

Intervention of Mr. Vittorio Scelzo, of the dicastery of the laity, of the family and of life, director in Rome of the Office for the Elderly and Children.

At the beginning of his speech, Dr. Vittorio Scelzo, invited to Santo Domingo for the International meeting of LAI, nous presented the institution he is directing, stating that it is very recent : created two years ago, it is an example of the reforms implemented by the Pope Francis .

Dr. Scelzo deliver us the meaning of his coming to Santo Domingo and his intervention with the members of the international meeting: "It is necessary that the society has another look at the elderly, we must be the actors of this change of mentality towards the people older. »

At the beginning of his term, Dr. Scelzo wanted to listen to what is happening in the different countries and to approach their realities. He said he was in the service of local churches and was ready to create networks between the Curia and the actors on the terrain. He is particularly interested in helping actors of terrain, those same who are engaged in pastoral care because they are the ones who carry the message of Jesus.

His first mission was to contact the episcopal conferences to see what was existing there. He realized that the development of a " pastoral for elderly" was not, far from it, the first concern of bishops, except for Argentina and Brazil.

As far as France is concerned, the link was made with the MCR and LAI. That's why he contacted the LAI president, Marta Melo Antunes, to find out what was going on there.

Through these contacts, he was able to begin to grasp the important work done by lay people in some countries of the planet: it is essential for the Church today.

In terms of population, The Dr Scelzo recalls the ever-increasing share (figures show) of elders in society ; unfortunately, "these last disturb, they are intended for the EHPAD with the same facility as one puts a coat in the wardrobe" says in substance Pope Francis ; another word from the Pope: "Society tends to forget the elders, but the Lord does not abandon them."

In our societies, old age is scary ; because of fragility and vulnerability, it is considered as a contagious disease you must protect yourself against. Hence the marginalization of elders as reflected in some of the findings: in Japan, thousands of elders commit suicide because of loneliness ; in institutions or retirement homes, elderly people, cut off from their familiar environment, die faster than at home because they no longer feel the urge to live; in Africa, lynching of elders accused of sorcery "stealing their years from the young" are sometimes witnessed.

For Dr. Scelzo, it is urgent to give our full attention to this segment of the population that are "the old", to change the way we look at old age, to no longer consider it a curse but to contrary, as in the Bible, to see in longevity, a sign of blessing; we must help the ancients to give meaning to the years remaining to live. This is how our societies, despite the increasing number of "old" as a result of increased longevity, will avoid becoming aging societies.

Dr. Scelzo had this surprising formula: young people are not the future of the Church but the present, **the elders are the future of the Church**, they are the ones who are building the future. During Pope Francis' visit to the Dicastery, which includes the Office for elderly and children headed by Dr. Scelzo, the Holy Father quoted from the Book of Joel: "your elders will have dreams, your young people, visions "; the ancients, according to the Pope, must not stop dreaming; the assets they have - the demographic weight they represent in society, their wisdom from their experience - can make them leaders in the Church, provided they do not stop dreaming and that they associate their dreams with

the visions of young people. These are the bases that clarify the mission of the elders which is to transmit the faith.

The time of old age raises questions about the meaning of existence and thus the religious dimension of life becomes more important; the pastoral attention to the elderly should not be episodic: in response to the questions that arise when we get older, we must develop a pastoral care for the elderly.

There has been no real reflection on the meaning of age and our elders are marginalized; this can be the mission of an association like yours: LAI must respond to the pope's concerns about the elderly, relay forcefully the words of the Pope for whom "old age is a vocation", translate into action his speech on old age by being, in each of our countries, active and convincing relays of this discourse, inventing and acting to make recognize that the elderly have a role to play in society and a mission to accomplish in the Church; LAI must help make sense of this time of old age from a life-giving spirituality. More specifically, we have a role to play as grandparents in the "transmission of the faith" to overcome the failures - or indifference - of parents who are often cornered, perhaps much more than we were, through their professional activities and everyday tasks.

Dr. Scelzo gives some tracks (some elements of "dreams") to feed our thinking :

What does it mean to no longer work, no longer to be productive? how to highlight the meaning of free?

What does it mean to have more time? what is the meaning of this availability

What does fragility mean ? Action, when one is marked by fragility, can take another form; The Pope gives the example of prayer, we can always pray, to ascend to the Lord a prayer of intercessory. The elders can be those intercessors.

What do pain, suffering mean? What does it mean to live when one suffers, to be a Christian when one is in mental confusion?

Thinking about death that limits all life.

There is therefore a whole reflection on the world of old age, on the meaning of the ages, on the Aging and On the vocation of Elderly Within the church; Indeed, this time of old age Brings Something fundamentally new to the Company. We are in the best position to know; Our demographic weight, our experience of life, the wisdom gained through the trials are all trumps that can make us leaders in the church: Let's play!

In conclusion, Dr. Scelzo tells us of his strong expectation of seeing us:

- "to adopt" the pope's thought on the elders

- to implement initiatives showing that we are a movement that engages in the Pastoral of the Elderly

- to work concrete projects that will show that the elders are the future of the Church; one of the tracks could be a collaboration between young and old people who would find a beautiful illustration at the next WYD, the ones in Panama being too close to foresee something.

Dr. Scelzo says being listening to what is happening, but he is also thinking about a meeting in the Vatican of the Pastoral of the Elderly. He admits he does not know enough about the realities of the field. . He asks us to send the details of the persons in charge for the organization of this meeting. Recalling the importance of having meetings in the Church, he regretted that the proximity of Panama's WYD made it difficult to meet young people and old people.

Dr. Scelzo concludes by expressing his thanks for the opportunity to know us and to understand everything that is done by our teams around the world.

Answers to questions posed by the assistance to Dr Scelzo:

Could the Pope intervene with the bishops so that VMI-VAI-LAI should be better recognized in the parishes?

It is clear that the bishops , in general, pay little attention to the world of elders and have not understood the role that they could play in the Church; but the laity that we are, must know how to assume their responsibility, to show courage, strength of conviction to promote LAI; it is the laity responsible for being, in the parishes, the protagonists of a pastoral dynamic for the elderly. Remember that LAI is recognized by the Vatican.

How can one think he can "be guilty of old age"?

It is because society has not understood the meaning to give to those extra years that we are given to live. We have a role to play in stimulating this reflection on the place that must be recognized for the elders and on their vocation.

Even if the bishops do not have the attention that we would like for the elderly, I invite you to work towards the implementation of a pastoral care for the elderly; be proud to respond to this mission. I invite you to work on the implementation of an elder's pastoral care; be proud to respond to this mission.