

Pope to students: Don't waste youth, respect diversity of thought

Joshua J. McElwee | Dec. 1, 2013 NCR Today
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Speaking during a prayer service for students at Rome's universities, Pope Francis on Saturday urged the young people to not waste their youth and to pursue big projects beyond the scope of the ordinary.

Francis urged the students not to look at life as if from the balcony of a building but to "mingle" at ground level "where there are the challenges of the contemporary world."

"He does not live who does not respond to the challenges" facing the world regarding poverty and issues of human dignity, the pontiff said.

Francis was speaking Saturday evening in St. Peter's Basilica, where he was hosting a Vespers service with the students. Vespers are an evening prayer said daily by Christians around the world. It is an annual tradition that the reigning pope say the prayers with young people at the beginning of Advent, the season during which Christians prepare for the celebration of Christmas.

During a short reflection amid the service, the pope told the students to not look at everyday life as monotonous and to instead cultivate large-scale projects.

"Your will and your abilities, combined with the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within each one of you on the day of your Baptism, allow you to be not spectators, but the protagonists of contemporary events," he said.

The pontiff also urged the students not to think in a "weak uniformity." He said they should not follow the model of a sphere, in which "every ledge is leveled and every difference disappears."

Instead, he said, they should follow the model of a polyhedron that "includes a multiplicity of elements and respects the unity in variety."

Diversity of thought, said the pope, "reflects the manifold wisdom of God when one approaches the truth with honesty and intellectual rigor, when one approaches the goodness, when one approaches the beauty."

Some students had gathered outside the basilica for hours before the event with the pope Saturday, trying to secure a place towards the front of the group in order to see the pontiff clearly.

One student, Anish Joy, said after the service that he had waited in a queue for the 6:00 PM event for five hours. Joy, who is a theology student at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, said the pope's words to the students "thrilled me very much."

"I really felt the warmth and power from the blessed words," said Joy. "I wish and pray that God help, guide and support our new Pope Francis to be star and role model for the young students."

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