



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO "ROMA TRE" UNIVERSITY

Friday, 17 February 2017

[Multimedia]

*Dear Dean,
Distinguished Professors,
Dear Students and Staff Members,*

Thank you for inviting me to visit this University, the newest in Rome. I cordially greet all of you. I thank the Dean, Professor Mario Panizza, for the words of welcome, and I wish you all the best for the work and mission of this University. The education and academic formation of the new generations are of primary importance for the life and development of society. I have received your questions, for which I am grateful. I read them in advance and I will try to give some responses, also in relation to my own experience.

Our society has an abundance of resources, actions of solidarity and of love toward others. Many people and many young people, surely also among you, are involved in volunteer work and service to the most needy. This is one of the loftiest values for which to be grateful and proud. However, if we look around, we see that there are many, too many signs of hostility and violence in the world. As Giulia rightly observed, there are multiple signs of “aggressive behaviour”. I thank you Giulia because this year’s Message for the World Day of Peace suggests precisely non-violence as an aim for life and for political action. In fact, we are living through a piecemeal world war. There are conflicts in many of the planet’s regions which threaten the future of entire generations. Why is the international community, with its organizations, unable to prevent or stop all this? Are economic and strategic interests more important than the shared interest of peace? Surely, these are issues which are treated in university lecture halls and resonate above all in our conscience. Basically, the University is, *par excellence*, the place where consciences are formed amid intense debate on the demands of good, truth and beauty, and those of reality, with all its

contradictions. A concrete example? The arms industry. For decades, there has been talk of disarmament; important processes have also been set in motion to this end. However, unfortunately, despite all the speeches and commitments, many countries are increasing their arms budget. And this is happening in a world which is still combatting hunger and sickness. It is a scandalous contradiction.

Faced with this dramatic reality, you rightly ask yourselves: what should our response be? Certainly not a resigned and distrustful attitude. You young people, in particular, cannot afford to be without hope. Hope is a part of you. In fact, when hope is lacking, life is also lacking. And so, some go in search of an illusionary existence which is offered by merchants who trade in emptiness. They sell things that provide temporary and apparent happiness, but in reality they lead to dead end streets, with no future, true existential labyrinths. Bombs destroy bodies. Addictions destroy the mind, soul and body too. And here I shall give you another concrete example of a current contradiction: the gambling industry. Universities can provide valuable research on how to prevent and contend with the addiction to gambling, which causes serious damage to people and families and with a high social cost.

A response that I would like to suggest — I am thinking of Niccolò's question — is that of committing yourselves, also as a university, to projects of sharing and service to the neediest, to favour the growth in our city of Rome, of a sense of belonging to a "common homeland". Many urgent social issues and situations of hardship and poverty challenge us: let us consider the people who live on the streets, of migrants, of those in need, not only of food and clothing, but of integration into society, such as those who come out of prison. In reaching out to this social poverty, we become protagonists of constructive actions which oppose the destructive action of violent conflict and also oppose the culture of hedonism and waste, based on the idols of money, pleasure, appearances.... Instead, by working on projects, even small ones which favour encounter and solidarity, together we can recover a sense of trust in life.

In all contexts, particularly in that of the university, it is important to recognize and face this change of epoch with reflection and discernment, without ideological prejudice, fear or running away. Every change, even the current one, is a step that brings with it difficulties, weariness and suffering. However, it also brings new horizons of good. Great changes demand rethinking our economic, cultural and social models in order to recover the central value of the human person. In the third question, Riccardo referred to "information which, in a globalized world, is transmitted mostly via social networks". In such a complex context, I think it is necessary to act with healthy discernment on the basis of ethical and spiritual criteria. It is therefore necessary to ask oneself: what is good, with reference to the values of a vision proper to man and the world, a vision of the person in all his dimensions, in particular, the transcendental aspect.

In speaking about transcendence, I would like to speak to you directly and show you who I am. I profess myself Christian, and the transcendence which I open myself and look to has a name:

Jesus. I am convinced that his Gospel is a force of true personal and social renewal. By speaking in this manner, I am not proposing illusions or philosophical or ideological theories, nor do I wish to proselytize. I am speaking about a Person who came to meet me when I was more or less your age. He broadened my horizons and changed my life. This Person can fill our hearts with joy and our lives with meaning. He is my traveling companion. He does not disappoint and he does not betray. He is always with us. He acts with respect and discretion along the path of our life; he sustains us especially when we feel lost or defeated, in moments of weakness and sin, to set us on our journey again. This is the personal testimony of my life.

Do not be afraid to open yourself to the horizons of the Holy Spirit, and if you receive the gift of faith — because faith is a gift — do not be afraid to open yourself to the encounter with Christ and to deepen your relationship with Him. Faith never limits the scope of reason, but rather opens it up to an integral vision of man and reality, protecting us from the danger of reducing the person to “human matter”. With Jesus, difficulties do not disappear, but they are faced in a different way, without fear, without lying to oneself and to others. They are faced with the light and the strength which come from Him. As Riccardo said, we can become “workers of intellectual charity”, starting from the University itself, so that it may be a place of the formation of “knowledge” in the fullest sense of the term, and of the integral education of the person. In this light, the University offers its singular and indispensable contribution to the renewal of society.

The University can also be the setting that fosters a culture of encounter and of welcome for people from different cultural and religious traditions. Nour, who comes from Syria, referred to the West’s “fear” with regard to foreigners, because they could “threaten Europe’s Christian culture”. Apart from the fact that the first threat to Europe’s Christian culture comes from within Europe itself, withdrawing into oneself or into one’s culture is never the right way to give new hope or carry out social and cultural renewal. A culture is strengthened by its openness and its exchange of views with other cultures, as long as it has a clear and mature awareness of its own principles and values. I therefore encourage professors and students to experience the University as an environment of true dialogue, which neither flattens nor intensifies diversity, but opens to constructive comparison. We are called to understand and appreciate the values of others, overcoming the temptation of indifference and fear. Never be afraid of encounter, of dialogue, of debate.

As you continue along your path of teaching and learning in the university, try asking yourself: is my *forma mentis* becoming more individualistic or more solidary? If it is more solidary, it is a good sign because you will be going against the current, but going in the only direction that has a future and that offers a future. Solidarity, which is not proclaimed in words but rather experienced concretely, creates peace and hope for all countries and for the whole world. And you, because of the fact that you work and study at university, have a responsibility to leave a positive mark on history.

I thank you wholeheartedly for this meeting and for your attention. May hope be the light which always shines on your studies and your commitment. I invoke the Lord's blessing on each of you and your families.