
Pope at audience: “In Ukraine the martyrdom of aggression”

Ukraine is suffering the “martyrdom of aggression”, the Pope said at the end of today’s general audience devoted to spiritual consolation. Francis prayed “for peace in the world, and for an end to all conflicts, with a special thought for the terrible suffering of the dear and martyred people of Ukraine.” A few minutes earlier His Holiness said: “may the World Championship taking place in Qatar” be “an occasion for encounter and harmony among the nations, fostering fraternity and peace among peoples”. Consolation, another important element for discernment, is “**light in the soul**”, Francis said. It is not to be taken for granted, “because it can lend itself to misunderstandings.” Spiritual consolation, Francis explained during the general audience in Saint Peter’s Square, is “an experience of interior joy, consisting in seeing God’s presence in everything. It strengthens faith and hope, and even the ability of doing good.”

“The person who experiences consolation never gives up in the face of difficulties because he or she always experiences a peace that is stronger than any trial”,

the Pope’s description: “It is, therefore, a tremendous gift for the spiritual life as well as life in general...and to live this interior joy. Consolation is an interior movement that touches our depths. **It is not flashy but soft, delicate, like a drop of water on a sponge.** The person feels enveloped in God’s presence in a way that always respects his or her own freedom. It is never something out of tune, that tries to force our will; neither is it a passing euphoria. On the contrary, as we have seen, even the suffering – caused for example by our own sins – can become a reason for consolation.” The Pope took as an example the experience **Saint Augustine**, “when he spoke with his mother Monica about the beauty of eternal life” or “the perfect joy of **Saint Francis**”, along with those of “the many saints who were able to do great things, not because they thought they were magnificent or capable, but because they had been conquered by the peaceful sweetness of God’s love.” “This is the peace that **Saint Ignatius** discovered in himself with such amazement when he would read the lives of the saints”, Francis went on: “To be consoled is to be at peace with God, to feel that everything is settled in peace, everything is in harmony within us.”

“Consolation affects hope, and reaches out toward the future, puts us on a journey, allows us to take the initiative that had always been postponed or not even imagined,”

such as Baptism was for **Edith Stein**, the Pope said: “when we are consoled, we want to do so much good, always. Instead, when there is a moment of desolation, we feel like closing in on ourselves and doing nothing”, Francis continued in unscripted remarks: “Consolation pushes us forward in service to others, society, other people.” “**Spiritual consolation cannot be ‘piloted’, programmed at will.** It is a gift of the Holy Spirit”, the Pope remarked: “It allows a familiarity with God that seems to cancel distances.” The Pope thus recalled when Saint Therese of the Child Jesus visited the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome at the age of fourteen and tried to touch the nail venerated there, one of the nails with which Jesus was crucified. “Consolation makes us daring”, commented the Pope. But he guarded against

“false consolations, noisier and flashier”:

“they are pure enthusiasm, like straw fires, lacking substance, leading us to close in on ourselves and not to take care of others.” “In the end, false consolation leaves us empty, far from the centre of our existence”, he denounced: let’s not confuse that peace that comes from desolation with “passing enthusiasm.” This is why we “have to discern”, the Pope said, because False consolation can become a danger if we seek it obsessively as an end in itself, forgetting the Lord. As Saint

Bernard would say, this is seeking the consolations of God rather than the God of consolations.” “We need to seek the Lord, and the Lord consoles us with his presence. He consoles us, makes us move forward, we should not be interested in this. This is the dynamic of the child who looks for his or parents only to get something, but doesn’t look for them – he or she is seeking their own interests.” “And when the family is divided, and they are accustomed to going to one and going to the other, this is not good, this is not consolation, but personal interest”, the Pope added departing from the written text. For Francis: “we too run the risk of living our relationship with God in a childish way, seeking our own interests, of reducing it to an object that we use and consume, losing the most beautiful gift which is God Himself.” “So, let us move forward in our lives that progresses between the consolations from God and the desolations from the sin of the world, but knowing how to distinguish when it is a consolation from God that brings peace to the depths of your soul, from a passing enthusiasm, which is not bad, but which is not a consolation from God.”

M.Michela Nicolais