

"I always keep two things in my pocket"

At the meeting with young people in Nairobi, Kenya on 27 November, Pope Francis revealed what keeps him going in difficult moments: the Rosary and small "Way of the Cross" that he always carries with him. With some reactions from those who saw him during his visit.

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At the meeting with young people in Nairobi on 27 November Pope Francis revealed what keeps him

going in difficult moments: “I always keep two things in my pocket: a Rosary, to pray and something that seems strange ... what is it? It is the story of God’s failure. It’s a small *Via Crucis*. Just as Jesus suffered from the moment he was condemned to death to the moment he was buried. With these two things, I do my best. Thanks to these two things I don’t lose hope.”

And perhaps many people who saw him in this trip identified with the Pope. He is not proposing an easy life but a life full of meaning because of the love we give, because of the hope we share. And this perhaps is at the heart of Africa: a limitless optimism despite challenges and difficulties. Below we summarize the reactions of some of the people who saw him or heard him.

Wajonah, a student, called his mother to ask her if she needed cards

for the Mass. He had extra. She told him she was not up to walking long distances in the darkness of the wee hours of the night to get to the venue. He was quick to remind her that in her youth they walked longer distances just to get to Sunday Mass. At the end of the Mass with Pope Francis at the University of Nairobi, Wajonah's mum called him up to thank him profusely for shaking her out of her lethargy: "It was wonderful! One in a lifetime opportunity! Thank you very much!"

Kelvin, another student, was struck by the words of the Holy Father at the meeting with the youth where he mentioned loving others even though you were not loved, and if you find someone is lonely, keeping them company. He found it inspiring because it is the opposite of what he had lived and experienced.

Teresa, whose family had been abandoned by her father when she was small, was also struck by the Pope's words. First he encouraged young people to take care of the family, a basic institution for human society. But the Pope was even more specific: "There is only one remedy to come out of these experiences: to do what oneself has not received. If you haven't received understanding, be understanding with others, if you haven't received love, love others; if you have felt the pain of loneliness, approach those that are alone."

Two volunteers were helping to guide the people coming through the entrance of the University of Nairobi grounds where the Mass was taking place. There came a mother, a child and a friend accompanying them who asked them if they could get out through the gate just next to them. The volunteers advised them that should they leave, the security

guards would not let them back in. The mother of the child informed them that they had started travelling from 11 pm the previous day and that the child had not eaten anything and was hungry. They had parked their car far away and had left their food there. “We gave them our food and they ate and went away happy,” they said. “I was impressed that they had come so early to attend the Mass. I thought I had come early since I had arrived at about 4:30 am!”

Kevin was struck by the Pope’s humility which he came to learn also includes letting others serve you. “It doesn’t mean that I should always be the one to serve people. Give them a chance also! He demonstrated this when the Pope let an elderly priest lay hands on him and bless him.” He was also impressed by how well organized the Holy Father was and just how much he was able to achieve in the few days he was here.

Michael, a Ugandan, was impressed by the Pope's humble detachment: "he has a lot of material things at his disposal but he lives his life to please God. From his motorcade, to the garments he wore, to his demeanor..." It caught Michael's attention as well that the Holy Father never spoke of humility at any point, but he eloquently taught it throughout his stay. That with the plan of life that we came to learn the Pope follows, were the two things that Mike found to keep with him as a memory of these historic days.

Mary was a volunteer. She was enthralled at working with volunteers from other universities and walks of life. She was just as excited as they were and screamed her voice hoarse with them when the Pope made his appearance. She was also charged with the sheer energy of the youth at the stadium: "I have never felt so much electricity seeing

thousands of people cheer in unison, chant in unison... To be honest, witnessing 60,000 faithful pray and cheer from the very centre of the stadium is enough to make anyone teary! I know I was!”

Three friends begun an unofficial Facebook page for the Pope’s visit. One of them mentioned how one of their readers commented that what struck him was how keenly Pope Francis would listen to everyone who addressed him.

Roy, in Kampala, was struck by the intensity of the Pope’s schedule. Several times he commented it was not right that a man as old as that had so many things to do in so few days! He should have some days off in between activities. At the end of the meeting, he had resolved to resume his own means of formation despite his own hectic work schedule.

Complete schedule for the 25-30 November trip, with links to addresses and homilies:

*Apostolic Journey of Pope Francis to
Kenya, Uganda and the Central
African Republic*

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