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MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

Lokomotiva Stadium in Košice
Tuesday, 14 September 2021

[Multimedia]

Dear young people, dear brothers and sisters, *dobrý večer!* [good evening!]

I was pleased to listen to Archbishop Bernard's words, and to your testimonies and questions. The questions were three, and I would now like to try, with you, to come up with some answers to them.

Let me start with Peter and Zuzka, and your question about love between two people. Love is our greatest dream in life, but it does not come cheap. Like all great things in life, love is magnificent, but not easy. It is our greatest dream, but not easy to explain. I will steal your words. You said: "We began to look at this gift with totally new eyes". You are right: we need to have new eyes, eyes that are not taken in by appearances. Dear friends, let us not trivialize love, because love is not simply an emotion or feeling, even though it may start that way. Love is not about having *everything now*; it is not part of today's *throwaway culture*. Love is fidelity, gift and responsibility.

Today, being really original and revolutionary means rebelling against the culture of the

ephemeral, going beyond shallow instincts and momentary pleasures, and choosing to love with every fibre of your being, for the rest of your life. We were not put here just to make do, but to make something of our lives. If you think about some of the great stories you read in novels, or see in unforgettable movies or hear in some moving tale, there are always two things that go together. One is love, and the other is adventure, heroism. They always go together. For our life to be great, we need love and heroism alike. If we look to the crucified Jesus, we find both boundless love and the courage to give one's life to the utmost, without half-measures. We also have before us Blessed Anna (Kolesárová), a heroine of love. She tells us to aim high. Please, don't let your lives just pass by like so many episodes in a soap opera.

And when you dream of love, don't go looking for special effects, but realize that each of you is special, each of you. Every one of us is a gift and we can make our own lives a gift. Other people await you: your communities, the poor... Dream of a beauty that goes beyond appearances, beyond cosmetic impressions, beyond the fads of the moment. Dream fearlessly of creating a family, having children and raising them well, spending your life in sharing everything with another person. Don't be ashamed of your faults and flaws, for there is someone out there ready to accept and love them, someone who will love you just as you are. This is what love means: loving someone as he or she is, and this is beautiful. Our dreams reveal the kind of life we want. Great dreams are not about powerful cars, fashionable clothes or wild vacations. Give no heed to those who appeal to dreams but instead peddle illusions. Dreaming is one thing; having illusions is another. Those who peddle illusions by speaking about dreams use happiness as a ploy for something else. We were created for a joy that is much greater. Each of us is unique. We were put in this world to be loved for who we are, and to love others in our own unique and special way. Life is not a game, where we can sit on the bench, waiting to be called. No, each of us is unique in God's eyes. So never let yourselves be "homogenized", or turned into a nameless piece on an assembly line. None of us is "standard issue"; instead, we are unique, free and alive, called to live a love story with God, to make bold and firm decisions, to accept the marvelous risk of loving. So I ask you: Do you believe this? Is this your dream?

I would like to give you another bit of advice. For love to be fruitful, don't forget your *roots*. What are your roots? Surely, they are your parents and especially your grandparents. Take heed: your grandparents. They prepared the soil in which you have grown. Cultivate your roots, visit your grandparents; it will do you good. Ask them questions, take time to listen to their stories. Today, there is a danger of growing up rootless, because we feel we always have to be on the go, to do everything in a hurry. What we see on the internet immediately enters our homes; just one click and people and things pop up on our screen. Those faces can end up becoming more familiar than those of our own families. Bombarded by virtual messages, we risk losing our real roots. To grow disconnected from life, or to fantasize in a void, is not a good thing; it is a temptation from the evil one. God wants us to be firmly grounded, *connected to life*. Never closed, but always open to others! Grounded and open. Understood? Grounded and open.

Yes, but you are going to tell me that the world thinks otherwise. We talk a lot about love, but we see another principle at work: *people are only concerned about themselves*. Dear young friends, don't let this affect you; don't be disheartened by the things that are not right, by the evil all around us. Don't be dismayed or yield to those who tell you that nothing will ever change. Once you start believing that, you will soon yield to pessimism. Have you seen the face of a pessimistic young person? Have you seen what kind of face he or she has? An embittered face, a disappointed one. Pessimism makes us sick with bitterness, it ages us from within; your youth will quickly grow old. Today, there are so many disruptive forces, so many people ready to blame everyone and everything, spreaders of negativity, professional complainers. Pay no attention to them, no, for pessimism and complaining are not Christian. The Lord detests glumness and victimhood. We were not made to be downcast, but to look up to heaven, to others, to society.

But when we do feel downcast – because at certain moments in life everyone is a little downcast, we all know what this feels like – when we do feel downcast, what are we to do? There is one infallible remedy that can put us back on our feet. Petra, it is what you said: go to Confession. Did you hear Petra's words? The remedy of Confession. You asked me how young people can overcome obstacles on the path to God's mercy. Here too it is a matter of how we see things, of looking to what really matters. If I were to ask all of you what you think about when you go to Confession – don't answer out loud – I am quite sure your answer will be "our sins". But let me ask you, and please answer me, are sins really the centre of Confession? Does God want you to approach him thinking just about yourself and your sins; or about him? What does God want? That you approach him thinking about him or about your sins? What does he want? What is central, our sins or the Father who forgives everything? It is the Father. We do not go to confession to be punished and humiliated, but as children who run towards the Father's loving arms. And the Father lifts us up in every situation, he forgives all our sins. Listen well to this: God always forgives! Understood? God always forgives!

I will give you a little piece of advice: after each Confession, sit still for a few moments in order to remember the forgiveness you received. Hold on to that peace in your heart, that inner freedom you are feeling; not your sins, which no longer exist, but the forgiveness that God has granted you, the caress of God the Father. Just hold on to that; don't let it fade. The next time you go to confession, think: I am going to receive again the embrace that did me so much good. I am not going to stand before a judge, but before Jesus, who loves us and heals us. Now I would like to give some advice to priests: priests should feel that they take the place of God the Father who always forgives, embraces and welcomes. In Confession, let us give God first place. Once he is in charge, everything becomes beautiful and Confession becomes the *sacrament of joy*. Yes, joy; not fear and judgement but joy. It is also important for priests to be merciful. Never curious or inquisitorial, but acting as brothers who convey the Father's forgiveness, brothers who accompany others in this embrace of the Father.

Someone might say, "But I am ashamed, I can't get over the embarrassment of going to

confession". This is not a problem; in fact, feeling ashamed is a good thing. In life, feeling ashamed sometimes does you good, because it means you are not happy about what you did. Feeling ashamed is a good sign, but like any other sign, it points to the road we need to follow. Don't let shame imprison you, because God is never ashamed of you. He loves you in the very place where you feel ashamed. And he loves you always. I will tell you something not in my original text: in my country, we call those brazen individuals who do all the wrong things "shameless".

One last thing. You may say: "But Father, I can't forgive myself, so how can God forgive me if I am always falling into the same sins?" Listen, is God ever offended? Is he offended if you go to him and ask for forgiveness? No! Never. God suffers when we think that he can't forgive us, because that is like us telling him: "Your love is not strong enough!" Saying to God, "Your love is not strong enough" is not good! Instead, God rejoices in forgiving us, time and time again. Whenever he picks us up, he believes in us as if it were the first time. He never grows discouraged. We are the ones who get discouraged, not he. He does not label us as sinners: he sees us as children to be loved. He does not see us as lost causes, but as beloved and hurting children; and then he feels all the more compassion and tenderness. So never forget, whenever we go to confession, there is a party in heaven. May it also be so on earth!

Finally, Peter and Lenka, you experienced the cross in your lives. Thank you for your testimony. You asked how young people can be encouraged not to be afraid to embrace the cross. *To embrace*: that is a fine verb. Embracing helps us overcome fear. Whenever someone embraces us, we regain confidence in ourselves and also in life. So let us allow ourselves to be embraced by Jesus. Because when we embrace Jesus we once more embrace hope. We cannot embrace the cross all by ourselves; pain, in and of itself, saves no one. It is love that transforms pain. So let us embrace the cross, always *with* Jesus and never alone! When we embrace Jesus, *joy is reborn*. And the joy of Jesus helps us find peace, even in the midst of sorrow. More than anything, dear young people, I want this joy for you. I want you to bring it to your friends. *Not sermons*, but joy. Bring joy! Not words, but smiles and fraternal closeness. Thank you for listening! Let me ask you one last thing: do not forget to pray for me. *Ďakujem!* [Thank you!]

Now let us all stand and pray to God who loves us. Let us pray the Our Father.