

### **Youth Question:**

Holy Father, when we look to our future we are accustomed to imagining it tinted with the grey, dark and menacing colors. To tell the truth, it seems to be that we see a blank page, with nothing...

Sometimes I have tried to draw my future. But at the end I see something that does not satisfy me. I will try to explain: I think that we draw it, but often we happen to start out from a grand design, a sort of great fresco from which, to our dismay, gradually we remove some details, we remove pieces. The result is that our plans and dreams, out of fear of others and their judgment, end up being smaller than they were at the outset.

And above all, I end up creating something I don't always like...

### **Answer of the Holy Father**

Good evening. I will tell you the truth: I knew your questions and had already prepared an answer, but also – hearing them – I would like to add something spontaneously. Because the way in which they have asked the questions goes beyond what is written.

You, Letizia, used a very important word, which is “dream”. And both of you said another very important one: “fear”. These two words will enlighten us a little.

Dreams are important. They keep our outlook broad, they help us to embrace the horizon, to cultivate hope in every daily action. And the dreams of the young are the most important of all. A young person who does not dream is anesthetized; he cannot understand life, the power of life. Dreams wake you up, they carry you ahead, they are the brightest stars, those which indicate a different path for humanity. So, you have in your heart these shining stars that are your dreams: they are your responsibility and your treasure. Make them also be your future!

And this is the work you must do: transform the dreams of today into the reality of the future, and this takes courage, just as we have heard from both of you. To the girl they said, “No, no, study economics because with this you will die of hunger”, and to the boy, “Yes, the plan is good but let's take away this piece, and this, and this...”, and at the end nothing remains. No! God ahead with courage, courage in the face of resistance, difficulties, all that which would extinguish our dreams.

Certainly, dreams must be made to grow, they must be purified, put to the test and also shared. But have you ever asked yourselves where your dreams come from? My dreams, where do they come from? Were they born from watching the television? Listening to a friend? Daydreaming? Are they great dreams or are they little, meager ones, that satisfy as little as possible? The dreams of comfort, the dreams only of well being: “No, no, I am all right like this, I won't go ahead”. But these dreams will make you die, in life! They will turn your life into something that is not great. The dreams of tranquility, the dreams that send the young to sleep and make a courageous youth one who instead stays on the couch. It is sad to see young people on the couch, watching life pass by in front of them. Young people – I have said it before – without dreams, who “retire” at 20, 22 years of age: what a bad thing, a young pensioner! Instead, the youth who dreams of great things goes ahead, he or she doesn't retire early. Do you understand? Like that, young people.

And the Bible tells us that the great dreams are those capable of bearing fruit. The great dreams are those which bring fruitfulness, which are capable of sowing peace, of sowing fraternity, of sowing joy, like today; these are the great dreams in which we think of everyone as US. Once, a priest asked me a question: “Tell me, what is the opposite of ‘I’? And I naively fell into the trap and said, “you”. “No, father, that is the seed of war. The opposite of “I” is “we”. If I say: the opposite is you, then I make war; if I say that the opposite of selfishness is “we”, I make peace, I make community, I carry ahead the dreams of friendship and peace. Think: the real dreams are the dreams of us. The great dreams include, involve, are extrovert, they share, they generate new life. And great dreams, to remain as such, need an inexhaustible source of hope, an Infinite that breathes into them and opens them up. The great dreams need God so as not to become mirages or a delirium of omnipotence. You can dream of great things, but by yourself it is dangerous, because you can fall prey to the delirium of omnipotence. But with God do not be afraid: go ahead. Dream big.

And then, the word you used, “fear”. Do you know? The dreams of young people scare adults a bit. They scare them, because when a young person dreams, he goes far. Perhaps because they have stopped dreaming and risking. Very often life causes adults to stop dreaming, to stop risking; perhaps because your dreams challenge their life choices, dreams that lead you to criticize, to criticize them. But do not let yourselves be robbed of your dreams. There was a boy, here in Italy, twenty, twenty-two years of age, who started to dream and to dream big. And his father, an important businessman, tried to convince him otherwise but he said, “No, I want to dream. I dream what I feel inside”. And in the end, he went away, to dream. And his father followed him. And that boy sought refuge in the bishopric, he took off his robes and gave them to his father: “Let me go on my path”. This young man, an Italian of the thirteenth century, was called Francis and he changed the history of Italy. Francis risked so he could dream big; he knew no boundaries and ended his life dreaming. Let us think: he was a young man like us. But how he dreamed! They said that he was mad because he dreamed in this way. And he did so much good, and continues to do so. The young scare adults a bit because adults have stopped dreaming, they have stopped

risking, and they have organized themselves well. But as I said before, do not let yourselves be robbed of your dreams. "And how can I make sure, Father, that no-one robs me of my dreams?" Look for good teachers capable of helping you to understand them and to make them real, gradually and with serenity. Be good teachers in turn, teachers of hope and trust towards the new generations who will follow you. "But how, I can become a teacher too?". Yes, a young person who is capable of dreaming becomes a teacher, through his or her witness. Because it is witness that shakes and moves hearts, and shows the ideals that everyday life covers up. The dream is a great strength. "Father, where can I buy the pills that make me dream?" No, those no! Those will not make you dream, they will send your heart to sleep. They will burn out your neurons. Dreams cannot be bought. Dreams are a gift, a gift from God, a gift that God sows in your hearts. Dreams are given to us freely, but so that we give them away freely to others too. Offer your dreams: no-one, taking them, will impoverish you. Offer them to others freely. Dear young people: "No" to fear. What the teacher said to you? Was he afraid? Yes, perhaps he was afraid; but he had sorted everything out, he was calm. But why did he not want a girl to take the same path? He frightened you. And what did he say? "Study economics: you will earn more". This is a trap, the trap of having, of setting yourself up in well being and not being a pilgrim on the path of your dreams. Take a risk on that path: do not be afraid. Take a risk, because you will be the ones to realize your dream, because life is not a lottery: life is realized. And we all have the capacity to do it.

Saint Pope John XXIII said: "I have never met a pessimist who achieved anything good" (Interview by Sergio Zavoli with Msgr. Capovilla in *Jesus*, no. 6, 2000). We must learn this, because it will help us in life. And fear makes us pessimistic. No pessimism. Risk, dream and go ahead.