

Three Fundamental Attitudes

That the Gospel may be made incarnate

Pope Francis

On 24 November 2023, Pope Francis addressed the participants of the meeting of chaplains and those responsible for university pastoral care which was promoted by the Dicastery for Culture and Education. He developed three key words to keep in mind in any accompaniment that seeks to enhance the uniqueness and particular potential of each person: appreciating differences, accompanying with care and acting with courage.

You have chosen as the theme for your proceedings: *“Towards a Polyhedric Vision”*. I like the figure of the polyhedron, for it is very expressive; as you know, it is close to my heart. I used that figure at the beginning of my pontificate, when I observed that pastoral ministry must not take as its “model the sphere... where every point is equidistant from the centre and there are no differences” between one point and another, but rather “the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness” ([Evangelii Gaudium](#), 236). In this way, the Gospel becomes incarnate and finds harmonious expression in different ways in different people’s lives, like a single melody that recurs in various tonalities. Today I would like to propose to you three approaches that I consider important to your service: *to appreciate differences, to accompany with care, and to act courageously.*

To appreciate differences. The polyhedron is not a straightforward geometric figure. Unlike the sphere, which is smooth and easy to handle, it is angular and also sharp: it has an edge, as reality itself can have at times. Yet this complexity is at the basis of its beauty, since it allows the figure to reflect light with different tones and gradations, depending on the angle of each facet. One facet casts a definite light, another more muted, and yet another more in shadow. [...] As all these images suggest, the work of education is a true mission, in which individuals and situations are accepted, with all their lights and shadows – their shadows too – with a kind of “parental” love. And this facilitates in a unique way the growth of those seeds that God has sown within each person. Each person must be accompanied as he or she is, and that is the starting point of all dialogue, journey and progress.

This brings us to the second point: *to accompany with care.* Believing in the vitality of the seeds that God sows also means caring for what is silently growing and coming to light in the sometimes confused thoughts, desires and affections of the young people entrusted to

you. Do not be afraid to assume this responsibility. Your attitude has to be more than just apologetic, dealing with questions and answers, prohibitions: do not be afraid to confront those realities. If we remove the edges and erase the shadows in a geometric solid, we reduce it to a flat object, without breadth or depth. Today we see certain ideological currents within the Church, in which people end up being reduced to an object that is flat, without any nuance. But if we wisely value a person for who he or she is, we can make that person into a work of art. The Lord himself teaches us the art of caring. He, who created the world from the formless abyss and rose to life from the darkness of death, teaches us how to draw out the best from his creatures, by caring for whatever is most fragile and imperfect in them. In the educational challenges that you encounter every day in contact with individuals, cultures, situations, affections and thoughts that are greatly diverse and at times problematic, do not grow discouraged. Care for all of them, without seeking immediate results, but in the sure hope that, when you accompany young people and pray for them, miracles spring up. Uniformity does not make them flourish; they flourish precisely in the differences that represent their richness.

And now, the third point: *to act courageously*. Dear friends, nurturing the joy of the Gospel in the university environment is an indeed exciting yet demanding undertaking, and one that requires courage. This is the virtue found at the beginning of every endeavor, from the “Fiat lux” of creation to the “Fiat” of Mary, and even to the smallest “yes” we say in the course of our daily lives. Courage enables us to bridge even the deepest chasms, like fear, indecision and excuses that prevent us from acting and which encourage a lack of commitment. We have heard the parable of the “unfaithful servant” who did not invest the capital that the Master had given him but buried it so as not to risk losing it. The worst thing an educator can do is refuse to take risks. Where there are no risks, there are no fruits: this is a rule. [...] Cherish great dreams: young people have to dream, and you have to do all that you can to help them dream and aspire to the measure of Christ: to the height, breadth and depth of his love (cf. Eph 3:17-19). It is my hope that, in life and in your ministry, you will always cultivate the bold confidence of those who believe. And who gives us the courage to move forward? The Holy Spirit, the “great hidden one” in the Church. He gives us strength and courage: we need to ask the Spirit to give us this courage.

