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Prelate to young people: open the doors to mercy

A message from the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarria, for World Youth Day in Poland

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Once again, hundreds of thousands of young people from around the world will gather around the Holy Father. For a few days, they will leave behind their homes, their studies and their daily routines to

celebrate together the beauty of the Christian faith and of the Holy Church.

The insight of St. John Paul II, who proposed the idea for these youth gatherings 30 years ago, has become strongly rooted in the lives of girls and boys, Catholics or not, from all over the world.

This time, World Youth Day 2016 returns to the geographical and spiritual roots of this Holy Polish Pontiff: there, mercy will once again be the *spark* that ignites many desires of giving oneself to God, and of living in the service of others. Ringing in the ears of those who will cross through Europe on their way to Krakow will echo those words that stunned the world and that still prevail: *Do not be afraid! Open the doors to Christ!*

Following in the footsteps of Saints John Paul II and Faustina Kowalska –

each of whom speak to us of God's Mercy – these days will be an invitation for young people to open the doors of their souls so as to *discover mercy*. Indeed, we need to avoid running the risk that *mercy* be only a beautiful word, able to fill speeches, clichés or songs, but that does not affect our being or our actions. This is why Pope Francis is offering us many opportunities – this World Youth Day being yet another example – to experience and incarnate mercy.

God's mercy is identical to Him, which is why it springs forth from His very mystery. To unveil what mercy contains, one must accept it, and the best way to do this – the most direct and joyful path – passes through the confession of our sins in the Sacrament of Penance. Leaving our trespasses in His hands allows us to know how much the Creator loves us. "*Jesus Christ*," St. Josemaría said,

"is always waiting for us to return to Him, because He knows our weakness." Hopefully many young people return from Krakow with a cleaner outlook and with the soul more cheerful after being placed in the hands of Divine grace, having felt the embrace of this Divine Father who waits for our return. Do not be afraid! *Open the doors* to God's mercy! This attitude leads us back to the good way if we have lost it, and renews our desires to love.

Mercy also becomes stronger in us when we practice it. It is so powerful, and it has the capacity to fill an entire lifetime, to transform a gray existence into the potent, positive and peaceful strength that our society needs. A healthy non-conformism characterizes the young soul, as St. Josemaria explained: *"As a young man I was rebellious and I still am now. Because I'm not into a lot of protesting that doesn't offer a*

positive solution, nor do I feel like filling life with disorder. I rebel against all that! I want to be a child of God, to get to know God, behave like a man who knows he has an eternal destiny and at the same time goes through life doing the good that he can, understanding, excusing, forgiving, living alongside others...”

These days in Poland will offer numerous opportunities for us to practice mercy, in the spirit of service: situations such as living with strangers, long waits, heat and cold, lack of sleep and other discomforts provide us with opportunities to meet and help others as Jesus Christ would do. Hopefully with this experience, each one will return home with a resolution – something concrete and personal – that will help spread the power of the tenderness of God to every corner of this world.

If we convert these days into a *school of mercy*, each pilgrim will go home with their backpack full of hope, capable of imparting the inexhaustible treasure possessed by the soul that lets itself be embraced by the Lord.

+ Javier Echevarría

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