

Dear Young Friends

Pope Francis in Conversation
with Young People

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Australian Foreword by
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CHAPTER ONE

Two Things I've Learned in Life

Following his opening comments at the welcoming ceremony of World Youth Day 2016 in Kraków, Pope Francis continued by sharing two things he had learned in life with regard to young people.¹

In my years as a bishop, I have learned many things, but I want to share one with you now: nothing is more beautiful than seeing the enthusiasm, dedication, zeal and energy with which so many young people live their lives. This is beautiful! And where does this beauty come from? When Jesus touches a young person's heart, he or she becomes capable of truly great things. It is exciting to listen to you share your dreams, your questions and your impatience with those who say that things cannot change, those whom I call 'quietists' (who say) 'nothing can change' ...

Today the Church looks to you, and I would add, the world looks to you, and wants to learn from you, to be reassured that the Father's Mercy has an ever-youthful face and constantly invites us to be part of his kingdom.

Knowing your enthusiasm for mission, I repeat: mercy always has a youthful face! Because a merciful heart is

motivated to move beyond its comfort zone. A merciful heart can go out and meet others; it is ready to embrace everyone. A merciful heart is able to be a place of refuge for those who are without a home or have lost their home; it is able to build a home and a family for those forced to emigrate; it knows the meaning of tenderness and compassion. A merciful heart can share its bread with the hungry and welcome refugees and migrants.

To say the word 'mercy' along with you is to speak of opportunity, future, commitment, trust, openness, hospitality, compassion and dreams. But are you able to dream? [The Young People reply: Yes!] When the heart is open and able to dream, there is room for mercy...

Don't Go into Early Retirement!

Let me tell you another thing I have learned over these years. I do not want to offend anyone, but it pains me to meet young people who seem to have opted for 'early retirement'. This pains me. Young people who seem to retire at twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five years of age. This pains me. I worry when I see young people who have 'thrown in the towel' before the game has even begun, who are defeated even before they begin to play. I am saddened to see young people who walk around glumly as if life had no meaning. Deep down, young people like this are bored ... and boring, who bore others, and this upsets me.

But it is also hard, and troubling, to see young people who waste their lives looking for thrills or a feeling of being alive by taking dark paths and in the end having to pay for it ... and pay dearly. Think of so many young people you know who

have chosen this path. It is disturbing to see young people squandering some of the best years of their lives, wasting their energies running after peddlers of false illusions, and they do exist (where I come from, we call them 'vendors of smoke'), who rob you of what is best in you. This pains me. I am sure that among you there are no such persons, but I want to tell you: there are young people that have gone into retirement, who have thrown in the towel before the game has even begun, there are young people who are enthralled by false illusions and end up in nothingness ...

To find fulfilment, to gain new life, there is a way, a way that is not for sale, that cannot be purchased, a way that is not a thing or an object, but a person. His name is Jesus Christ. I ask you: can you buy Jesus Christ? Can Jesus Christ be bought at the shops? Jesus Christ is a gift, a gift from the Father, the gift from our Father ...

Jesus can give you true passion for life. Jesus can inspire us not to settle for less, but to give the very best of ourselves. Jesus challenges us, spurs us on and helps us keep trying whenever we are tempted to give up. Jesus pushes us to keep our sights high and to dream of great things.

I try but So Many Times I fall Down

You might say to me, 'but Father, it is so difficult to dream of great things, it is so difficult to rise up, to be always moving forwards and upwards. Father, I am weak, I fall, and I try but so many times I fall down'. Mountaineers, as they climb mountains, sing a very beautiful song whose words go like this: 'in the art of climbing, it is not important that you do not fall down, but that you do not stay down'. If you are weak, if

you fall, look up a little for there is Jesus' hand extended to you as he says: 'Rise up, come with me'. 'And what if I fall again?' Rise again. 'And what if I fall yet again?' Rise yet again. Peter once asked the Lord: 'Lord, how many times?' And the reply came: 'seventy times seven'. The hand of Jesus is always extended, ready to lift us up again when we fall ...

Jesus Wants to Stop and Enter our Home

In the Gospel, we heard how Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem, stopped at a home – the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus – and was welcomed. He stopped, went in and spent time with them. The two women welcomed him because they knew he was open and attentive. Our many jobs and responsibilities can make us a bit like Martha: busy, scattered, constantly running from place to place ... but we can also be like Mary: whenever we see a beautiful landscape, or look at a video from a friend on our mobile phone, we can stop and think, stop and listen ... In these days, Jesus wants to stop and enter our home: your home, my home, enter into our hearts; Jesus will look at us hurrying about with all our concerns, as he did with Martha ... and he will wait for us to listen to him, like Mary, to make space for him amid the bustle ...

Whoever welcomes Jesus learns to love as Jesus does. So he asks us if we want a full life. And in his name, I ask you: do you want a full life? Start right this moment by letting yourself be open and attentive! Because happiness is sown and blossoms in mercy. That is his answer, his offer, his challenge, his adventure: mercy. Mercy always has a youthful face. Like that of Mary of Bethany, who sat as a disciple at the feet of

Jesus and joyfully listened to his words, since she knew that there she would find peace. Like that of Mary of Nazareth, whose daring 'Yes' launched her on the adventure of mercy. All generations would call her blessed; to all of us she is the 'Mother of Mercy'...

A Prayer to Help Us

All together, let us ask the Lord, each repeating in the silence of his or her heart: 'Lord, launch us on the adventure of mercy! Launch us on the adventure of building bridges and tearing down walls, be they barriers or barbed wire. Launch us on the adventure of helping the poor, those who feel lonely and abandoned, or no longer find meaning in their lives. Launch us on the journey of accompanying those who do not know you, and telling them carefully and respectfully your Name, the reason for our faith. Send us, like Mary of Bethany, to listen attentively to those we do not understand, those of other cultures and peoples, even those we are afraid of because we consider them a threat. Make us attentive to our elders, to our grandparents, as Mary of Nazareth was to Elizabeth, in order to learn from their wisdom ... Here we are, Lord! Send us to share your merciful loves ...'

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