

"It was about four in the afternoon"

The young apostle John was so deeply moved by his first encounter with Jesus that he even remembers the exact time, Pope Francis said in his August 30 general audience, continuing his reflections on the virtue of hope.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Today I would like to return to an important theme: the relationship between hope and memory, with particular reference to the memory of vocation. I take the call of Jesus' first disciples as an icon. This experience made such an impression on their memory that one of them even noted the time: it was about four in the afternoon (cf. Jn 1:39). The Evangelist John tells the story as a clear recollection from his youth, left untouched in his memory as an old man: because John wrote these things when he was already old.

The encounter took place near the Jordan River, where John the Baptist was baptizing; and those young Galileans had chosen the Baptist as their spiritual guide. One day Jesus came and was baptized in the river. The following day he passed by again and it was then that the Baptizer, that is, John the Baptist, told two of

his disciples: “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (v. 36).

And for those two, it is the “spark.” They leave their first teacher and begin to follow Jesus. On the way, he turns to them and asks the decisive question: “What do you seek?” (v. 38). In the Gospels, Jesus appears as an expert on the human heart. At that moment he met two young men, searching, with a healthy restlessness. Indeed, what youth is a satisfied youth without a quest for meaning? Young people who seek nothing are not young people; they are retired; they have aged prematurely. It is sad to see young people in retirement.... And throughout the entire Gospel, in all of the encounters that happen to him along the way, Jesus appears as an “incendiary” of hearts. From this springs that question of his that seeks to bring out the desire for life and happiness that every young person

bears inside: “What do you seek?” I too would like to ask the young people here in the Square today, and those who are listening via the media: “You, who are young, what do you seek? What are you looking for in your heart?”

John and Andrew’s vocation begins in this way: it is the beginning of a friendship with Jesus so strong as to impose a commonality of life and of passions with Him. The two disciples begin to stay with Jesus and immediately become missionaries, because when the encounter ends, they do not calmly return home: in fact, their respective brothers—Simon and James—soon become engaged as followers. They go to them and say: “We have found the Messiah; we have found a great prophet”: they share the news. They are missionaries in that encounter. It was such a touching, such a happy meeting that the disciples will

remember forever that day which illuminated and gave direction to their youth.

How can we discover our own vocation in this world? It can be discovered in many ways, but this passage of the Gospel tells us that the first indicator is the joy of the encounter with Jesus. Marriage, consecrated life, priesthood: every true vocation begins with an encounter with Jesus who gives us joy and hope anew; and he leads us, even through trials and difficulties, to an ever fuller encounter; that encounter, the encounter with him, grows greater, and to the fullness of joy.

The Lord does not want men and women who walk behind him reluctantly, without having the wind of gladness in their hearts. You who are here in the Square, I ask you—each of you respond to yourself—do

you have the wind of gladness in your heart? Each of you ask yourself: “Do I have within me, in my heart, the wind of gladness?” Jesus wants people who understand that being with him bestows immense happiness, which can be renewed every day of our life. A disciple of God’s Kingdom who is not joyful does not evangelize this world; he is sad. We become Jesus’ preachers not by sharpening the weapons of rhetoric: you can talk, talk, talk, but if there is nothing else.... How do we become preachers of Jesus? By keeping the sparkle of true happiness in our eyes. We see many Christians, even among us, who transmit the joy of faith with their eyes: with their eyes!

For this reason, a Christian, like the Virgin Mary, keeps alive the flame of falling in love: in love with Jesus. Certainly there are trials in life; there are moments in which it is necessary to go forward despite the cold and

the crosswinds, despite much bitterness. But Christians know the way that leads to that sacred fire which ignited them once and for ever.

But please, I implore you: let us not give credence to embittered and unhappy people; let us not listen to those who cynically recommend not cultivating hope in life; let us not trust those who extinguish all nascent enthusiasm, saying that no undertaking is worth the sacrifice of a whole life; let us not listen to those “old” at heart who stifle youthful euphoria. Let us go to the elderly who have eyes sparkling with hope! Instead, let us cultivate healthy utopias: God wants us to be able to dream like him and with him, as we journey, well aware of reality. Dream of a different world. And if one dream is snuffed out, [let us] go back to dreaming of it again, drawing with hope from the memory of the

beginning, from those embers that, perhaps after not such a good life, are hidden under the ashes of the first encounter with Jesus.

Here then, is a fundamental dynamic of Christian life: remembering Jesus. Paul said to his disciple: “Remember Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 2:8); this is the advice of the great Saint Paul: “Remember Jesus Christ”. [Let us] remember Jesus, the loving fire by which one day we understood our life as a project of good, and with this flame, [let us] rekindle our hope.

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