

(ZENIT News / Rome, 16.11.2022).- Pope Francis held the traditional General Audience in Saint Peter's Square on Wednesday morning, November 16. On this occasion he resumed the theme of discernment, to which he has been dedicating his weekly catecheses. *Today's was the eighth dedicated to this theme, and he focused more specifically on desolation, on the reason we become desolate.*

Here is the text of the catechesis with headers and phrases in bold added by ZENIT.

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[1st First read what happens and then make decisions]

Today, let us resume the catechesis on the theme of discernment. We have seen how important it is to read what stirs within us, so as not to make hasty decisions, spurred by the emotion of the moment, only to regret them when it is too late. That is, to read what happens and then make decisions.

[2nd Desolation: an occasion for growth]

In this sense, even the spiritual state we call desolation, when in the heart everything is dark, is sad, these things, this state of desolation can be an opportunity for growth. Indeed, **if there is not a little dissatisfaction, a little healthy sadness, a healthy capacity to dwell in solitude and to stay by ourselves without fleeing, we risk always remaining on the surface of things** and never making contact with the core of our existence.

[3rd Desolation Shakes the Soul]

Desolation causes a "rousing of the soul": when one is sad it is as if the soul were shaken; it keeps us alert, it fosters vigilance and humility, and protects us from the winds of fancy. These are indispensable conditions for progress in life, and hence also in the spiritual life. A perfect but "aseptic" serenity, without feeling, when it becomes the criterion for decisions and behaviour, makes us inhuman.

[4th The role of feelings]

We cannot ignore our feelings: we are human and sentiment is a part of our humanity. And **without understanding feelings we are inhuman; without living our sentiments we will also be indifferent to the sufferings of others and incapable of accepting our own.** Not to mention that such a "perfect serenity" cannot be reached by this path of indifference. This sterile distance: "I won't get involved in things, I will keep my distance": this is not life, it is as though we lived in a laboratory, shut away, so as not to have microbes and diseases.

Many of our prayers are also somewhat like this: they are requests for favours addressed to the Lord, without any real interest in Him. We go to ask, to ask, to

ask the Lord. **The Gospel notes that Jesus was often surrounded by many people who sought Him out in order to obtain something: healing, material assistance, but not simply to be with Him. He was pushed by the crowds, yet He was alone.** Some saints, and even some artists, have contemplated this condition of Jesus. It may seem strange, unreal, to ask the Lord: "How are you?" Instead, it is a beautiful way to enter into a true, sincere relationship, with His humanity, with His suffering, even with His singular solitude. With Him, with the Lord, who wanted to share His life with us to the full.

It does us a great deal of good to learn to be with Him, to be with the Lord, to learn to be with the Lord without ulterior motives, exactly as it happens with people we care for: we wish to know them more and more, because it is good to be with them.

[7th The spiritual life is not a technique at our disposal]

Dear brothers and sisters, **the spiritual life is not a technique at our disposal, it is not a programme for inner "wellbeing" that it is up to us to plan. No. The spiritual life is the relationship with the Living One, with God, the Living One who cannot be reduced to our categories.** And desolation, then, is the clearest response to the objection that the experience of God is a form of wishful thinking, a simple projection of our desires. Desolation is not feeling anything, when everything is dark, but you seek God in the desolation. In that case, if we think that He is a projection of our desires, we would always be the ones to plan, and we would always be happy and content, like a record that repeats the same music. Instead, **those who pray realize that the outcome is unpredictable: experiences and passages from the Bible that have often enthralled us, today, strangely, do not move us.** And, equally unexpectedly, experiences, encounters and readings that we have never paid much attention to or preferred to avoid – such as the experience of the cross – bring immense peace. *Do not fear desolation; face it with perseverance, do not evade it. And in desolation, try to find the Heart of Christ, to find the Lord. And the answer will come, always.*

[8th Confront the test with determination]

Faced with difficulties, therefore, never be discouraged, please, but confront the test with determination, with the help of the grace of God, which is never lacking. And if we hear within us an insistent voice that wants to turn us away from prayer, let us learn to unmask it as the voice of the tempter; and let us not be influenced; let us simply do the opposite of what it tells us!

Thank you.