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Message for World Youth Day 2016

Pope Francis' message for World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow, Poland, "the city of Saint John Paul II and Saint Faustina Kowalska."

10/22/2015

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

FOR THE THIRTY-FIRST WORLD YOUTH DAY

2016

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7)

Dear Young People,

We have come to the last stretch of our pilgrimage to Krakow, the place where we will celebrate the 31st World Youth Day next year in the month of July. We are being guided on this long and challenging path by Jesus' words taken from the Sermon on the Mount. We began this journey in 2014 by meditating together on the first Beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3). The theme for 2015 was: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). During the year ahead, let us allow ourselves to be inspired by the words: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7).

1. The Jubilee of Mercy

With this theme, the Krakow 2016 WYD forms part of the Holy Year of Mercy and so becomes a Youth Jubilee at world level. It is not the first time that an international youth gathering has coincided with a Jubilee Year. Indeed, it was during the Holy Year of the Redemption (1983/1984) that Saint John Paul II first called on young people from around the world to come together on Palm Sunday. Then, during the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, over two million young people from around 165 countries gathered in Rome for the 15th World Youth Day. I am sure that the Youth Jubilee in Krakow will be, as on those two previous occasions, one of the high points of this Holy Year!

Perhaps some of you are asking: what is this Jubilee Year that is celebrated in the Church? The scriptural text of *Leviticus 5* can help us to understand the meaning of a

“jubilee” for the people of Israel. Every fifty years they heard the sounding of a trumpet (*jobel*) calling them (*jobil*) to celebrate a holy year as a time of reconciliation (*jobal*) for everyone. During that time they had to renew their good relations with God, with their neighbours and with creation, all in a spirit of gratuitousness. This fostered, among other things, debt forgiveness, special help for those who had fallen into poverty, an improvement in interpersonal relations and the freeing of slaves.

Jesus Christ came to proclaim and bring about the Lord’s everlasting time of grace. He brought good news to the poor, freedom to prisoners, sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed (cf. *Lk 4:18-19*). In Jesus, and particularly in his Paschal Mystery, the deeper meaning of the jubilee is fully realized. When the Church proclaims a jubilee in the

name of Christ, we are all invited to experience a wonderful time of grace. The Church must offer abundant signs of God's presence and closeness, and reawaken in people's hearts the ability to look to the essentials. In particular, this Holy Year of Mercy is "a time for the Church to rediscover the meaning of the mission entrusted to her by the Lord on the day of Easter: to be a sign and an instrument of the Father's mercy" (*Homily at First Vespers of Divine Mercy Sunday*, 11 April 2015).

2. Merciful like the Father

The motto for this Extraordinary Jubilee is "Merciful like the Father" (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, 13). This fits in with the theme of the next WYD, so let us try to better understand the meaning of divine mercy.

The Old Testament uses various terms when it speaks about mercy. The most meaningful of these are *hesed* and *rahamim*. The first, when applied to God, expresses God's unfailing fidelity to the Covenant with his people whom he loves and forgives for ever. The second, *rahamim*, which literally means "entrails", can be translated as "heartfelt mercy". This particularly brings to mind the maternal womb and helps us understand that God's love for his people is like that of a mother for her child. That is how it is presented by the prophet Isaiah: "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you" (*Is* 49:15). Love of this kind involves making space for others within ourselves and being able to sympathize, suffer and rejoice with our neighbours.

The biblical concept of mercy also includes the tangible presence of love that is faithful, freely given and able to forgive. In the following passage from Hosea, we have a beautiful example of God's love, which the prophet compares to that of a father for his child: "When Israel was a child I loved him; out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the farther they went from me... Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks... I stooped to feed my child" (*Hos 11:1-4*). Despite the child's wrong attitude that deserves punishment, a father's love is faithful. He always forgives his repentant children. We see here how forgiveness is always included in mercy. It is "not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as of that of a father

or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child... It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 6).

The New Testament speaks to us of divine mercy (*eleos*) as a synthesis of the work that Jesus came to accomplish in the world in the name of the Father (cf. *Mt 9:13*). Our Lord’s mercy can be seen especially when he bends down to human misery and shows his compassion for those in need of understanding, healing and forgiveness. Everything in Jesus speaks of mercy. Indeed, he himself is mercy.

In Chapter 15 of Luke’s Gospel we find the three parables of mercy: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the parable of the prodigal son. In these three parables we are struck by God’s joy, the joy that God feels when he

finds and forgives a sinner. Yes, it is God's joy to forgive! This sums up the whole of the Gospel. "Each of us, each one of us, is that little lost lamb, the coin that was mislaid; each one of us is that son who has squandered his freedom on false idols, illusions of happiness, and has lost everything. But God does not forget us; the Father never abandons us. He is a patient Father, always waiting for us! He respects our freedom, but he remains faithful forever. And when we come back to him, he welcomes us like children into his house, for he never ceases, not for one instant, to wait for us with love. And his heart rejoices over every child who returns. He is celebrating because he is joy. God has this joy, when one of us sinners goes to him and asks his forgiveness" (*Angelus*, 15 September 2013).

God's mercy is very real and we are all called to experience it firsthand.

When I was seventeen years old, it happened one day that, as I was about to go out with friends, I decided to stop into a church first. I met a priest there who inspired great confidence, and I felt the desire to open my heart in Confession. That meeting changed my life! I discovered that when we open our hearts with humility and transparency, we can contemplate God's mercy in a very concrete way. I felt certain that, in the person of that priest, God was already waiting for me even before I took the step of entering that church. We keep looking for God, but God is there before us, always looking for us, and he finds us first. Maybe one of you feels something weighing on your heart. You are thinking: I did this, I did that.... Do not be afraid! God is waiting for you! God is a Father and he is always waiting for us! It is so wonderful to feel the merciful embrace of the Father in the

sacrament of Reconciliation, to discover that the confessional is a place of mercy, and to allow ourselves to be touched by the merciful love of the Lord who always forgives us!

You, dear young man, dear young woman, have you ever felt the gaze of everlasting love upon you, a gaze that looks beyond your sins, limitations and failings, and continues to have faith in you and to look upon your life with hope? Do you realize how precious you are to God, who has given you everything out of love? Saint Paul tells us that “God proves his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom 5:8*). Do we really understand the power of these words?

I know how much the WYD cross means to all of you. It was a gift from Saint John Paul II and has been with

you at all your World Meetings since 1984. So many changes and real conversions have taken place in the lives of young people who have encountered this simple bare cross! Perhaps you have asked yourselves the question: what is the origin of the extraordinary power of the cross? Here is the answer: the cross is the most eloquent sign of God's mercy! It tells us that the measure of God's love for humanity is to love without measure! Through the cross we can touch God's mercy and be touched by that mercy! Here I would recall the episode of the two thieves crucified beside Jesus. One of them is arrogant and does not admit that he is a sinner. He mocks the Lord. The other acknowledges that he has done wrong; he turns to the Lord saying: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom". Jesus looks at him with infinite mercy and replies: "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (cf. *Lk* 23:32, 39-43).

With which of the two do we identify? Is it with the arrogant one who does not acknowledge his own mistakes? Or is it with the other, who accepts that he is in need of divine mercy and begs for it with all his heart? It is in the Lord, who gave his life for us on the cross, that we will always find that unconditional love which sees our lives as something good and always gives us the chance to start again.

3. The amazing joy of being instruments of God's mercy

The Word of God teaches us that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). That is why the fifth Beatitude declares that the merciful are blessed. We know that the Lord loved us first. But we will be truly blessed and happy only when we enter into the divine “logic” of gift and gracious love, when we discover that God has loved us infinitely in

order to make us capable of loving like Him, without measure. Saint John says: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love... In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another” (1 *Jn* 4:7-11).

After this very brief summary of how the Lord bestows his mercy upon us, I would like to give you some suggestions on how we can be instruments of this mercy for others.

I think of the example of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. He said, “Jesus pays me a visit every morning in Holy Communion, and I return the visit in the meagre way I know how, visiting the poor”. Pier Giorgio was a young

man who understood what it means to have a merciful heart that responds to those most in need. He gave them far more than material goods. He gave himself by giving his time, his words and his capacity to listen. He served the poor very quietly and unassumingly. He truly did what the Gospel tells us: “When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret” (*Mt 6:3-4*). Imagine that, on the day before his death when he was gravely ill, he was giving directions on how his friends in need should be helped. At his funeral, his family and friends were stunned by the presence of so many poor people unknown to them. They had been befriended and helped by the young Pier Giorgio.

I always like to link the Gospel Beatitudes with Matthew 25, where Jesus presents us with the works of

mercy and tells us that we will be judged on them. I ask you, then, to rediscover the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, assist the sick, visit the imprisoned and bury the dead. Nor should we overlook the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, teach the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the sorrowful, forgive offences, patiently bear with troublesome people and pray to God for the living and the dead. As you can see, mercy does not just imply being a “good person” nor is it mere sentimentality. It is the measure of our authenticity as disciples of Jesus, and of our credibility as Christians in today’s world.

If you want me to be very specific, I would suggest that for the first seven months of 2016 you choose a corporal and a spiritual work of

mercy to practice each month. Find inspiration in the prayer of Saint Faustina, a humble apostle of Divine Mercy in our times:

“Help me, O Lord,

...that my eyes may be merciful, so that I will never be suspicious or judge by appearances, but always look for what is beautiful in my neighbours’ souls and be of help to them;

... that my ears may be merciful, so that I will be attentive to my neighbours’ needs, and not indifferent to their pains and complaints;

... that my tongue may be merciful, so that I will never speak badly of others, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all;

... that my hands may be merciful and full of good deeds;

... that my feet may be merciful, so that I will hasten to help my neighbour, despite my own fatigue and weariness;

... that my heart may be merciful, so that I myself will share in all the sufferings of my neighbour” (*Saint Faustina, Diary, 163*).

The Divine Mercy message is a very specific life plan because it involves action. One of the most obvious works of mercy, and perhaps the most difficult to put into practice, is to forgive those who have offended us, who have done us wrong or whom we consider to be enemies. “At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully” (*Misericordiae Vultus, 9*).

I meet so many young people who say that they are tired of this world being so divided, with clashes between supporters of different factions and so many wars, in some of which religion is being used as justification for violence. We must ask the Lord to give us the grace to be merciful to those who do us wrong. Jesus on the cross prayed for those who had crucified him:

“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (*Lk 23:34*). Mercy is the only way to overcome evil.

Justice is necessary, very much so, but by itself it is not enough. Justice and mercy must go together. How I wish that we could join together in a chorus of prayer, from the depths of our hearts, to implore the Lord to have mercy on us and on the whole world!

4. *Krakow is expecting us!*

Only a few months are left before we meet in Poland. Krakow, the city of Saint John Paul II and Saint Faustina Kowalska, is waiting for us with open arms and hearts. I believe that Divine Providence led us to the decision to celebrate the Youth Jubilee in that city which was home to those two great apostles of mercy in our times. John Paul II realized that this is the time of mercy. At the start of his pontificate, he wrote the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*. In the Holy Year 2000 he canonized Sister Faustina and instituted the Feast of Divine Mercy, which now takes place on the Second Sunday of Easter. In 2002 he personally inaugurated the Divine Mercy Shrine in Krakow and entrusted the world to Divine Mercy, in the desire that this message would reach all the peoples of the earth and fill their hearts with hope: “This spark needs to be lighted by the grace of God. This fire of mercy needs to be passed on

to the world. In the mercy of God the world will find peace and mankind will find happiness!” (*Homily at the Dedication of the Divine Mercy Shrine in Krakow*, 17 August 2002).

Dear young people, at the Shrine in Krakow dedicated to the merciful Jesus, where he is depicted in the image venerated by the people of God, Jesus is waiting for you. He has confidence in you and is counting on you! He has so many things to say to each of you... Do not be afraid to look into his eyes, full of infinite love for you. Open yourselves to his merciful gaze, so ready to forgive all your sins. A look from him can change your lives and heal the wounds of your souls. His eyes can quench the thirst that dwells deep in your young hearts, a thirst for love, for peace, for joy and for true happiness. Come to Him and do not be afraid! Come to him and say from the depths of your hearts: “Jesus, I trust in You!”. Let

yourselves be touched by his boundless mercy, so that in turn you may become apostles of mercy by your actions, words and prayers in our world, wounded by selfishness, hatred and so much despair.

Carry with you the flame of Christ's merciful love – as Saint John Paul II said – in every sphere of your daily life and to the very ends of the earth. In this mission, I am with you with my encouragement and prayers. I entrust all of you to Mary, Mother of Mercy, for this last stretch of the journey of spiritual preparation for the next WYD in Krakow. I bless all of you from my heart.

From the Vatican, 15 August 2015

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

FRANCIS

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