

Speech by Msgr. François Maupu

Growing up in faith

Dr Scelzo spoke in his intervention of the spirituality of the elders, developed a need for spirituality specific to the elderly. I am not answering these questions at all, but I am plugging into that in the sense that he said with a somewhat provocative title "Growing up in the faith". How can we propose, in amazement, to older people to grow in faith? I do not only propose it to older people but to people who intend to be actors or actresses of evangelisation.

You may remember a passage from the Gospel of St. John where Jesus meets Nathanael, who thinks he is already old when Jesus told him this: *One must be reborn.*

Nathanael said him: *This is not possible, I am old, I cannot be reborn, enter again into the bosom of my mother.* Jesus explains that *this rebirth is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.*

What Nathanael discovers in his dialogue with Jesus is what most of us have discovered in their own lives at the human level. In all life we discover new things, including when we reach a certain age, there are new aspects of life that we did not know, there are pleasant experiences because we have more time, there are unpleasant experiences or what society claims around us, coupled with unpleasant experiences that are not necessarily unpleasant.

Hence the first point I develop: *Growing up is aging and aging is growing*, a formula borrowed from a French gerontologist from its experience:

Growing up is aging like the children who want to grow up, it is passing from six years to seven years, from seven years to eight years...

But there is an age of life where this is not a problem, that is what you want to do. It may be less common to say *Aging is growing*. It is the same process as when one had a few weeks and even before and that continues.

I also found a quote from a French writer, Marcel Jouhandeau, who says: *Getting older, if you know, is not at all what you believe, it's not at all diminishing but growing.*

In the case of our meeting, when we talk about growing up, it is a matter of growing in faith to become actors of evangelization and more specifically in the context of Ascending Life, or its various denominations, which is a movement of evangelization, and sometimes even emphasizing it, of integral evangelization.

Regarding our personal life of faith, our own growth, I will often draw inspiration from Pope Francis, especially in an intervention he had with the priests of his Diocese of Rome eighteen months ago and taken over by the Osservatore Romano. The pope said:

The growth of faith occurs through encounters with the Lord throughout life. These encounters that mark us, which we remember as a treasure of memory in our lives and which constitute our faith.

They are like a living story in our personal life.

We can understand this by looking at the Faith of Israelites

What did the Israelites believe? What does the Bible tell us? She does not make a treatise of faith, but she says: God is with us in our history. There are successful matches, but also missed matches, missed. It has happened that we, people of Israel are on the wrong roads, that we have chosen paths that lead nowhere. The Bible records these encounters, the failures of the encounter, the infidelities and the gifts that God has been able to make to his people.

Growing up in faith is not a voluntarist decision, faith is meeting with someone else, it's not a decision I take on my own. To grow in faith is not to decide to believe more, nor to learn new things. We are, of course, attentive to formation, to all training operations, but doctrinal formation is something that accompanies growth in the faith. It's not accumulating knowledge that allows you to grow in faith.

Pope Francis offers three words that I will develop:

- Memory
- Hope
- Discernment

The memory

Israel remembers its history.

I've found a beautiful phrase of St. Catherine of Siena who lived in Europe in the 14th century and who in a dialogue on Providence, gives the word to God who says: *I gave the memory to my creature so that it would keep the memory of my blessings.*

The faith of Israel is a reminder of God's goodness and action in history.

Can our memory answer this question: How many beautiful things has God achieved for me? The Apostles for example never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: *Jesus, you burned my heart* In the Gospel of St John, one remembers even at what time: it was about the 10th hour.

The Lord came to meet us either to enlighten us, he came to pick us up, to meet us as with Zacchaeus in the Gospel of St Luke, sometimes to get us up, to get us back up, sometimes to pick us up when we were in very bad condition, a little like the prophet Ezekiel who will pick up the one he will make his wife later, Christ comes to pick us up, to put us back up. Let's not forget those moments when Jesus touched us, where he touched our hearts.

Memory can be compared to scars that can mark our bodies, reminiscent of injuries as a result of an operation, a battle for the most combative of us at a time when it is less painful and that means healing.

There are also the scars of our soul, this intervention that you Lord made by working with your mercy. Memory through scars, memory through those times when Jesus touched our hearts.

In the Letter to the Hebrews there is also an invitation to remember people who helped us to grow in faith, who led us, who told us the Word of God, to remember those who helped us throughout the stages of our life, it's part of the memory. It's not at all about looking back, Israel looks back not to regret what happened but to build on it. Also, when I look at my story, but when I see my scars, when Jesus touched my heart, I do not look in the rear-view mirror but, as some say, even if the mirror is useful it should not be bigger than the windshield. The windshield in our cars is used to see in front. What I have in my memory does not prevent me from propelling myself forward, of advancing, on the contrary we rely on this memory to move forward.

There is a psalm, which bears No. 135. It is a simple psalm that has a chorus "Eternal is his love". This refrain comes after every line that evokes the blessings of God (creation, the exit of Egypt and including the particular one that has destroyed the firstborn of the Egyptians) it evokes the entire history of the Hebrew people. It can be a very personal exercise for everyone, each of us, to write our own psalm 135 and to remember the events of our lives. Do not hesitate to put the chorus: Eternal is his love. What we will put are not necessarily glorious things; on the contrary, there are mistakes in our lives, moments of failure, waste,

but even then, the Lord did not abandon me. This is the role of memory based on the promise of the Lord who set me on the road and who continued to accompany me.

Hope: Hope opens faith to the surprises of God (expression of Pope Francis) It leads to finding in the treasure of memory new things and to identify new possibilities in life and in the lives of people I meet.

To look at others with faith is also to look at them with hope and to find out what they are capable of. It is the look of a Christian and an agent of evangelization, that to see all the possibilities even unsuspected that are in him, in her.

Hope adds Pope Francis is to see on the face of the poor that I meet today the Lord who will one day come to judge us. The Pope alludes to chapter 25 of the Gospel of St. Matthew: *I was naked, and you gave me clothes, I was hungry, and you gave me to eat.*

Discernment:

Memory nourishes faith, hope allows active faith and discernment allows us to see where faith is put into action., We Catholics refer to St Paul who speaks to us of faith operating through charity.

Discernment that's what gets us going and makes it possible not to be content with saying that we believe, that we install ourselves in the faith and that that is enough.

Faith must be active and active otherwise, says Pope Francis: *faith that remains abstract risks becoming fossilized when the love received is kept in a museum, if it does not operate in charity.*

Faith can volatilize also tells us the Pope, that is to say when it is not acting it becomes practically something virtual. Discernment makes that concrete love is possible at this moment in favour of the neighbour.

Discerning also means taking a step back to reflect, not rushing, not being deceived by the force of evil, but seeing the victory of Christ in all human situations. On this subject in Evangelii Gaudium's programmatic encyclical of the Pope to which we can refer and to which the Pope himself refers, in Nos. 85 and 86, it is also what nourishes hope, to see the victory of the Cross of Christ in all human situations.

Citation of Nos. 85 and 86

One of the greatest temptations that stifles fervour and daring is the resignation to failure that turns us into pessimistic dissatisfied and disappointed with darkened faces. It's not at all the face of the members of life Ascending who have never, or almost never, this darkened, pessimistic and disappointed face. One who begins without trust has lost half of the battle in advance and is burying his talents. Discernment is what makes us recognize what can make us grow.

Faith grows when in the present moment we discern how to concretize the love for the good possible in relation to the good of the other because the other also has the possibility to grow up in the faith.

Believe that Christ is there in the poor, in the lost sheep, by making himself even discreetly or without being noticed but taking a small step towards him is a progress of the faith.

Faith needs discernment to be implemented. We must not stick to an act of faith that was recited in our old catechism.

To conclude my statement I will make two quotations: the first comes from the catechism of the Catholic Church in No 162. It is question of growing, of growing in faith. To persevere and grow in faith we must nourish it by the Word of God, implore the Lord to increase it, it must act by charity (Saint Paul), be carried by hope and be rooted in the faith of the Church.

A French writer, Julien Green, writes:

Old age does not exist or rather there is old age only where there is no love,

It is about being loved regardless of what one is able to achieve without refusing to achieve.

Finally, I propose to work your memory: When Jesus burned your heart? What are the beautiful things that the Lord has done for you personally?

May each of you personally practice Psalm 135: I have forgotten you, you have come for me because "*Eternal is your love*". I fell and you picked me up because "*Eternal is your love*". I met people who helped me to love you because "*Eternal is your love*". I found out how much you loved me because "*Eternal is your love*"

Take a little time to internalize what I just told you.

I hope that these words will help you to advance in faith.