Gospel when He meets a man blind from birth. And he surely asked himself this: “But why was I born blind?” The disciples ask Jesus: “Who sinned? This man or his parents?” And Jesus replies: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him” (cf. *Jn* 9: 1-3). It means that God, faced with so many bad situations in which we can find ourselves from an early age, wants to heal them, to make them better, to bring life where there is death. This is what Jesus does, and this is also true for Christians who are truly united with Jesus. You have experienced it. The “why” is an encounter that heals from pain, from sickness, from suffering, and gives the embrace of healing. But it is a “why” for the after: at the beginning we cannot know. I do not know “why”, I cannot even think of it; I know that those “whys” have no answer. But if you have experienced the encounter with the Lord, with Jesus Who heals, Who heals with a hug, with caresses, with love, then, after all the evil that you may have experienced, in the end you have found this. This is “why”.

Fifth question: *It can happen that I feel alone and I do not know what meaning my life has. My child is in foster care and some people judge me, that I am not a good mother. Instead I believe that my daughter is well and that I have decided correctly also because we see each other often.*

Pope Francis: I agree with you that foster care can help in certain difficult situations. The important thing is that everything is done with love, with care for people, with great respect. I understand that you often feel lonely. I advise you not to close up, but to seek the companionship of the Christian community: Jesus came to form a new family, His family, where no one is alone and we are all brothers and sisters, children of our Father in Heaven and of the Mother Jesus gave to us, the Virgin Mary. And in the family of the Church we can all meet each other, healing our wounds and overcoming the gaps in love that often exist in our human families. You yourself said that you believe your daughter is well in the family home because you know that there they care for the child and for you too. And then you said: “We see each other often”. Sometimes the community of Christian brothers and sisters helps us this way. To trust each other. Not just children. When one feels something in the heart he trusts in a friend and makes that pain come out of the heart. Trusting in each other fraternally, this is beautiful, and Jesus taught this. Thank you.

Sixth question: *When I was two months old, my mother left me in an orphanage. At 21 I looked for my mother and I stayed with her for two weeks but she did not treat me well and so I left. My father is dead. What fault do I have if she do not want me? Why does she not accept me?*

Pope Francis: I understood this question well because you asked in Italian. I want to be sincere with you. When I read your question, before giving the instructions for my speech, I wept. I was close to you with a few tears. I do not know why, you gave me a lot; the others did too, but perhaps you caught me off guard. When one speaks about their mother there is always something... and in that moment you made me weep. Your “why?” is similar to the second question, on parents. It is not a question of fault, it is a question of the great fragilities of adults, due in your case to grave destitution, to many social injustices that crush the small and the poor, and also to so much spiritual poverty. Yes, spiritual poverty hardens hearts and causes what would seem impossible, that a mother would abandon her own children: this is the fruit of material and spiritual poverty, the fruit of a wrong and inhumane system, which hardens hearts, which causes errors, which ensures that we do not find the right path. But you know, this will take time: you have sought something deeper in your heart. Your mother loves you but does not know how to do so, she does not know how to express it. She cannot, because life is hard and unjust. And that love that is closed up in her does not know how to say it, and how to caress you. I promise to pray that one day she may show you that love. Do not be sceptical, be hopeful.

Simona Carobene (head of the initiative): I was very impressed by your message for the Day of the Poor. It took me aback because I asked myself, “How do I look at my children?! Sometimes I realize that I am busy in what I am doing and I forget why Jesus has put us together. I still need to undertake a journey of conversion, and this journey is continuous and can never be taken for granted. This is why I continue to follow my youngsters, because they are “my saints”. And I remain attached to the Holy Mother Church through the charism of Don Giussani, which is the concrete method that made me love Jesus. At the same time, though, the call of His message was very real. There was talk of true sharing. I began to wonder if maybe the time had come to take

one more step in my life, that of welcoming and sharing. It is a desire of the heart that is emerging in me and which I would like to verify in the coming period. What are the signs to look at to understand what the plan is for me? What does it mean to live fully the vocation of poverty?

Pope Francis: Simona, thank you for your testimony. Yes, our life is always a journey, a journey following the Lord Jesus, Who with patient and faithful love never ceases to educate us, to make us grow according to His plan. And sometimes He surprises us, He breaks with our established mindsets. Your desire to grow in sharing and in evangelical poverty comes from the Holy Spirit. This can not be bought or hired: only the Spirit is able to do this and He will help you go forward in the way in which you and your friends have done so well. You have helped the Lord to do His work for these boys.

Thanks again to all of you. Meeting you has been very good for me. I hold you in my prayers. And don't forget, pray for me too, as I am in need. Thank you.
