

Pope Francis to Japanese students: 'Dialogue is what brings peace'

Cindy Wooden | Aug. 21, 2013
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Not wanting to disappoint 200 Japanese junior high school students, Pope Francis held a special audience Wednesday in the San Damaso Courtyard of the apostolic palace.

The students from Seibu Gakuen Bunri Junior High School in Tokyo had planned their trip to Rome and the Vatican long before the Vatican announced that Pope Francis would not hold his weekly general audiences in August.

The pope told the students that traveling, getting to know people who are different from themselves, learning about other cultures and religions "is good for you. It helps you grow."

Growth, he said, is impossible if a person stays closed in on himself.

"If we go out to encounter other people, other cultures, other religions, we grow and we begin that beautiful adventure called dialogue," he told the students.

"Dialogue is what brings peace," the pope told the group, which included Christians and Buddhists. "Peace is impossible without dialogue.

"All wars, conflicts and troubles we encounter with each other are because of a lack of dialogue," he said.

Pope Francis said there is always a danger that two people with firm identities and an inability to be open to the other will fight instead of dialogue.

"We dialogue to meet each other, not to fight," he said.

Dialogue involves asking the other, "Why do you think this?" or "Why is that culture this way?" then listening to the response, he said. "First listen, then talk -- that's meekness."

"If you don't think like I do ... and you can't convince me to think like you do, that's OK. We can still be friends," he said.

After the students sang for him, Pope Francis told them that give-and-take is important in dialogue, but he was very sorry that he couldn't reciprocate with a song of his own.

"I don't know how to sing; I can't," he said.

A young girl, in correct but halting Italian, thanked the pope for giving the students some of his precious time, and she promised they would try to follow his advice.

"Are you from Naples?" the pope asked her. "Your Italian is so good."

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