



The Holy See

CELEBRATION OF VESPERS

WITH THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF THE ROMAN ATHENEUMS

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

First Sunday of Advent - Saturday, 30 November 2013

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Today we renew the traditional Advent meeting with university students from this diocese, who are joined by the Rectors and Professors of Rome and of Italy's universities. I cordially greet you all: the Cardinal Vicar, the Bishops, the Mayor, the various academic and institutional Authorities and Assistants to the Chaplaincies and university groups. I especially greet you, dear university students.

The hope that St Paul addressed to the Christians of Thessalonica, that God *might sanctify them unto perfection*, shows on the one hand his concern for their holiness of life, which had been imperilled, and on the other hand, reveals his great trust in the Lord's power to intervene. The Apostle's concern also applies to Christians today. The fullness of Christian life which God brings to fulfillment in men is, in fact, continually threatened by the temptation to yield to the spirit of the world. Therefore, God gives us his help so that we might persevere and preserve the gifts of the Holy Spirit which he has given us, the new life in the Spirit which he gives us. By safeguarding this salutary "sap" of our lives, our whole being, spirit, soul and body, *is preserved blameless* and upright. But why, after having bestowed on us his spiritual treasures, did God have to intervene again in order to preserve them whole and entire? This is a question we should ask ourselves. For we are weak — we know this well — our human nature is frail and God's gifts are kept in us as in "earthen vessels" (cf. 2 Cor 4:7).

God's intervention that we might persevere until the end, until the definitive encounter with Jesus, is an expression of his fidelity. It is like a dialogue between our weakness and his faithfulness. He is strong in his fidelity. Elsewhere Paul was to say that he, Paul, is strong in his weakness. Why? Because he is in dialogue with the God's faithfulness. And God's faithfulness never disappoints. He is faithful first and foremost to himself. Therefore, he will bring to completion the work that he has begun in each one of us by his call. This gives us great assurance and confidence: a confidence which rests in God and requires our active and courageous cooperation in the face of the challenges of the present moment. You know, dear young university students, that we cannot live without facing challenges, without responding to challenges. Whoever does not face challenges, whoever does not take up challenges, is not living. Your willingness and your abilities, combined with the power of the Holy Spirit who abides in each of us from the day of Baptism, allow you to be more than mere spectators, they allow you to be protagonists in contemporary events. Please do not watch life go by from the balcony! Mingle where the challenges are calling you to help carry life and development forward, in the struggle over human dignity, in the fight against poverty, in the battle for values and in the many battles we encounter each day.

Many and various are the challenges that you undergraduates are called to face with inner strength and evangelical daring. Strength and daring. The socio-cultural context in which you live is at times weighed down by mediocrity and boredom. We must not resign ourselves to the monotony of daily life; rather we must cultivate projects of a wider breadth and go beyond the ordinary: do not let yourselves be robbed of your youthful enthusiasm! It would be a mistake to allow yourselves to be fettered by weak ways of thinking and by uniform ways of thinking, by the kind of thought that banalizes everything, or by a globalization understood as mere uniformity. To overcome these risks, the model to choose is not the sphere. The model to follow in true globalization — which is good — is not that of the sphere in which every edge is smoothed over and all differences disappear; but rather that of the polyhedron, which presents a multiplicity of facets and respects unity in variety. In defending unity, we also defend diversity. A unity contrary to this would not be human.

Thought, in fact, is fruitful when it is an expression of an open mind, enlightened by truth, which discerns the good and the beautiful. If you do not allow yourselves to be conditioned by prevailing opinions, but rather remain faithful to Christian ethical and religious principles, you will find the courage to go against the tide. In a globalized world, you will be able to contribute to saving particular traits and characteristics, seeking however not to lower your ethical standards. In fact, plurality of thought and individuality reflect the manifold wisdom of God when we draw near to truth with intellectual honesty and rigour, when we draw near to goodness, when we draw near to beauty, in such a way that everyone can be a gift for the benefit of others.

May the commitment to journeying in faith and behaving in a manner consistent with the Gospel accompany you this Advent Season, that you may live the commemoration of the Lord's Birth in an authentic way. The beautiful witness of Pier Giorgio Frassati — a university student like you —

can help you. He said: "To live without faith, without a homeland to defend, without constantly upholding truth in the heat of battle, is not living but simply getting along. We should never just get by, we should live" (cf. *Letter to I. Bonini*, 27.ii.1925).

Thank you, and I wish you a blessed journey toward Bethlehem!