

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS - 7. "TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE"

Is there anything more beautiful that can happen in a day than being able to face it in the company of someone who listens to all our questions, without any shame? We read in the last worksheet: "His attention towards man is full of infinite understanding, unreservedly friendly and affectionate: 'even all the hairs of your head are counted.' He has compassion for those in grief and is unable to dine without first have healed. He cries over Lazarus and weeps over the city." (Traces of the Christian Experience—worksheet 7)

A few Romanian kids, last January, saw how the Pope was moved in front of their questions, bringing them the same compassion as Jesus: "Even if we are in a place of great fragility, if we are dirty with sin, if we have been abandoned by everyone and by life itself, He embraces us and kisses us."¹

In these day, an image is impressed, almost chiseled, into the imagination of many, seeing the "private" tears experience by Pope Francis because of the question asked him by a young Romanian man who was "refused" two times by his mother, once when he was two months old and then again at the mature age of 21. This happened during a private meeting last 4 January, a meeting full of many "why's" and of much tenderness, witnessed by more than just Francis and the young man, but also by a group of 30 at-risk young Romanians, who are assisted by the association "FDP—Protagonists in Education" (a group linked to the charisma of Father Luigi Giussani) [...].

What struck the Pope was the confidence of this young man: "Why did my mother not accept me? She abandoned me to an orphanage and I found her again when I was 21 years old, but she didn't treat me well and so I left." The Pope shared that he had cried, when he read the question, because "you caught me with my guard down," and he explained that it is not a question of blaming adults, but of their great fragility, "owing in your case to so much misery, and to so many social injustices that afflict the small and the poor." These things harden hearts and cause something that seems impossible: that a mother would abandon her own child. "Your mother loves you, but doesn't know how to express it," Francis reasoned. "She can't because life is hard, is unjust. I promise you, I'll pray that some day she can make you see that love. Don't be skeptical, but have hope."

The following dialogues between the Bishop of Rome and this selected group of young people was certainly full of significance and thick with questions about meaning. They brought the Pope their questions about life and death, about sickness and sin, about the pain of being abandoned by their own parents, the difficulties of maintaining lasting bonds or of accepting the answers of a Church that sometimes seems to build "walls" instead of "bridges."

There are so many "why's," Bergoglio told them, and he tried to respond to almost all the questions. Some of these questions, "you can never respond fully to, because they come from the heart," and some questions only God can answer. "In life there are so many 'why's' to which we cannot respond. We can only look, feel, suffer, and cry," he said. He »

¹ Francis, *Audience with the young Romanian people helped by the NGO "FDP—protagonists in education"*, 4 January 2018

» went on to observe: "It is hard to receive help from fragile parents and sometimes we are the ones who have to help them." The January encounter was also an occasion to dispel the doubts of a young man who, last year on Holy Thursday, saw one of his friends from the orphanage die. "An orthodox priest told us that he died a sinner and therefore would not go to Paradise. I don't believe that this is right," the young man confided. And Pope Francis wanted to offer his own reflection: "Maybe that priest did not know what he was saying, maybe that day that priest was not doing well, or he had something going on inside that made him respond like that. None of us can say that a person is not going to Heaven. I'll tell you something that might shock you: we can't even say that about Judas. You were speaking about your friend who had died, and you remembered that he died on Holy Thursday. It seems strange to me what you heard from that priest, I would need to understand it better, maybe they didn't understand correctly... Anyway, I tell you that God wants to bring us to Paradise, no one excluded." He is the Good Shepherd who "is always on the road" looking for the lost sheep, and "He is not afraid when he finds us, even if we are in a very fragile state, if we are dirty with sin, if we are abandoned by everyone and by life itself. He embraces us and kisses us."

("The tears of the Pope for an abandoned child", *Avvenire*, February 21, 2018)

Is seeking the authoritative and tender face of a "good shepherd" for our life something for adults or for children? Do you seek this or avoid it? Where have you found it?