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## Pope Francis: “Killing children is an act of cruelty, an injustice”

Like a grandfather to his grandchildren: this is how Pope Francis introduced himself to 7,000 children from 84 countries who gathered at the Vatican on Monday afternoon to participate in the meeting “Children Meet the Pope: Let Us Learn from Boys and Girls”, organised by the Dicastery for Culture and Education. A lively discussion took place with the direct participation of all those present, who were encouraged to repeat the gestures and words of the Pope. The meeting opened with Mr Rain’s song “*Superero*” (“Superheroes”) sung by the children gathered in the Paul VI Hall. **Peace and war.** The Pope touched on many themes, prompted by the children’s sometimes curious and personal questions. First of all, peace. Rania, a young girl of Palestinian origin, asked: “If World War III begins, will peace never return?” “You have asked a question that concerns your homeland,” Pope Francis replied. “War has already broken out all over the world, not only in Palestine. War is terrible and it takes away our life and our peace. We must work for peace,” he added, inviting the children to repeat with him, “in a low voice,” “let us work for peace” and, silently, “greet Rania and all the people of her homeland with a gesture of the hand. Peace is beautiful.” But how do you make peace? asked Ivan, a child from Ukraine. “This is a difficult question - the Pope replied promptly - it is easier to say how war is made, because it is made with hatred and revenge, hurting the other. It is instinctive.” “There is no recipe for learning peace. There is a gesture: an outstretched hand, a hand of friendship, always trying to involve other people, to come together. Peace is made with the heart and the outstretched hand.” A Syrian child asked a blunt and direct question: “Why do they kill children in war and there is no one to defend them?” “How many children have died, innocent ones, and this shows the evil of war”.

“Killing children is an act of cruelty,”

the Pope replied, asking for a moment of silence for all the children killed. “It is an injustice, the war is cruel, and who pays for it? The price is paid by innocent children,” the Pope said, inviting everyone to recite the Lord’s Prayer. **Care for creation and wasted food.** Many questions arose about the care of creation and food waste, issues close to the heart of Pope Francis. To Isadora from Brazil, who asked if children could save the earth, the Holy Father replied: “Children can save the earth because you are simple souls who understand that to destroy the earth is to destroy ourselves. The earth gives us everything we need to live”. I am very worried about the natural world,” the Pope said in response to another question. “At the North Pole, the glaciers are melting. The seas are rising, they are encroaching on the land. The fauna and fish in the sea are being destroyed, so I am worried. We all should be.” When Luxelle, a little African girl, asked him, “Why is it so hot in autumn?”, Francis replied: “That is a very important question.” “People do not care for creation and nature is rebelling. We must learn to take care of creation and not pollute it.” Salma, a nine-year-old from Ghana, said: “How can we stop people from wasting so many things?” The Pope replied immediately: “Don’t waste your food because there are people who have nothing to eat. Always eat your meals.

“A meal is a grace from God.”

“We must all learn not to waste our meal,” the Pope said, asking the children to repeat: “Do not waste your meal.” And if there is anything left over at lunchtime, eat it for dinner, but do not throw it away. To waste a meal is an ugly sin.” **What does the Pope dream about? Who are the Pope’s friends?** Finally, there were some curious questions to which the Pope replied with amusement, such as when Massimo from Rome asked him: “What do you dream about at night?” “I don’t know what I dream about at night because I’m asleep,” the Pope replied without hesitation, prompting laughter and applause in the Paul VI Hall. “Sometimes I have dreams that remind me of my youth, of my childhood, but most of the time I sleep,” he explained. Dreaming is beautiful, when you dream

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there is life in it.” “How do you relax when you get angry?” asked Sophie from the Philippines: “Sometimes I get angry, but I don't bite,” Francis replied, giving advice: “When you get angry, drink a glass of water before you answer. Let us leave anger to the dogs and try to be meek.” Finally, when asked who his friends were, the Pope replied: “My friends are the people who live with me, at home. I have many friends outside, some parishes and even some cardinals are friends. I have the grace of having friends, and this is a grace from God, because the person who has no friends is a sad person”. The meeting ended with an exchange of peace and with a blessing.

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