The Holy See

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ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE COMMUNITY OF CHRISTIAN LIFE (CVX) - MISSIONARY STUDENTS' LEAGUE OF ITALY

Paul VI Audience Hall
Thursday, 30 April 2015

[Multimedia]

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS POSED BY ITALIAN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COMMUNITY OF CHRISTIANS LIFE

Paola asked the first question. After describing her experience serving in a prison in Reggio Calabria, she asked the Pope how to speak about hope to those serving life sentences and how those called to be close to them can refine their consciences.

Paola, I wrote down your two questions — there are two of them! You know that I like to say — it's just a saying but it is the truth of the Gospel — that we must go forth to the peripheries. To go forth and head for the periphery of divine transcendence in prayer, always to go forth. Prison is one of the harshest peripheries, one with the most pain. To go to a prison means first of all to say to yourself: "If I am not here, like this woman, like this man, it is only by the grace of God". The pure grace of God. If we did not slip into making these mistakes, offences or crimes, some of them grave, it is because the Lord held us by the hand. You can't enter a prison with the spirit of "I come here to tell you about God, because, forgive me, you are an inferior class, you are a sinner...". No, no! I am a bigger sinner than you are, and this is the first step. In prison one can say it with great courage; and we must always say it. When we go to preach Jesus Christ to people who do not know him or who do not live a life that seems morally correct, think about how I sin more than he does, it is by the grace of God that I have not fallen in that situation. This is the indispensable condition. We cannot go out to the peripheries without this awareness. Paul, Paul had this awareness. He says that he is the greatest of sinners. He also says something very ugly about

himself: “I am untimely born” (cf. 1 Cor 15:8). But this is in the Bible, it is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit! It is not — as they say — putting on a holy face of the saints. The saints felt like sinners because they understood this! And the grace of the Lord sustains us. If you, if I, if each one of you does not have this awareness it’s impossible to carry out Jesus' mandate, Jesus' mission: “Go to the ends of the earth, to all nations, to all margins” (cf. Mt 28:19). And who are those who are incapable of receiving this? Closed people, doctors, those doctors of the law, those closed people who did not accept Jesus, did not accept his message to go forth. They seemed just, they seemed like people of the Church, but Jesus uses a word that is not very nice: “Hypocrites”. This is what Jesus calls them. And in order to help us understand what they are like, the image Jesus makes out of them is this: “You are like whitewashed tombs” (cf. Mt 23:27). The one who is closed cannot receive, he is incapable of receiving the courage of the Holy Spirit, and remains closed and unable to go to the periphery. You ask the Lord to remain open to the voice of the Holy Spirit, to go to this periphery. Then tomorrow, maybe he will ask you to go to another, you don’t know.... But it is always the Lord who sends us. And in prison always say this, even with the many people who are suffering: why is this person suffering and not me? Why doesn’t this person know God? Why doesn’t he hope in eternal life? He thinks everything ends here, and I do not. Why is this person accused in court, why is he corrupt... and not I? By the grace of the Lord! This is the most beautiful preparation for going out to the margins.

Then, you say: “What hope am I speaking about with these people in prison?”. Many are condemned to death... No, in Italy, there is no death penalty, but there are life sentences.... A life sentence is a death sentence, because one knows that they will never be released. It’s hard. What do I say to this man? What do I say to this woman? Maybe... say nothing. Take them by the hand, embrace them, cry with him, cry with her... Thus, have the same feelings as Jesus Christ. Approach the heart that suffers. We can often say nothing, nothing, because a word would be an offence. Only gestures. Gestures that show love. “You are a lifer, here, but I share with you this piece of life in prison”. That sharing with love, nothing more. This is sowing love.

And then you put your finger on it: “How to sharpen our consciences, so that being with the suffering is not for us mere charity, but that it converts our hearts and makes us capable of fighting bravely for a more just world?”. Charity is a small step: Are you hungry? — Yes — I will give you something to eat today. Charity is the first step towards helping others advance. And this is not easy. How do we advance hungry children? How do we promote them... we are speaking about children now: how do we help children without education move forward? How do we promote children who don't know how to laugh and who, if you caress them, will slap you because in their home they see the father slap their mother? How do we foster them? How do we advance people who have lost their jobs, how do we accompany and promote, helping them make their way? For without work a person feels like he or she has no dignity. Yes, it’s good to bring them something to eat. But dignity lies in when *he* or *she* can bring food to their own home: this gives dignity! This is promotion — the president spoke about it [referring to the community’s president who spoke before]: you do so many things.... One difference between habit-like charity — I don’t mean the

kind of charity that helps people out of very serious hardship — but habitual charity and *promotion* is that habitual charity eases one's mind: "Today I gave people food, now I will go peacefully to sleep". Promotion makes your soul restless. "I must do more... and tomorrow this, and the day after that, and what I'll do is...". That healthy restlessness of the Holy Spirit.

This is what I would like to tell you. May it not be mere charity for us but that it convert our hearts. And this restlessness that the Holy Spirit gives you to find ways to help, promote your brothers and sisters, this unites you to Jesus Christ: this is penitence, this is the cross, and this is joy. A great, great, great joy that the Holy Spirit gives you when you give this. I don't know if this helps you, what I said.... For, when they ask me these things, the risk — even for the Pope — is to believe that one has the answer to all things... But the only one who can answer every question is the Lord. My work is simply to listen and to say what comes from within. But its very insufficient and very little.

Tiziana from Cagliari spoke to the Pontiff about how young people today are susceptible to losing hope. She asked his help in understanding that God never abandons us.

To young people I like to say: "Do not let yourselves be robbed of hope". But your question goes further: "What hope are you talking about, Father?". Some may think that hope is for a life of comfort, a tranquil life, obtaining something.... It is a controlled hope, a hope that fits nicely into a laboratory. But if you dwell in life and work in life, with its many problems, with the overwhelming skepticism that life offers you, with its many failures, "what hope are you speaking about, father?". Yes, I can tell you: "we are all going to heaven". Yes, it's true. The Lord is good. But I want a better world, and I am fragile, and I don't see how this can be done. I want to "get involved", for example in politics or in medicine... but sometimes I find corruption there and jobs that were meant to *serve* become *business*. I want to "get involved" in the Church, and there too the devil sows seeds of corruption and there frequently is.... I remember that *Via Crucis* of Pope Benedict XVI, when he invited us to drive out filth from the Church.... In the Church too there is corruption. There is always something that disappoints.... But the *real* hope is a gift from God, it is a present, and it never disappoints. But how do we understand that God never abandons us, that God is with us, that he is walking with us? Today, at the start of Mass, the Psalm we recited was very beautiful, so beautiful: "O God, when thou didst go forth before thy people, when thou didst battle at our side, the earth quaked and the heavens poured" (cf. Ps 68:7-8). Yes. But this is not always evident. It is just something of which I am sure — I am sure of it, but I don't always feel it, yet I am sure: God walks with his people. God never abandons his people. He is the shepherd of his people. But when I commit a sin, when I make a mistake, when I do something unjust, when I see many things, I ask: "Lord, where are you? Where are you?". Today, many innocents are dying: where are you, Lord? Can something be done? Hope is one of the most difficult virtues to understand, and some great people — I think it was Péguy, one of those who said that it was the most humble of virtues, hope, because it is the virtue of the humble. One needs to lower himself so that the Lord may give it to him, so that the Lord will grant it. It is He who sustains us. But tell me: what kind of

hope can you have from a natural point of view, let us think of a hospital: a sister spends 40 years of her life in the terminal illness ward, and every day one, then another and another and another... Yes, I believe in God, but the love that woman gives always finishes, finishes, finishes.... and at a certain point that woman could say to God: “But is this the world you made? Can something be hoped for from you?”. The temptation, when we are undergoing hardship, when we see the brutality that occurs in the world, hope seems to fall away. But in the heart of the humble it remains. This is hard to understand because your question is very profound. How do we not leave the fight and live the good life, as we are, without hope, it's much easier... Service is the work of the humble, today we have heard it in the Gospel. Jesus came to serve, not to be served. And hope is the virtue of the humble. I believe that this could be the way. I tell you with sincerity: nothing else comes to my mind to say. Humility and service: these two things guard the *little* hope, the most humble virtue, but the one that life gives you.

Fr Bartolo — a diocesan priest, formator and professor at the interregional seminary in Campania run by Jesuits — asked what specific contribution can an Ignatian movement make to the Christian formation of pastoral workers and to the education of and engagement with the youth?

The President mentioned an Ignatian motto: “Contemplative in action”. To be contemplative in action is not to walk through life looking up at the sky, because you will fall in a hole certainly!... One needs to understand what contemplation means. You said something, a word that struck me: I touched with my hand the wounds of the Lord in the poverty of the people of our time. And this I believe to be one of the best remedies for the malady that plagues us: indifference. As well as skepticism: to believe that nothing can be done. The patron of the indifferent and of skeptics is Thomas: Thomas had to touch the wounds. There is a beautiful discourse, a tremendously beautiful meditation by St Bernard on the wounds of the Lord. You are a priest, you can find it in the Third Week of Lent, in the Office of Readings, I don’t remember which day. To enter into the wounds of the Lord: we serve a Lord wounded by love; the hands of our God are hands wounded by love. To be capable of entering in…. And again Bernard continues: “Be trusting: enter into the wound at his side and you will contemplate the love of that heart”. The wounds of humanity, if you approach them, if you touch them — and this is Catholic teaching — you touch the wounded Lord. This you will find in Matthew 25… so I’m not a heretic by saying this. When you touch the wounds of the Lord, you understand a little more about the mystery of Christ, of God Incarnate. This precisely is Ignatius’ message, in spirituality: a spirituality where at the centre is Jesus Christ, not institutions, not people, no. Jesus Christ. Christ Incarnate! And when you do the Spiritual Exercises, he tells you that seeing the Lord who suffers, the wounds of the Lord, strains you to tears, to feel pain. And the Ignatian spirituality gives your Movement this path, offers you this road: to enter into the heart of God through the wounds of Jesus Christ. Christ wounded in the hungry, in the ignorant, in the discarded, in the elderly all alone, in the sick, in the imprisoned, in the insane… He is there. And what is the biggest mistake any one of you could make? You might be speaking about God, finding God, encountering God… but what it is just a god, a “god-spray”, a common god, an ethereal god… Ignatius wanted you to encounter Jesus Christ, the Lord, who

loves you and gave his life for you, wounded for your sin, for my sin, for all people… And the wounds of the Lord are everywhere. In exactly what you said lies the key. We can speak a lot about theology, a lot… good things, speak about God… but the way is being able to contemplate Jesus Christ, to read the Gospel, what Jesus Christ did: It's He, the Lord! Fall in love with Jesus Christ and say to Jesus Christ that you choose to follow Him, to be like Him. And this is done through prayer and touching the wounds of the Lord. You will never know Jesus Christ if you don't touch his injuries, his wounds. He was wounded for us. This is the way, it is the way which the Ignatian spirituality offers to all of us: the journey... And I'll go a little further still: you are a formator of future priests. Please, if you see an intelligent boy, good but lacking in the experience of touching, embracing and loving the wounded Lord, advise him to go take a nice vacation for a year or two... and you will do him good. "But, Father, we priests are so few: we need them...". Please, don't let the illusion of quantity deceive us and cause us to lose sight of quality! We need priests who pray. And who pray to Jesus Christ, who challenge Jesus Christ for their people, as Moses who had the audacity to challenge God and save the very people God wanted to destroy, what bravery before God; priests who also have the courage to suffer, to bear the solitude and to give great love. Bernard's discourse on the wounds of the Lord holds for them too. Do you understand? Thank you.

Gianni asked about discernment in Ignatian spirituality as an aid to maintaining the relationship between faith in Jesus Christ and responsibility to build a more just and solid society.

I believe Fr Bartolomeo Sorge would do a much better job at answering the question than I — I don't know if he is here, no, I didn't see him. He's very good! He is a Jesuit who paved the way in this field of politics. One might say: "We ought to start a Catholic party!". This is not the way. The Church is a community of Christians who worship the Father, follow the path of the Son and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It's not a political party. "No, let's not say party … a party only for Catholics". It serves nothing, and won't have the ability to engage, because it will be doing what it was not called to do. "But can a Catholic engage in politics?" — "She must!" — "But can a Catholic make a difference in politics?" — "He must!". Blessed Paul VI, if I'm not mistaken, said that politics is one of the highest forms of charity, because it seeks the common good. "But Father, politics is not easy, because in this corrupt world... in the end you cant get anywhere...". What do you want to say, that engaging in politics is a little like martyrdom? Yes. It is a kind of martyrdom. But it is a daily martyrdom: seeking the common good without letting yourself be corrupted. Seek the common good by thinking of the most fitting ways for this, the most fitting means. Seek the common good by working for the little things, the small ones, it gives little return... but one does it. Politics is important: small politics and big politics. In the Church there are many Catholics who engaged in clean healthy politics; and those who have fostered peace among Nations. Think of the Catholics here, in Italy, after the war: think of De Gasperi. Think of France: Schumann, who has a cause for beatification. One can become a saint through politics. And I don't want to name more: two examples of those who pursued the common good are enough. Engaging in politics is martyrdom: truly a martyr's work, because one needs to go the whole day with that ideal, every

day, with the ideal of building the common good. And always carrying the cross of many failures and carrying the cross of many sins. Because in the world it's difficult to do good in a society without getting your hands or your heart a a little dirty; but that is why you go ask for forgiveness, you ask for pardon and continue to do it. Don't allow this discourage you. "No, Father, I don't do politics because I don't want to sin" — "That's not good! Go forward, ask the Lord to help you not to sin, but if you do get your hands dirty, ask forgiveness and go forward!". But do it, do it...

And fight for a more just and supportive society. What is the solution for politics that this globalized world offers us today? Simple: money is the core. Not men and women, no. Money. The god of money. This is the core. Everyone is at the service of god of money. But that is why what doesn't serve the god of money is thrown away. And what the globalized world today offers us is a throw-away culture: what is useless is thrown away. Children are thrown away, because people are not having children or because they are killed before they are born. The elderly are thrown away, because... old people are useless... and now whoever doesn't have a job goes and looks for his grandparents because their pension might help! But they are useful momentarily. The elderly are thrown away, abandoned. And now, work must diminish because the god of money can't do everything, and so young people are thrown away. Here in Italy 40-41% of young people 25 and under — I don't want to make a mistake, correct me — are unemployed. They are thrown away... But this is the path of destruction. Do I, a Catholic, watch from the balcony? You can't watch from the balcony! Get involved! Give it your best. If the Lord calls you to this vocation, get to it, engage in politics. It will make you suffer, it may be an occasion for sin, but the Lord is with you. Ask forgiveness and go forward. Let's not let this throw-away culture throw us all away! It throws away creation too, because creation is being destroyed more and more every day.

Do not forget what Blessed Paul VI said: politics is one of the highest forms of charity. I don't know if I answered [your question]...

I wrote an address... maybe it's boring, like all addresses; but I will consign it, because I preferred this dialogue...

[Then the Pope recited with the whole Assembly a Prayer to Our Lady of the Way]

And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

ADDRESS CONSIGNED BY THE HOLY FATHER

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I greet all of you, representing the *Community of Christian Life* in Italy, and the leaders of various groups of Ignatian spirituality, those close to your tradition of formation and committed to evangelization and human promotion. A special greeting goes to the students and former students of the “Massimo” Institute of Rome, as well as to representatives of other schools run by Jesuits in Italy.

I know your community well because I was a chaplain in Argentina, at the end of the 70s. Your roots are found in the Marian Congregations, which date back to the first generation of the companions of St Ignatius of Loyola. A long path has distinguished the Association throughout the world because of the intense spiritual life and apostolic zeal of its members, and it anticipated, in certain ways, the dictates of the Second Vatican Council concerning the role and service of the lay faithful in the Church. In line with this perspective, you chose as the theme of your gathering, which takes as its title “Beyond the walls”.

Today I would like to offer you some guidelines for your spiritual and communal journey.

First: commitment to spreading a *culture of justice and peace*. In the face of a culture of lawlessness, corruption and conflict, you are called to dedicate yourselves to the common good, also through the service to people called politics. This, as Blessed Paul VI affirms, “is the highest and most effective form of charity”. If Christians were to disengage in their direct involvement in politics, it would betray the mission of lay faithful, called to be salt and light in the world always in this kind of presence.

Second, the apostolic priority directs you towards *pastoral care* of the family, in the line of deepening upon the last Synod of Bishops. I encourage you to help diocesan communities in caring for the family, the vital cell of society, and in accompanying engaged couples toward marriage. At the same time, you can collaborate in welcoming those who are, so to speak, “distant”: among them there are many separated persons, suffering from the failure of their plan for married life, as well as other situations of family unrest, which can make even the journey of faith and the life of the Church tiresome.

The third line that I suggest to you is *missionary life*. I was pleased to learn that you have embarked on a common journey with the “Lega Missionaria Studenti”, which led you down the paths of the world to encounter with the poor and with the communities that are in the greatest need for pastoral workers. I encourage you to maintain this capacity to go forth and move toward the most needy frontiers of humanity. Today you have invited delegations of members of your communities present in your sister countries, especially Syria and Lebanon: people martyred by terrible wars. To them I renew my affection and my solidarity. These people are experiencing the hour of the cross, therefore, let us allow them to feel the love, the closeness and the support of the

whole of the Church. May your bond of solidarity with them confirm your vocation to build bridges of peace everywhere.

May your style of brotherhood, which you are undertaking in projects of welcoming of migrants in Sicily, make you generous in educating the young, both within your association and in schools. St Ignatius understood that it was essential to begin with youth in order to renew society and thus he encouraged the opening of schools. And from there the first Marian Congregations were born. In the wake of this bright and fruitful apostolic style, you too can be active in the various education institutions, Catholic and state, present in Italy, as you already do in many parts of the world. May there always be the joy of Gospel witness, together with a delicate approach and respect for others at the heart of your pastoral work.

May the Virgin Mary, who with her fiat inspired your founders, enable you to respond without hesitation to the vocation of being “the light and salt” in the fields where you live and work. May my heartfelt blessing that I impart to you and your families accompany you. Please, do not forget to pray for me.

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