



The Holy See

PASTORAL CONFERENCE OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Basilica of Saint John Lateran

Monday, 19 June 2017

[Multimedia]

As that priest said, “Before speaking, I shall say a few words”.

I wish to thank Cardinal Vallini for his words and I would like to say something that he was unable to say, because it is a secret, but the Pope can say it. After the election, when they told me that I had to go first to the Pauline Chapel and then to the balcony to greet the people, immediately the name of the Cardinal Vicar came to my mind: “I am the bishop; there is a vicar general...”. Right away. I even felt it fondly. And I called him. And from the part of Cardinal Hummes, who was at my side during the ballot count and who told me things that helped me. These two accompanied me, and from that moment I said: “On the balcony with my Vicar”. There, on the balcony. From that moment on he has accompanied me, and I wish to thank him. He has many virtues and also a sense of objectivity that has helped me many times, because at times I “fly” and he helps me “land” with so much charity.... I thank you, your Eminence, for the companionship. But Cardinal Vallini is not retiring, because he belongs to six Congregations and will continue to work, and it is better this way, because a Neapolitan without work would be a calamity in the dioceses ...
[laughter, applause]. I would like to thank him publicly for his help. Thank you!

And to all of you, good afternoon!

I thank you for this opportunity enabling me to begin this, your diocesan conference, in which you will discuss an important theme for the life of our families: to accompany parents in the education of their adolescent children. In these days you will reflect upon several key topics that correspond in some way to the places in which our being a family is played out (home, school, social networks, the intergenerational relationship, the precariousness of life and family isolation).

I would like to share with you a few “premises” that may help us in this reflection. Often we do not

realize it, but the spirit we reflect with is just as important as the content (a good athlete knows that the warm-up counts as much as the performance that follows). Therefore, this conversation can help us in this sense: a “warm-up”, and then it will be up to you to “give it all you’ve got”. I will divide this presentation into small sections.

1. *In ‘Roman’!*

To enter this theme, I wished to call the first of the keys “In Roman”: the actual dialect of the Romans. We often fall into the temptation of thinking or reflecting on things “generally”, “in the abstract”. Thinking *about* problems, *about* situations, *about* adolescents.... And in this way, without realizing it, we fall completely into nominalism. We would like to embrace everything but we accomplish nothing. Today I invite you to think “in dialect” about this theme. And to do this we have to make a considerable effort, because we are called to think about our families in the context of a big city like Rome; with all its wealth, opportunities, variety, and at the same time with all its challenges. Not to close ourselves off and ignore the rest (we are always Italians), but to face reflection and even moments of prayer with a healthy and stimulating realism; no abstraction, no generalization, no nominalism.

Family life and the education of adolescents in a great metropolis like this requires particular attention at the foundation, and we can not take it lightly. Because educating or being a family is not the same thing in a small town as it is in a metropolis. I am not saying it is better or worse. It is simply different. The complexity of the capital does not allow for reductive summaries, but rather spurs us to a multifaceted way of thinking, through which every neighbourhood and zone echoes in the diocese and in this way the diocese can be visible, palpable in every ecclesial community, with its own way of being.

You experience the tensions of this great city. In many of the pastoral visits I have made a few of your daily practical experiences have been presented to me: distances between home and work (in some cases up to two hours to get there); the lack of close family ties, because of having to relocate to find work or to be able to afford rent; living always “down to the last penny” to get to the end of the month, because the pace of life is more costly in and of itself (it is easier to manage in small towns); time is often insufficient for getting to know neighbours where we live; the need in so many homes to leave children all alone.... And thus we could go on listing a large number of situations that touch the life of our families. Therefore carry out your reflection and prayer “in Roman”, in practice, with all these concrete things, with the very real faces of families and thinking about how you can help each other to form your children within this reality. The Holy Spirit is the great initiator and generator of processes in our societies and situations. He is the great guide of transformative and salvific dynamics. With him, do not be afraid to “walk” through your neighbourhoods, and to think about how to give impulse to support for parents and adolescents, that is, in practice.

2. Connected

In addition to the previous one, I would like to focus on another important aspect. The current situation is gradually giving rise in all of our lives, and especially in our families, to the experience of feeling “uprooted”. We speak of a “liquid society” — and so it is — but today I would like, in this context, to present to you the growing phenomenon of the *uprooted society*. This means people, families who are gradually losing their ties, that essential fabric so important to feeling a part of one another, partners with others in a common plan. It is the experience of knowing that “we belong” to others (in the noblest sense of the term). It is important to keep in mind this climate of uprootedness, because little by little it seeps into our gaze and especially into our children’s life. An uprooted culture, an uprooted family is a family without history, without memory, indeed without roots. And when we are not rooted, any wind can end up carrying us away. For this reason one of the first things we must think about as parents, as families, as pastors is the settings in which to root ourselves, where to create bonds, find roots, where to grow that fundamental network that allows us to feel “home”. Today social networks would seem to offer us this area of “network”, of connection with others, and they also make our children feel part of a group. But the problem that they bring, because of their very “virtuality”, is that they leave us as if “up in the air” — I have said “liquid society”; we can say “fizzy society” — and therefore very “volatile”. There is no worse alienation for a person than to feel he or she has no roots, that he or she does not belong to anyone.

So often we demand from our children excessive formation in certain fields that we consider important for their future. We make them study a number of things so they may give their “best”. But we do not give the same importance to the fact that they know their land, their roots. We deprive them of knowing the great people and the saints who engendered us. I know you have a workshop dedicated to intergenerational dialogue, to the area of grandparents.

I know it might be repetitive but I feel it as something the Holy Spirit has imprinted on my heart: in order that our young people may have visions, may be “dreamers”, may face the future with boldness and courage, it is necessary that they listen to the prophetic dreams of their fathers (cf. Joel 3:1). If we want our children to be formed and prepared for the future, it is not only by learning languages (to give an example) that they will succeed. It is necessary that *they be connected*, that they know their roots. Only in this way will they be able to fly high; otherwise they will be captured by the “visions” of others.

And I return to this, I am obsessed perhaps but.... Parents must make space for their children to speak to their grandparents. Many times the grandfather or the grandmother is in a retirement home and they do not go to visit them.... They must speak [to them]. Even by overstepping parents but taking roots from their grandparents. Grandparents have this quality of transmitting history, faith, belonging. And they do it with the wisdom of those who are on the threshold, ready to leave. I return, I have said several times, to the passage of Joel (cf. 3:1): “Your old men shall dream and your young people shall prophesy”. And you are the bridge. Nowadays we do not let grandparents dream, we discard them. This culture discards grandparents because grandparents

do not produce; this is the “throw-away culture”. But grandparents can only dream when they meet a new life; then they dream, they talk.... But think of Simeon, think about that chatterbox Anna who went from one place to another saying: “It is that one! It is that one!”. This is beautiful; this is beautiful. They are the grandparents who dream and they give children [the sense of] belonging that they need. I would like that in this intergenerational workshop, you undertake an examination of conscience on this. To find the concrete history in grandparents. And not to leave them aside. I do not know if I have recounted this once, but a memory of a story that one of my two grandmothers told me comes to my mind. Once upon a time there was a widowed grandfather in a family. He lived with the family but he had aged and when they ate, some soup would fall from his mouth or some saliva, and he would get a bit soiled. And the father decided to make him eat on his own in the kitchen, “so we can invite friends...”. And so it was. A few days later, he comes back from work and he finds his child playing with a hammer, nails, wood.... “What are you making?” — “A table” — “why a table?” — “A table to eat at” — “But why?” — “So that when you get old, you can eat there by yourself”. This child had understood intuitively where the roots were.

3. *In motion*

Educating adolescents in motion. Adolescence is a phase of transition in the life of not only your children but of the whole family — the whole family is in a transitional phase — you know it well and you experience it; and as such, we must address it in its totality. It is a phase of bridging, and for this reason adolescents are neither here nor there; they are in motion, in transit. They are not children (and they do not want to be treated as such) and they are not adults (but they want to be treated as such, especially at the level of privileges). They are experiencing precisely this tension, first of all within themselves and then with those who surround them.¹ They always seek confrontation; they question, dispute everything; they look for answers. And at times, they do not listen to the answers, and they ask another question before the parents say the answer.... They pass through these various states of mind, and their families with them. However, allow me to tell you that it is a precious time in the life of your children. A difficult time, yes. A time of changes and of instability, yes. A phase that presents great risks, no doubt. But above all, it is a time of growth for them and for the entire family. Adolescence is not a pathology and we cannot address it as though it were. A child who experiences his or her adolescence (as difficult as it may be for the parents) is a child with future and hope. I am often worried by the current tendency to prematurely “medicalize” our young people. It seems that everything is resolved by medicalizing, or controlling everything with the slogan “make the most of your time”, and in this way young people’s agenda is worse than that of a senior manager.

Therefore I insist: adolescence is not a pathology that we must combat. It is a normal, natural part of growing up, of the life of our young people. Where there is life there is movement; where there is movement there are changes, seeking, uncertainty; there is hope, joy and also anguish and desolation. Let us correctly frame our discernment within the foreseeable fundamental processes. There are margins that are necessary to be aware of so as not to be alarmed, not to be careless,

nor to be negligent, but to know how to accompany and help [young people] to grow. Not everything is insignificant, but neither does everything have equal importance. For this reason it is important to discern which battles are to be fought and which are not. In this matter it is very helpful to listen to couples with experience, who, although they can never give us a recipe, can help us with their testimony to know this or that margin or range of behaviour.

Our young people seek to be and want to feel they are — logically — protagonists. They do not at all like to feel commanded or to respond to “orders” coming from the adult world (they follow their “accomplices” rules of the game). They seek that complicit autonomy that lets them feel “they are in control of themselves”. And here we have to pay attention to uncles and aunts, especially those who have no children or who are not married.... I learned my first bad words from a “spinster” uncle [*laughter*]. In order to gain the favour of their nephews or nieces, they often do not do the right thing. There was the uncle who used to sneakily give us cigarettes ... things of those times. And nowadays.... I am not saying they are bad, but one has to be careful. In this search for autonomy that young people want, we can find a good opportunity, especially for schools, parishes and ecclesial movements. To encourage activities that put them to the test, that make them feel as protagonists. They need this. Let us help them! They seek in many ways the “dizziness” that makes them feel alive. So, let’s give it to them! Let us encourage all that helps them to transform their dreams into projects, and enables them to discover that all the potential they have is a bridge, a passageway to a vocation (in the broadest and most beautiful sense of the word). Let us offer them broad goals, great challenges, and let us help them to accomplish them, to reach their goals. Let us not leave them on their own. Thus, let us challenge them more than they challenge us. Let us not allow them to receive that “dizzying sensation” from others, who do nothing but put their lives at risk: let us give it to them ourselves; but the right dizziness that satisfies this desire to move, to go forward. We see many parishes that have the capacity to “capture” adolescents. “These three days of holiday, let us go to the mountains, let us do something ... or let us go whitewash that school in a poor neighbourhood which needs it...”. Make them protagonists of something.

This calls for finding educators capable of committing themselves to young people’s growth. It calls for educators spurred by love and by the passion to make grow in them the life of the Spirit of Jesus, to show that being Christian demands courage and is a beautiful thing. To educate today’s adolescents we cannot continue to use a merely scholastic teaching model, of ideas alone. It is necessary to follow the pace of their growth. It is important to help them to acquire self-esteem, to believe that they can truly succeed in all they they apply themselves to. In motion. Always.

4. Integrated education

This process requires a simultaneous and integrated manner of developing the various languages that build us as persons. That means teaching our young people to integrate all that they are and that they do. We might call it socio-integrated alphabetizing, which is education based on the intellect (the head), feelings (the heart), and actions (the hands). This will offer our young people

the opportunity for harmonious growth, not only at the personal but, at the same time, the social level. It is essential to create places where social fragmentation is not the dominant framework. To this end it is important to teach them to think what they feel and do, to feel what they think and do, and to do what they think and feel; that is, integrating the three languages. A dynamism of ability placed at the service of the person and of society. This will help enable our young people to feel active and as protagonists in their growth processes, and will also lead them to feel called to participate in the building of the community.

They want to be protagonists: let us give them room so they may be protagonists, guiding them — obviously — and giving them the tools to develop all of this growth. For this I believe that the harmonious integration of different spheres of knowledge — of the mind, the heart and the hands — will help them to build their character. We often think that education is imparting knowledge, and along the way we leave emotional illiterates and young people with countless incomplete plans because they have found no one to teach them how to “do”. We have concentrated education on the head, overlooking the heart and hands. This too is a form of social fragmentation.

At the Vatican, when the guards take their leave, I receive them one by one, those who are leaving. The day before yesterday, I received six [of them]. One by one. “What are you doing, what will you do?”. I thank them for their service. And one of them said this to me: “I am going to be a carpenter. I would like to be a woodworker but I will be a carpenter. Because my father taught me a lot about this and my grandfather too”. The desire to “do”: this young man was well educated with the language of doing, and his heart is good too because he was thinking about his father and his grandfather, an affectionate, good heart. Learning “how to do...”. This struck me.

5. Yes to adolescence, no to competition

As the last element, it is important for us to reflect on an environmental dynamic that involves everyone. It is interesting to observe how young people want to be “grown-ups” and “grown-ups” want to be or have become adolescents.

We cannot ignore this culture, since it is air that we all breathe. Today there is a sort of competition between parents and children; different from that of other eras in which a confrontation normally occurred between one and the other. Today we have passed from comparison to competition. There are two different dynamics of the spirit. Our young people today find much competition and few people to measure themselves against. The adult world has welcomed “eternal youth” as a paradigm and model of success. It seems that to grow up, to mature, “to age” is a bad thing. It is synonymous with a frustrated or used up life. Today it seems that everything is to be masked and concealed. As if the very fact of living had no meaning. Appearances, not aging, wearing makeup.... I feel sorry when I see those who dye their hair.

How sad it is when someone wants to give the heart a “facelift”! And today, we use the word “facelift” more than the word heart. How painful it is when someone wants to erase the “wrinkles” of so many encounters, of so much joy and sadness! The thought of when they advised the great

Anna Magnani to get a facelift, comes to mind. She said: “No, these wrinkles have cost me my entire life: they are precious”.

In a certain sense this is one of the most dangerous, “unwitting” threats in the education of our adolescents: excluding them from their growth processes because adults take their place. And we find many adolescent parents, many. Adults who do not want to be adults and want to play at being adolescents forever. This “marginalization” can augment a natural tendency that young people have to isolate themselves or to stop their growth processes for lack of comparison. There is competition but no comparison.

6. *Spiritual “gluttony”*

I would not want to conclude without this aspect which can be a key topic that intersects all the workshops that you will have: it is across the board. It is the theme of austerity. We are living in a context of very intense consumerism.... And making a connection between consumerism and what I have just said: after food, medicine and clothing, which are essential for living, the highest spending is for beauty products, cosmetics. This is statistical! Cosmetics. It is awful to say this. And cosmetics, which used to be more about women, are now the same with both sexes. After spending for basic things, the first thing is cosmetics and then mascots [companion animals]: food, veterinarian.... These are statistics. But this is another topic, the one of pets which I will not touch upon now: we will think about this further ahead. But let us return to the topic of austerity. As I said, we are living in a context of intense consumerism. It seems that we are urged to consume consumption, in the sense that the important thing is to always consume. In the past, we used to say to those who had this problem that they were addicted to shopping. Nowadays, this is not said anymore. We are all within this rhythm of consumerism. For this reason, it is urgent to recover that very important and undervalued spiritual principle: austerity. We have entered an abyss of consumerism and we are induced to believe that we are valued according to what we are capable of producing and consuming, to what we are capable of having. Educating in austerity is an incomparable richness. It awakens genius and creativity, generates opportunities for imagination and especially opens one to teamwork, in solidarity. It opens one to others. A type of “spiritual gluttony” exists. That attitude of gluttons who, instead of eating, devour all that surrounds them (they seem to gorge themselves as they eat).

I think it does us good to educate ourselves better, as family, about this “gluttony”, and to make room for austerity as a way to meet one another, to build bridges, to open up spaces, to grow with and for others. This can be done only by one who knows how to be austere; otherwise he or she is simply a “glutton”.

In *Amoris Laetitia* I said to you: “The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. Couples should be helped to realize that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead, it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their

union. Life together should not diminish but increase their contentment; every new step along the way can help couples find new ways to happiness” (n. 232). To me it seems important to experience the education of children beginning from this perspective, as a call the Lord makes to us, as family, to make this passage one of growth, in order to learn to better savour the life that he gives us.

This is what I thought to tell you on this theme.

[After Cardinal Vallini's thanks and the blessing:]

Thank you. Work well. I wish you all the best! Go forward!

1 “For the young the future is long, the past short; In fact, at the start of the morning, there is nothing of the day to remember, while there is everything to hope. They are easy to deceive because of the reason mentioned; that is, because they readily hope. And they are more courageous, for they are full of passion and hope, and the former of these prevents them fearing, while the latter inspires them with confidence, for no one fears when angry, and hope of some advantage inspires confidence. And they are bashful” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, ii, 12:2).