
Pope at audience: “Sadness works like a traffic light that is indispensable for our health”

Pope Francis concluded today's general audience with an appeal to pray for the Democratic Republic of Congo and for "tormented Ukraine": "May the Lord protect that people and lead us all onto the path of lasting peace." Francis chose desolation as the subject of his catechesis - the first affective mode of discernment that Saint Ignatius of Loyola defined as follows: "Darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of different agitations and temptations, moving to want of confidence, without hope, without love, when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad and as if separated from his Creator and Lord." "We all have experience of this. I believe that, in one way or another, we all have experienced of this, of desolation. The problem is how to interpret it, because it too has something important to tell us, and if we are in a hurry to free ourselves of it, we risk losing this." **"No-one wants to be desolate, sad: this is true"**, is Francis' analysis: "We would all like a life that is always joyful, cheerful and fulfilled. Yet, besides not being possible – because it is not possible – this would not be good for us either. Indeed, the change from a life oriented towards vice can start from a situation of sadness, of remorse for what one has done. The etymology of this word, "remorse", is very beautiful: the remorse of the conscience, we all know this: literally, it is the conscience that bites", the Pope said, taking as an example a quote from **Alessandro Manzoni's** *The Betrothed*, "which gave us a wonderful description of remorse as an opportunity to change one's life", in the famous dialogue between Cardinal Federico Borromeo and the Unnamed. "God touches the heart, and something comes to you inwardly", Francis commented off text: "sadness, remorse for something, and it is an invitation to set out on a new path." That's why "it is important to learn how to read sadness.", which "in our time is mostly considered negatively, as an ill to avoid at all costs, and instead it can be an indispensable alarm bell for life, inviting us to explore richer and more fertile landscapes that transience and escapism do not permit." Saint Thomas "defines sadness as a pain of the soul: like the nerves for the body, it redirects our attention to a possible danger, or a disregarded benefit. Therefore, it is indispensable for our health; it protects us from harming ourselves and others." "It would be far more serious and dangerous not to feel this, and to go ahead", Francis remarked. He explained:

"At times sadness works like a traffic light:

'Stop, stop! It is red, here. Stop'. For those, on the other hand, who have the desire to do good, sadness is an obstacle with which the tempter tries to discourage us", the Pope said: "In that case, one must act in a manner exactly contrary to what is suggested, determined to continue what one had set out to do. Think of work, study, prayer, a commitment undertaken: if we abandoned them as soon as we felt boredom or sadness, we would never complete anything." "The road to goodness, the Gospel reminds us, is narrow and uphill, it requires combat, self-conquest. I begin to pray, or dedicate myself to a good work, and strangely enough, just then things come to mind that need to be done urgently."

"It is important, for those who want to serve the Lord, not to be led astray by desolation",

Francis told the faithful. In the closing lines of his catechesis he denounced: "Unfortunately, some people decide to abandon the life of prayer, or the choice they have made, marriage or religious life, driven by desolation, without first pausing to consider this state of mind, and especially without the help of a guide." **"A wise rule says not to make changes when you are desolate"**, the Pope's counsel: "It will be the time afterwards, rather than the mood of the moment, that will show the goodness or otherwise of our choices." "If you want to take the good path, prepare yourself: there

will be obstacles, there will be temptations, there will be moments of sadness”, Francis remarked: “It is like when a professor examines a student: if he sees that the student knows the essentials of the subject, he does not insist: the student has passed the test. But he must pass the test. If we know how to traverse loneliness and desolation with openness and awareness, we can emerge strengthened in human and spiritual terms.”

“No trial is beyond our reach”,

the Pope assured: “no trial will be greater than what we can do. But do not flee from trials: see what this test means, what it means that I am sad: why am I sad? What does it mean that I am in desolation and cannot go on? Saint Paul reminds us that no-one is tempted beyond his or her ability, because the Lord never abandons us and, with him close by, we can overcome every temptation.” “And if we do not overcome it today, we get up another time, we walk and we will overcome it tomorrow.” Francis concluded in unscripted remarks. “We must not remain dead – so to speak – we must not remain defeated by a moment of sadness, of desolation: go forward! Spiritual life is always a journey.”

M.Michela Nicolais