
Pope at audience: “Let us not forget Ukraine.”

“The children who were with me in the Popemobile were Ukrainian children”, the Pope said in his closing remarks at the end of the Wednesday General Audience, before the special greetings to the Italian-speaking faithful. Yet again, the Pope reiterated his solidarity with the Ukrainian people in an appeal:

“Let us not forget Ukraine. Let us not forget the suffering of that martyred people!” Francis said.

The three Ukrainian children aboard the popemobile – the Vatican press office made known in a statement – are pupils at Rome’s primary school Alberto Cadlolo, where they are continuing their studies. Before greeting the Italian-speaking faithful, Francis expressed his “sympathy to the dear Afghan people” hit by a devastating earthquake and his “sorrow and dismay” at the killing of two Jesuit priests in Mexico together with a layman. Fr Javier Campos Morales and Fr Joaquin Cesar Mora Salazar, were slain while attempting to defend a man seeking refuge in the Cerocahui community church, chased by a gunman. “How many killings there are in Mexico!”, Francis said: “With affection and prayer, I am close to the Catholic community affected by this tragedy. Once again, I repeat that violence does not solve problems, but increases unnecessary suffering.” Upon learning of the savage killings, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus said he was “shocked and saddened by this news.” “My thoughts and prayers are with the Jesuits in Mexico and the families of the men - he declared in a statement - We have to stop violence in our world and so much unnecessary suffering.”

“To follow Jesus always, on your feet, running, going slowly, in a wheelchair... but always following Him,

is the message at the heart of the catechesis on old age, with a focus on the dialogue between the risen Jesus and Peter at the end of John’s Gospel. “When you were young you were self-sufficient, when you are old you will no longer be so much the master of yourself and your life”, is Jesus’ warning to Peter. “**Tell me I have to go in a wheelchair, eh?**” is Francis’ comment. “But that’s how it is, that’s life. With old age you get all these illnesses and we have to accept them as they come. We don’t have the strength of youth!”, The Pope said. In this respect, His Holiness mentioned a passage from St Ignatius of Loyola that says: “Just as in life, so also in death we must bear witness as disciples of Jesus.” “The end of life must be an end of life of disciples: of disciples of Jesus, whom the Lord always speaks to us according to our age.” “Your sequela [following in my footsteps] will have to learn to allow itself to be instructed and moulded by your frailty, your helplessness, your dependence on others, even in getting dressed, in walking.” Francis reminded the faithful that “the following of Jesus is always going forward, in good health, in not so good health; self-sufficient, without physical self-sufficiency.” “**I like talking to the elderly, looking into their eyes: they have those bright eyes, those eyes that speak to you more than words, the witness of a life**”, Francis said: “And this is beautiful, we must preserve it until the end. Thus to follow Jesus: full of life.” “From our frailty we learn to express the consistency of our witness of life in the conditions of a life largely entrusted to others, largely dependent on the initiative of others”, the Pope said with regard to the elderly. “With sickness, with old age, dependence grows and we are no longer as self-dependent as before; this grows and there too faith matures, there too Jesus is with us, there too that richness of the faith well lived on the road of life springs forth”, he remarked. “It’s not easy to move away from being the protagonists of our lives”, Francis said. “This new time is also certainly a time of trial – beginning with the temptation – very human, undoubtedly, but also very insidious – to preserve our protagonism.” “And at times the protagonist has to diminish, has to lower himself”, he pointed

out: “you must accept that old age reduces you as protagonist. But you will have another way of expressing yourself, another way of participating in the family, in society, in the group of friends.” It is therefore necessary to say “No” to giving in to what even Peter was tempted by, namely the temptation of “sticking your nose in other people’s lives.” “To follow Jesus: in life and in death, in health and in sickness, in life when it is prosperous with many successes, and in life when it is difficult, in many bad moments of failing.”

“We old people should not be envious of young people who take their path, who occupy our place, who outlive us”,

is the Pope’s recommendation. **“Learning to take leave: this is the wisdom of the elderly”**, is Francis’ counsel. Yet, he added, it is important to “say farewell well - carefully, with a smile, to take one’s leave in society, to take one’s leave with others. The life of the elderly is a farewell, slow, slow, but a joyful farewell: I have lived life, I have kept my faith. This is beautiful, when an elderly person can say, ‘I have lived life, this is my family; I have lived life, I was a sinner but I have also done good.’ And this peace that comes, this is the farewell of the elder.” In his closing remarks the Pope called on the faithful: “Let us look to the elderly, let us look upon them, and let us help them so that they may live and express their wisdom of life, that they may give us what is beautiful and good in them.” “And we elders, let us look at the young, and always with a smile, at the young: they will follow the path, they will carry forward what we have sown. An elderly person cannot be happy without extending their gaze to the young, and the young cannot get on in life without extending their gaze to the elderly.”

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