



**Brothers of
the Christian
Schools**



TESTIMONIES

ST. JOSEPH TEACHES YOUNG PEOPLE

THE MEANING OF LIFE

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1. A look at young people

Today more than ever, many eyes are fixed on young people. This is corroborated by this 21st century in which they are one of the most visible faces.

From a very early age, young people are the protagonists of many events. They are present in one way or another in all social dynamics and social life, and no wonder! Their participation in relevant issues of social life has a great impact.

More and more areas of life are opening their doors to the presence of young people. Politics, for example, a space traditionally reserved for adults, is being enriched by the poise and dynamism of young people. In addition, many high-level government agencies seek to include them in their thinking and decision-making processes. Prestigious companies, recognized in the world for their competitive positioning, are run by young people; some have even been created by young people themselves. Science and technology owe many of their achievements to their active commitment.

Organizations dedicated to the safeguarding of human rights, women's rights and gender equality have their support. The voice of protest against social injustices is permeated by the sharp tone of youth. When it comes to demanding rights, young people are there to make their voices heard. This is why the protection of the environment is an issue motivated by their denunciations. They are the ones who, with impetus and courage, denounce the pollution and saturation of the



atmosphere due to contaminating gases emitted by huge factories, which care nothing more than to promote production and exacerbated consumption at the cost of economic gain. Indeed, the active role of young people in society shows a favourable spectrum of their success as an expression of their active commitment.

This successful presence of young people in social life has not always been the case. In the past, the presence of young people in social dynamics was invisible as they waited to come of age. It was the adults who made the most important decisions in social life. Only they had the privilege of participating in major public and private affairs. Because of the way the social structure itself was organized, adults were responsible for the care, protection and development of the young.

Discussions about what was best for them depended on adults. Adults were in charge of discussing and defining the organization of society. Their functioning, based on precise and fixed rules, reflected a certain security. Based on a certain order and a certain stability, the quality of the results was anticipated. Thus, an era was configured in which prediction did not depend on sources of chance, such as the areas known today as the horoscope, tarot, among others. Thus, in this time of certainties, the future of young people was anticipated. Adults projected their education, job performance, and emotional ties beforehand.

In this dynamic of certainties, institutions were the mechanisms used to safeguard security protected by order. The State was the first institution in charge of organizing norms of behaviour that promoted peaceful relations. The family and the school received the way in which society should function, while helping children and young people to learn it. In this way, they are prepared to cope without trauma in adult life. The Church inspects the field of conscience or morality. Its importance lies in its role in shaping the convictions and motivations that lead one to act in a certain way. Therefore, the belief in the relationship between compliance with the rules and acting well is an effective mechanism in the preservation of the established order.

In fact, there is a strong tension between a protagonist and active position in the direction that personal life should take and another, where subjection to the determinations of adults guides the destinies of young people.

Moving from one state to another does not happen overnight. There are many events that influence this passage from a passive state to a state of high activity. Some of them help to understand the active participation of young people as an awakening.

I imagine the social, religious and family dynamics of the family of Nazareth and St. Joseph taking care of Jesus and trying to transmit the traditions and values, at the same time that he collaborated in the growth and education of Jesus, as a child and as a young man. His doubts, his achievements, his dreams...

2. In a time of change, also of hope.

It is common to hear sociologists talk about the accelerated way in which changes are taking place. Whereas it used to take centuries to move from one fact to another, or at least to become aware of it, today everything seems to be changing in the blink of an eye.

Rapidly transformations in communication, transport, medicine have impacted the world. The encounters and misunderstandings mediated by transport or communication occur instantly. What used to take a long time is now done in a flash. While in medicine there is a delay in surgery, due to the procedures and risks, today it is a matter of minutes, thanks to the sophisticated tools available. The war scenario soon incorporates the creation and implementation of more sophisticated weapons; think, for example, of the fear generated by the risk of the use of weapons of mass destruction such as missiles and nuclear bombs.

The changes do not stop. With the vertiginous way in which everything happens new more sophisticated elements are incorporated into human life, those that already existed have been transformed or have disappeared. With the speed of change what remains is change itself. However, the new elements are not easily accommodated to the previous structure of thought. Preparedness to receive and incorporate the new elements is deficient. Predicting outcomes is increasingly difficult. In effect, this difficulty in incorporating changes into the previous dynamics of life affects the order in which places, social communities and individuals function.

As a result of this inability to position oneself in the face of the new, a time lag is produced that affects the regulated functioning of institutions. The ability to predict changes in the previous era helped to model a type of person, with the necessary characteristics to adapt to the functioning of society according to an anticipated dynamic. This augured success. In this new dynamic of accelerated changes, institutions have difficulty in guaranteeing the necessary conditions to succeed in the social dynamics outside of anticipated regulations. Thus, the uncontrolled changes in social life plunge human life into a crisis.



However, the benefits of the advances acquired with the changes of the epoch are accompanied by new disasters. Deregulation and uncertainty in the face of the changes introduced by the new epochs brought with them devastating effects such as increased pollution; wars and armed confrontations become more acute with the use of more sophisticated weapons; a decrease in the labour supply due to the fact that machines come to replace human skills; the appearance of new diseases... in short, a real chaos comes to replace the old planned order.

The old utopian anticipations that spoke of a perfect world, such as those of Thomas More and Saint Augustine, are a thing of the past. In the midst of chaos and uncertainty, the dystopias of a happy world predominate. The same ones that Aldous Huxley and George Orwell anticipated at the beginning and middle of the 20th century.

While it is true that the active role of young people, as mentioned at the beginning, has earned them great recognition, it is also true that, as a consequence of the changes described above, they are producing reactions in them that are not so positively criticized.

Faced with the new dynamics of life in which the supreme characteristic is change and instability, a pessimism is produced as a result of discontent with the failure of the anticipated project of adults. This gives rise to a strong rejection, protected by distrust of the pseudo-certainty of long-term projects.

In this sense, young people assume lifestyles in accordance with the fleetingness of time. Immersed in the new techno-scientific elements, young people seem to dilute themselves in the evanescence of change. So, a withdrawal into themselves, with a tendency to individualism and selfishness, are more noticeable. This affects the duration of their interpersonal relationships.

In the fleetingness of time, young people do not want to put off until tomorrow what they can do today. What matters is this moment, here and now. The premise is to live the moment with intensity. Thus, in the eyes of adults, under the old slogan of planning, young people appear as disorganized, irresponsible, hedonistic, narcissistic... As a result, the anguish generated by the uncertainty of an uncertain future drives young people's desire to live the greatest number of pleasurable sensations in a constant present, disconnected from the past and the future.

Are all these pessimistic attitudes all the fault of young people? Do they determine once and for all the significant presence of young people in society? What role do young people have in the face of the accelerated changes that the world is experiencing and that greatly affect the relationships between people, other creatures and with transcendence?

In the midst of all this gloomy panorama that covers the reality of young people, the words of sister Joan Chittister call us to look with hope at the future of young people. The North American sister tells of the Irish practice, and surely in other regions of the world it is similar, in which families are accustomed to hide the embers left over from the previous day's fire with some ashes to rekindle the fire the following day. In these burning embers that are hidden and then uncovered to give new life to the fire, the potential of the strength contained in young people to preserve the future of a better world is visualized.

In them is hidden the dynamism to keep alive this generation and those to come. It is only necessary to remove those ashes that hide the passion contained in them; with which the new burning fire that will keep the flame of hope alive will be lit.

There are many glowing embers in young people. Because when the darkness of hopelessness prevents us from seeing any possibility of hope, there are embers that we can rekindle. In this sense, Pope Francis sees young people as a hope for the Church and for the world.

At World Youth Day, celebrated in Rio de Janeiro in 2013, the Pope invited young people to raise their voices in the face of injustice: "Make a ruckus, but do a good job of it! -the Holy Father exhorted- A ruckus that brings a free heart, a ruckus that brings solidarity, a ruckus that brings us hope, a ruckus that comes from knowing Jesus and knowing that God, once I know him, is my strength. That is the kind of ruckus which you should make".

I imagine the ruckus that Jesus must have created in his Nazareth, in his family ... In his disappearances, mischief and "escapes" to which Joseph and Mary had to face, as when "lost" in the temple. Undoubtedly, Joseph must have been, necessarily, attentive to the maturation changes of Jesus himself.



3. St. Joseph, clues to hope.

On the other hand, without moving away from images, voices and models of hope, it is worthwhile to recognize in the life of St. Joseph clues to keep the flame of hope alive. Because this man is an example of life to follow.

As in contemporary times, this saint had to deal with uncertainties; doubts because of the opacity of the future.

The circumstances of his time were not very friendly to him. Persecutions, murders, poverty were very common at that time. And in the midst of this darkness the people kept the fire of hope that a saviour would come to comfort the helpless (2 Sam 7:11-16). Without clarity as to how and when this would be possible, St. Joseph had a dream in which he was told of his proximity to this plan of salvation. This is where the determined will of a man is a sign of complete freedom. In spite of the confusion, the saint gives himself as a collaborator to the realization of this dream.

But was St. Joseph a man who had no plans, no life project, like any person who idealizes a life? Could it be that this man was just waiting for the fate of the future, waiting to see what would happen to him? I do not think so.

St. Joseph surely had dreams, goals, purposes; he had idealized a way of living like many men of his time. Proof of this is that he already had a profession. The Gospels relate that he was a carpenter (Mt 13:55). That is, he had a job and he earned his living with it. In addition, he already had plans to go and live with a woman called Mary. He dreamed of setting up a home.

However, in the course of her life plans, a discordant situation appears. An event that enters her life to disrupt it. It bursts in untimely to alter the course of his life. The Gospels relate that the woman he was going to marry was pregnant (Mt 1:18). Moreover, the child she was expecting was not his. In the order of logical human actions, Joseph thinks of leaving Mary. Not to continue with the plan he had. However, in this orderly development of the life story that Joseph had proposed to himself, the unexpected event of salvation is articulated.

While Joseph was sleeping, he was visited by an angel who told him not to be afraid to take Mary and the child as his wife, because the child was the Son of God (Mt 1:20-21). Can you imagine Joseph's confusion? What reason did he have to believe and accept what was happening to him? And yet, in spite of his discomfort, this courageous man accepts and acts as the angel had told him in a dream.

But all this accumulation of unexpected actions does not end here. Later, when he had courageously accepted a woman with a child that was not his own, altering the moral and religious canons by which he had been formed, he had to deal with the uprooting of his comforts. He had to leave land, friendships, work, stability by choosing to take care of Mary and the child she carried in her womb. He had to move from Galilee to another town, Bethlehem, with his pregnant wife Mary, to fulfil the duty of the census (Lk 2:1-4), a mandatory requirement at that time for every citizen. Not that it ended there, after the birth of Jesus, he had to flee to another town, Egypt, to protect the life of the child of the king of that time. Herod was looking for him to assassinate him (Mt 2:13). What a tragedy for Joseph!

There is no doubt that Joseph's constant responses in the midst of so many uncertainties regarding the veracity of the realization of God's salvific plan in humanity are an example of trust in an uncertain project... on the other hand, it is also the irrefutable proof that life does not always follow a previously established order. And that, in spite of all changes in the order and anticipated plans of life, life can always be reordered in another way, and not for that reason it ceases to have meaning. Because life can always be otherwise. Unthinkable, many times.

This leads one to think that, even if times are calamitous and high risk as they are now, there is a possibility of rebuilding projects. For the presence of a virus has altered the rhythm and plans of so many people. Meetings have become permanent misunderstandings. Faced with the risk of contagion, people withdraw and avoid contact with others. Many people keep the fire of hope to reframe their lives. To rekindle the flame of hope that once kept them motivated to embrace life with intensity.

Nevertheless, and in spite of any gloomy panorama; opaque due to uncertainties, life deserves to be lived. In other words, if life does not follow the course traced out at a given moment because of unforeseen circumstances, even so, in the chaos it can be configured in a horizon of meaning. We must cling to it in order not to give up and fall into the pit of discouragement due to pessimism.



In the midst of turbulence and chaos, young people can remember the words of sister Chittister, Pope Francis, and the life of Joseph, to maintain hope. Trust. Discover your dream connected to the dream of humanity that a better world is possible. Strive for it. Work to build it.

4. How can we keep hope alive in young people?

Faced with feelings of confusion in a world of rapid change, with unpredictable and unpredictable circumstances, like those faced by St. Joseph in his time, there are paths of hope for young people. When things do not go according to plan, let alone life seems to be on a course connected to their various experiences, it is worth considering stopping, observing, shaping, interpreting, sharing and moving forward.

The rush of the moment makes the important things in life go unnoticed. This inattention prevents us from recognizing the presence of a totality made up of details like a puzzle. This is why it is important to stop and pay attention to what is happening in one's life.

After fixing our attention on the present moment in which so many things are happening, it is important to observe. This implies an attentive look at what happens and stops happening, to discover beyond the established limits anachronistic canons and a more diaphanous image than the one granted by the fleetingness of appearances. That is what happened with José. If he had remained with the conventional view of reality, he would not have been aware of God's designs for him.

Following this new situation that transcends the conventional, it becomes necessary to configure the moments of life in a totality, in openness to new changes. This process requires recognizing that since life does not take place diachronically, which makes it unintelligible, it is necessary to construct a totality with the fragments that make up each life.

Now, when life has the order that each person gives it according to his or her gaze, then it is time to look at it again. This action of reviewing history as a synthesis of what has been lived makes it possible to anticipate with expectant attention

a way in which one wishes to live. This is what can be called the meaning of life. That which is on the horizon and which moves each person to move forward with hope.

Finally, to close this first global moment of the meaning of life, and recognizing that there are as many meanings as people live, it is necessary to share each horizon of meaning with others. In this way there is a re-actualization and an opening to new ways of projecting oneself in the world. Thus, Joseph's life, like the lives of so many others, reflects God's intervention in their lives. They, after assuming life with attention and configuring it in a certain order, discovered his loving presence. There was no other response than to give themselves resolutely to the guidance of that pure incandescent love.