

To educate the youth: a challenge of human and Christian growth

Homily at the occasion of the Eurojam closing weekend in Rome, December 6th 2014

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Greeting and introduction

Dear Friends,

I express my cordial greetings to the leaders of the Guides and Scouts of Europe, gathered in this Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Divine Love which is so dear to the Romans, in order to review the Eurojam 2014 and to outline an agenda for the future. I gladly join your common thanksgiving in this Eucharist: once again the Lord has richly blessed this event which was so important for our youth. At the same time, I take this opportunity to pay my debt towards you, because I would like to beg your pardon for having cancelled my participation in your celebration last Summer... I am glad to be with you finally and to express to you – in the name of the Church – my sincere gratitude for your loyal and fruitful commitment to the human and Christian formation of the younger generations. In our days characterised by a great educational crisis, this is an extremely urgent mission.

Homily

To educate the youth: a challenge of human and Christian growth

1. One day – as Saint Matthew tells us – when Jesus “saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9, 36). Reading this sentence, our thinking turns spontaneously to the world of youth today. Isn't it exactly a description of our youth? How many of them are tired, confused, misled, without any hope! Young left alone, without any guide and without any leader... The world of youth is an extremely sensitive seismograph for the situation of our surrounding world, lacerated by many deep crises: economic, financial, but above all, anthropological – a crisis of values, of the meaning of life, of hope, of education... We are living in a “liquefied” world, without certainties, deprived of any reference point on which to build one's life... How many young without any future, “rejected” by a culture where power, money and the rule of the stronger are the only things that matter! How sad it is to see the young today, discouraged and resigned, who “seek happiness solely in possessing material things and in satisfying their fleeting emotions”¹, young who are an easy prey for delinquency and destructive addictions such as drugs and sex. Newspapers are talking about a “whole lost generation”. But a society losing its young generation is a society without a future! During the World Youth Day in Rio

¹ Pope Francis, Divine Liturgy in the Patriarchal Church St. George in Istanbul, Sunday 30 November 2014. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141130_divina-liturgia-turchia.html (22.12.2014).

de Janeiro, Pope Francis said that the youth is the window through which the future is making itself present... but what future?

The crop is certainly rich in this huge field of contemporary youth – as Jesus said – but the workers are not very numerous... The young have an urgent need of “shepherds”, “pastors”, that is to say reliable guides, real leaders, true educators... Unfortunately, our world suffers from a great lack of such people! How many leaders, teachers and even parents are giving up their call as educators! We are living in a world marked by a deep educational crisis which is making the transmission of fundamental values and of basic rules for social life extremely difficult... Deprived from real leaders, the young don’t grow in humanity – or better, they don’t want to grow and to mature and we have eternal teenagers! This is an important challenge we are expecting – as society and as Church – at the threshold of the third millennium: the educational challenge!

St. Matthew writes also that Jesus, when he saw the crowds, “had compassion on them” and this is how he invites us all – youth trainers and educators – to enter into the Christ’s “compassion”... This “compassion” is the fundamental attitude which should give life to all our educational programmes, our choices and our way of relating to youth... This is the heart of our call and of our mission as educators.

2. A few days ago, Pope Francis said during his speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg: “Young people today are asking for a suitable and complete education which can enable them to look to the future with hope instead of disenchantment.”² In order to challenge deeply the educational crisis, we need today educators who are driven by new educative momentum and courage! What kind of educators are we exactly talking about?

The young need above all *educators who are witnesses* of a mature and beautiful humanity; witnesses of a faith lived in plenitude. From this point of view, the young are extremely demanding and they don’t forgive adults for all their kinds of inconsistency, duplicity and hypocrisy. Training the youth is, thus, a very laborious vocation demanding a permanent conversion of one’s own heart. Let’s remember the words of blessed Pope Paul VI: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”.³

The young also need “concerned” educators. Pope Francis insists a lot on this aspect. To be an educator of youth means to never be satisfied and to never seal oneself up in one’s group. We rather have to look always further, to the peripheries also inhabited by young, “rejected” by the world... A real educator doesn’t wait for the young to come to him, but he himself goes to look for them, without getting discouraged, without abdicating. A “concerned” educator doesn’t accept the easy rule of “we have always done it like this”... He constantly looks for new ways, ever new and more efficient languages and manners of communicating the joy and the beauty of the Gospel to the young.

The young also need *educators who sow hope and joy*. A good educator trusts the young he is accompanying. He knows that all of them, even the one who is deeply hurt by the sin of themselves, have in themselves the seed of the authentic good wherefrom a new beginning is always possible... As Prophet Isaiah says: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out” (Is 42, 3). On the contrary, he bears an infectious joy, according to the words of Pope Francis:

² Pope Francis, Speech at the European Parliament in Strasbourg on Tuesday 25 November 2014. https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html (22.12.2014).

³ PAUL VI, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 41. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html (22.12.2014).

“And may the world of our time (above all, the world of the youth) [...] be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ”⁴. At the same time, a good educator can also be demanding, he has the courage to offer the young to go along with their pre-set goals... Because young like being tested and they don't want us to say always “yes” to them.

Indeed, today's crop of the young generations is plentiful and – as Jesus tells us – there are only few workers. In this Eucharist where we are thanking the Lord for the gift of the last Eurojam 2014, let us raise up to God our supplication, so that he sends us workers for his crop, good educators – *witnesses, “concerned” and full of joy and hope* – among the young of our time.

⁴ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 10.

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#II.%E2%80%82The delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#II.%E2%80%82The%20delightful%20and%20comforting%20joy%20of%20evangelizing) (22.12.2014).