



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO STUDENT MEMBERS OF THE "KNIGHTS"

*Aula Paul VI Audience Hall
Friday, 2 June 2017*

[Multimedia]

Marta:

Dear Pope Francis, my name is Marta. In this period, I am very concerned by the fact that, being in eighth grade, I will no longer see most of my best friends next year and I am afraid of this jump from middle to high school. I am fine the way I am now, with my current friends. Why do I have to change everything? Why does it scare me so much to grow up? I cannot and do not want to imagine my life and everything that will happen to me without those friends whom I love. What should I do? How will I cope later on?

Pope Francis:

Thank you Marta. I will tell you this. Life is a continuous 'hello' and 'goodbye'. Many times, these are small things, but many times it is a 'goodbye' for years or forever. We grow by meeting and by bidding farewell to each other. If you do not learn to take your leave well, you will never learn how to meet new people. What you are talking about here, Marta, is a challenge. It is the challenge of life. It is true, your classmates will not be the same — maybe you will see them, you will talk..., but there are new classmates that you must meet and that is the challenge. And in life, we must get used to this path: leaving something behind and finding new things. And this is also a risk. There are people who are really afraid — you used the word afraid, "I am afraid" — of taking a step, who remain always still, too calm, without growing. When a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, says "enough" and — as the parish priest mentioned — becomes "comfortable on the couch", they do not grow. They close the horizon of life. And here I will use another word.... Do you see that wall: what is behind the wall? Can't you see what is 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 does not want to grow: they have a wall before them, they do not know what is there [on the other side]. But if you go out to the country — think — 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 by looking at horizons, always more, always farther, always forward. And this means meeting new people, encountering new situations. Not forgetting about others, no! There are always beautiful memories and usually one meets old friends, one greets them.... But we always have to journey in order to grow. It is true that you used the word 'afraid': "I am afraid of growing up"; "I am afraid of moving forward... "; but instead, use the word "I have a challenge": "Do I overcome the challenge or do I let the challenge defeat me?". Do you understand? Look at the wall and think about what it's like in the countryside, along the horizon. And this is the choice you have to make. You cannot see behind the wall; you go further with the horizon; the more horizon there is, the more you move forward: the horizon never ends! And we have to grow along the horizon. I don't know if I have explained myself. And I said one word: 'remember' your past friends, all those whom you have to leave in order to take another path. Remember them, call them sometimes, meet up with them.... But live with the new ones and journey with the new ones. And that is how we grow. But you were good! Because you were unable to tell me what lies behind the wall and this is a very good thing, because you can't see behind the wall, and you were able to tell me that when you are in the country and you look to the horizon, you can see everything. Good girl! Let's go on!

Giulia:

Dear Pope Francis, my name is Giulia and I would like to ask you what we young people can do concretely to change somewhat the world that surrounds us, with everything that is happening....

Pope Francis:

We can think about calling a fairy to come with a magic wand and change the world. Can we do this? How do we change the world? Is it possible to change the world? Answer all of you: is it possible?

Children:

"Yes!".

Pope Francis:

Is it easy to change the world?

Children:

"No!".

Pope Francis:

Is it difficult to change the world?

Children:

"Yes!".

Pope Francis:

If it is difficult for grown ups, for people who have studied, for people who have the ability to govern countries, how much more difficult will it be for a young boy and a girl, right? It is difficult. But I would like to ask all of you a question: can you change the world?

Children:

"Yes".

Pope Francis:

You are not very sure, are you? Can you or can't you?

Children:

"Yes!".

Pope Francis:

There, that's better. But how? With the things around you. For example, always, when I meet children — you are a bit bigger, but children — I ask this question: if you have two pieces of candy and a friend comes over, what do you do? Almost everyone says: "I give one to him and one to me". Some don't say this but think: "I will keep them both in my pocket and I will eat them later when he leaves". The first is a positive attitude: 'one for you, one for me'. The other is a selfish attitude, negative: all for me. Look at your hands. Each of you, look at your hands and do this gesture, [he gestures]. Positive gesture: how is the hand? Let us all do it together: *Take it, yes ... let us share.*

Pope Francis:

Negative attitude: How is the hand? Closed [he gestures]. Let us make the gesture. In order to change the world, do we need a closed hand?

Children:

"No!".

Pope Francis:

Which one do we need? Show me.... There it is! Yes, we need the hand open. But the hand is a symbol for the heart. We cannot do this with the heart; it would be difficult.... But it is a symbol for the heart: *an open heart*. You can begin to change the world with an open heart. Next comes another question I ask children. And if you have only one piece of candy and a friend comes, what do you do? It is not easy! The majority answers: "half and half". And is this like so, or like so? [he makes a gesture with his hand] half and half.... And some say: "I will put it in my pocket and I will eat it by myself". What is this like? Like so or like so? [he gestures] Show me.... The world is changed by opening our hearts, listening to others, welcoming others, sharing things. And you can do the same. If you have an acquaintance, a friend, a classmate ... whom you do not like, who is a bit disagreeable — if you go to others to gossip about that person, what is this like: like this or like this? [he gestures] Good job. Instead, if you let it go — "well I don't like him but I will say nothing" — what is this like? Good job. You have understood. Changing the world with small every day things: with generosity, sharing, creating these attitudes of fraternity. If someone insults me and I insult him, what is this like? Instead, if someone insults me and I do not respond, what is this like? Do you understand? Never exchange harm for harm! [the children applaud]. Never. Do you hurt me? What did Jesus teach us about this? Listen: pray for everyone; pray for your friends and also pray for your enemies, for those who make you suffer. Jesus says: "As our Father who is in heaven, make the sun shine on the good and the bad". Yes, pray for everyone. Pray for all and do not wish harm on others. This is how the world can be changed. There is no magic wand, but

there are small everyday things that we must learn. And I have a proposal for you. Discuss this as a group for about half an hour. Small groups, when you are all gathered together. 'If they do this to me, what should I do? If I am faced with this choice, what should I do?' Speak about which things are like so and which are like so [he gestures] with the heart. Thank you for your question.

Tanio:

Dear Pope Francis, my name is Tanio. I was born in Bulgaria and when I was one month old, my parents left me in an orphanage. When I was five years old I was adopted by a new Italian family. After one year, however, my new mother died. I have lived with Dad and my grandparents until now. This year, my grandparents also died. The "Knights" are a gift, a great gift, for me: because they are close to me and they support me in every moment of my life. But this question comes to mind: how can you believe that the Lord loves you when he lets you lose people, or things happen that you would never want?

Pope Francis:

How can we understand that the Lord loves us when he lets you lose people or things that you would never want to lose? Let us think a little all together with our imagination about any children's hospital. How can we think that God loves those children and allows them to become sick, allows them to die, so often? Think about this question: why do children suffer? Why are there children in the world who suffer from hunger and in other parts of the world there is such great waste? Why? You know there are questions — like the one you asked — which cannot be answered with words. Tanio, you asked this question and there are no words to explain this. You will only find some explanation — not to the "*perché*" ["why"], but to the "*para que*" ["for what purpose"] — in the love of those who love you and support you. It is not an explanation for why these things happen, but there are people who accompany you. I tell you sincerely, and you will understand this ... I ask myself in prayer: "why do children suffer?" I usually do so when I go to children's hospitals and then I leave. To tell you the truth, with my — I wouldn't say 'destroyed, but — deeply saddened heart, the Lord does not answer me. I just look to the Crucifix. If God allowed his Son to suffer so for us, there must be something there that makes some sense. However, dear Tanio, I cannot explain the meaning. You will find it later on in life or in the next life. But as for explanations, as one explains a mathematical theory or a historical question, neither I nor anyone can give you any. There are in life — understand this well! — there are some questions and situations which cannot be explained. One of them is the one you have experienced, about your suffering. But behind this, there is always God's love. "And how do you explain this?". It cannot be explained. I cannot explain it. And if someone says to you: "Come, come I will explain it to you", be skeptical. Only those who support you, accompany you and help you grow can make you feel God's love. Thank you for having asked 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 forward. Thank you Tanio.

And embracing some of the pain from the last question, let us turn to our Mom, to our Mom in Heaven, to Mother: She understands pain, as all mothers do, and let us pray together the consecration.

[Prayer of consecration]

Jesus, my Lord and King....

[*Blessing*]

And before we finish, in order to go forward in life, and to have a generous heart, how must the heart be? [Show me] with your hand....

Children:

“Open!”.

Pope Francis:

To go backwards ... to go backwards: how do we go backwards? With the heart how?

Children:

“Closed!”.

Pope Francis:

Closed; and another question: can all, all of life's situations be explained?

Children:

“No!”.

Pope Francis:

I did not understand.... I cannot hear....

Children:

[*louder*] *“No!”*.

Pope Francis:

That's it, onward!

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