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Pope Francis: "If we lack love, we have nothing"

Complete texts and video summaries of the Holy Father's addresses at the XXXIV World Youth Day in Panama (January 23-28, 2019).

01/28/2019

Apostolic Journey of the Holy Father to Panama for the 34rd

World Youth Day (23-28 January 2019)

Live video transmission

(Vatican Media)

- *Multimedia*
- *Missal for the Apostolic Journey*
- *Video message of His Holiness Pope Francis*
- *Photo Gallery*

Wednesday, 23 January 2019

ROME-PANAMA

9:35 Departure by air from Rome/Fiumicino for Panama

16:30 Arrival at Tocumen International Airport in Panama

**Official
welcome**

16:50

Transfer to the
Apostolic Nunciature

Thursday, 24 January 2019

PANAMA

9:45

Welcome ceremony
at the main entrance
of *Palacio de las*
Garzas – Presidency
of the Republic

Courtesy
visit to the
President of
the Republic
in *Palacio de*
las Garzas –
Presidency of
the Republic

10:40

Meeting with the
Authorities, with
the Diplomatic
Corps and with
Representatives of
Society in *Palacio*

Bolivar – Ministry of
Foreign Affairs

**Meeting with
central american**

11:15

Bishops in the

Church of *San*

Francisco de Asis

**Welcome ceremony
and opening of WYD**

17:30

at *Campo Santa*

Maria la Antigua –

Cinta Costera

Friday, 25 January 2019

PANAMA

Penitential liturgy with

10:30

young detainees in the *Centro*

de Cumplimiento de Menores

Las Garzas de Pacora

11:50

Transfer by helicopter to the

Apostolic Nunciature

17:30

Via Crucis with young people
at Campo Santa Maria la
Antigua – Cinta Costera

Saturday, 26 January 2019

PANAMA

9:15 **Holy Mass with the**
dedication of the altar of the
Cathedral Basilica of Santa
Maria la Antigua with
priests, consecrated persons
and lay movements

12:15 **Lunch with young people in**
the San José Major Seminary

Vigil with young people at
18:30 *Campo San Juan Pablo II –*
Metro Park

Sunday, 27 January 2019

PANAMA-ROME

8:00

**Holy Mass for World
Youth Day** at *Campo San
Juan Pablo II* – Metro Park

10:45 **Visit to the Casa Hogar
del Buen Samaritano**

Angelus

16:30 **Meeting with the WYD
volunteers** in the Rommel
Fernandez Stadium

18:00 **Farewell ceremony** at
Panama International
Airport

18:15 Departure by air for Rome

Monday, 28 January 2019

PANAMA-ROME

11:50 Arrival at Rome-Ciampino
International Airport

**Meeting with the Authorities, with
the Diplomatic Corps and with
Representatives of Society**

Mr President,

Madam Vice President

Distinguished Authorities,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you, Mr President, for your words of welcome and your kind invitation to visit this nation. In addressing you, I would like to greet and thank all the people of Panama who, from Darién to Chiriquí and Bocas del Toro, have made a marvellous effort to welcome the many young people arriving from all over the world. Thank you for having opened to us the doors of your home.

I begin my pilgrimage in this historical precinct where, as His Excellency the President just reminded us, Simón Bolívar stated that “if the world had to choose its capital, the Isthmus of Panama would be marked out for this great

destiny”, and convoked the leaders of his time to forge the dream of the unification of the Great Fatherland. A convocation that helps us realize that our peoples are able to create, to forge and, above all, to dream of a great fatherland that can include, respect and embrace the multicultural richness of each people and culture. Taking up this inspiration, we can look upon Panama as a land of convocation and a land of dreams.

1. Panama is a land of convocation

This was seen in the Congress of Panama and is seen today too in the arrival of thousands of young people who bring with them the hope and desire to meet and celebrate with one another.

Thanks to its privileged location, your country is a strategic enclave not only for the region but also for the entire world. A bridge between

oceans and a natural land of encounter, Panama, the narrowest country of the entire American continent, is the symbol of the sustainability born of the ability to create bonds and alliances. This capacity shapes the heart of the Panamanian people.

Each of you has a special place in the building of the nation, and is called to ensure that this land can live up to its vocation to be a land of convocation and encounter. This involves decision, commitment and daily effort to ensure that all have the opportunity to feel that they are agents of their own destiny and that of their families and the entire nation. It is impossible to think of the future of a society without the active – and not merely nominal – participation of each of its members, in such a way that his or her dignity is acknowledged and guaranteed through access to quality education

and the promotion of dignified jobs. These two realities help make it possible to recognize and appreciate the genius and the creative dynamism of this people. Similarly, they are the best antidote to any type of “guardianship” that would restrict your freedom and subordinate or ignore the dignity of citizens, especially that of the most poor.

The genius of these lands is marked by the richness of its indigenous peoples: the bribri, bugle, emberá, kuna, nasoteribe, ngäbe and waunana, who have so much to relate and recall from their culture and vision of the world. I greet them and I thank them. And it continues to be a sign of hope that this World Youth Day started a week ago with the Day of young people from indigenous communities and the Day of young people of African descent. I greet them from here and I thank them that they have taken this first

step of the World Youth Day. To be a land of convocation means celebrating, acknowledging and listening to what is specific about each of these peoples and of all those men and women who make up the face of Panama and work to build a future of hope. For it is possible to defend the common good above the interests of a few or for few only when there is a firm decision to share with justice one's goods.

The younger generation, with its joy and enthusiasm, with its freedom, sensitivity and critical capacity, demands that adults, and especially all those who exercise roles of leadership in public life, lead a life consonant with the dignity and authority that they possess and that has been entrusted to them. They call upon them to live in simplicity and transparency, with a clear sense of responsibility for others and for our world. It is a call to lead a life that

demonstrates that public service is a synonym of honesty and justice, and opposed to all forms of corruption. Young people demand a commitment in which all – beginning with those of us who call ourselves Christians – have the audacity to build “an authentically human politics” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 73) that makes the person the centre and heart of everything. A politics that works to build a culture of greater transparency between governments, the private sector and the entire population, in the words of your prayer for your country: “Give us our daily bread: may we eat it in our own homes and in a state of health worthy of human beings”.

2. As well as being a land of convocation, Panama is a land of dreams

In these days, Panama will not only be spoken of as a regional centre or

strategic site for commerce or the transit of persons: it will turn into a hub of hope. A meeting-point where young people coming from the five continents, brimming with dreams and hopes, will celebrate, meet one another, pray and kindle their desire and commitment to building a more humane world. In this way, they will defy the shortsighted and short-term views that, seduced by resignation or greed, or prey to the technocratic paradigm, believe that the only way forward is to obey the “laws of competition, [speculation] and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 53). To believe that would be to close the future to a new imagination of humanity. By welcoming the dreams of these young people, Panama now becomes once more a land of dreams that challenges so many certainties of our time and opens up vital horizons that can enrich the path

ahead through a fresh, respectful and compassionate gaze towards others. In these days, we will witness the opening of new channels of communication and understanding, of solidarity, creativity and mutual assistance; channels of humanity that foster commitment and break through anonymity and isolation, for the sake of a new way of building history.

Another world is possible! We know this and young people urge us to take our part in building it, so that our dreams do not remain ephemeral or ethereal, but can promote a social contract in which everyone has the chance to dream of a tomorrow. The right to the future is also a human right.

Against this horizon, the words of Ricardo Miró seem to come alive. In singing to his beloved homeland, he said: “When they see you, my native

land, they might say that you were shaped by God's will, so that beneath the sun shining down upon you, all humanity can come together in you" (*Patria de mis amores*).

I renew my gratitude for everything you have done, especially you, Mr President, to make this meeting possible, and I reiterate to Your Excellency, and to all those here present, and all those who join us through the communications media, my best wishes for renewed hope and joy in the service of the common good.

May Our Lady, Santa Maria La Antigua, bless and protect Panama.

Meeting with Central American Bishops

Dear Brothers,

I thank Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas of San Salvador for his words of welcome in the name of all. I find here some old friends: this is a wonderful thing. I am happy to be able to be with you and to share in a closer and more direct way your hopes, projects and dreams as pastors to whom the Lord has entrusted the care of the holy people. Thank you for your fraternal welcome.

Meeting with you also gives me the opportunity to embrace your peoples and feel closer to them, to make my own their aspirations, but also their disappointments, and above all the unshakable faith that restores hope and encourages charity. Thank you for letting me be close to that tested yet simple faith seen on the faces of your people, who, though poor, know that “God is here; he is not sleeping, he is active, he watches and

helps” (SAINT OSCAR ROMERO, *Homily*, 16 December 1979).

This meeting reminds us of an important ecclesial event. The bishops of this region were the first in America to create a means of communion and participation that continues to bear rich fruit: the Episcopal Secretariat of Central America (SEDAC). It has provided a forum for sharing, discernment and agreement that nurtures, revitalizes and enriches your Churches.

Farsighted bishops gave a sign that, far from being merely programmatic, showed that the future of Central America – or of any area of the world – necessarily depends on clear thinking and the ability to broaden horizons and to join in a patient and generous effort to listen, understand, engage and involve. And, as a result, to discern the new horizons to which the Spirit

is leading us (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*,
235).[1]

In the seventy-five years since its establishment, SEDAC has sought to share in the joys and sorrows, the struggles and the dreams of the peoples of Central America, whose history has been interwoven with and forged by the history of your own faithful. Many men and women, priests, consecrated and lay, have devoted their lives and even shed their blood to keep the Church's prophetic voice alive in the face of injustice, the spread of poverty, and the abuse of power. I remember as a young priest how some of your surnames were a bad word, and how your perseverance indicated the way: thank you! They remind us that "those who really wish to give glory to God by their lives, who truly long to grow in holiness, are called to be single-minded and tenacious in their practice of the works of

mercy” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 107).
And this, not simply as almsgiving,
but as a true vocation.

Among these prophetic fruits of the Church in Central America, I am happy to mention Saint Oscar Romero, whom I recently had the privilege of canonizing during the Synod on Young People. His life and his teachings remain a source of inspiration for our Churches and, in a special way, for us as bishops. He too was a bad word, suspected, excommunicated by the secretive gossip of many bishops. His episcopal motto, inscribed on his tombstone, clearly expresses the principle that guided his life as a pastor: *to think with the Church*. It was the compass for his life and fidelity, even in times of great turmoil.

His legacy can become an active and life-giving witness for us, who are likewise called to the daily

martyrdom of serving our people, and on it, I would like to base the reflection, thinking with the Church. It is a reflection that I wish to share with you with the figure of Romero very much in mind. I know that some among us knew Archbishop Romero personally, like Cardinal Rosa Chávez, of whom Cardinal Quarracino told me of his candidature for the Nobel Prize for Fidelity! Your Eminence, if you think that I am mistaken in any of my assessments, you can correct me, without hesitation. To appeal to the figure of Romero is to appeal to the holiness and prophetic character present in the DNA of your particular Churches.

Thinking with the Church

1. Recognition and gratitude

When Saint Ignatius sets out the rules for thinking with the Church – forgive the publicity - he tries to help

the retreatant overcome any type of false dichotomy or antagonism that would reduce the life of the Spirit to the habitual temptation to make God's word serve our own interest. This can give the retreatant the grace to recognize that he is part of an apostolic body greater than himself, while at the same time being aware of his own strengths and abilities: an awareness that is neither feeble nor selective or rash. To feel part of a whole that is always more than the sum of its parts (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 235), and is linked to a Presence that will always transcend him (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 8).

So I would like to focus this preliminary *thinking with the Church*, along with Saint Oscar, on thanksgiving, or rather gratitude, for all the unmerited blessings we have received. Romero instinctively knew how to understand and appreciate the Church, because he loved her

deeply as the wellspring of his faith. Without this deep love, it would be difficult to understand the story of his conversion. It was that same love that led him to martyrdom: a love born of receiving an utterly free gift, one that does not belong to us but instead frees us from any pretension or temptation to think that we are its proprietors or its sole interpreters. We did not invent the Church; she was not born with us and she will carry on without us. This attitude, far from encouraging sloth, awakens and sustains boundless and unimaginable gratitude. Martyrdom has nothing to do with faintheartedness or the attitude of those who do not love life and cannot recognize its value. On the contrary, the martyr is one who is capable of incarnating and living fully this act of thanksgiving.

Romero “thought with the Church”, because before all else he loved the

Church as a mother who had brought him to birth in the faith. He felt a member and a part of her.

2. A love flavoured by people

This love, loyalty and gratitude brought him to embrace passionately but also with hard work and study, the currents of renewal authoritatively proposed by the Second Vatican Council. There he found a firm guide for Christian discipleship. He was neither an ideologue nor ideological; his actions were born of a thorough familiarity with the Council documents. Against this ecclesial horizon, *thinking with the Church* meant, for Romero, contemplating her as the People of God. For the Lord did not want to save us alone and apart from others, but to establish a people who would profess him in truth and serve him in sanctity (cf. Lumen Gentium, 9). A people that as a whole possesses,

guards and celebrates the “anointing of the Holy One” (ibid., 12), and to whom Romero carefully listened, so as not to be deprived of the inspiration (cf. SAINT OSCAR ROMERO, *Homily*, 16 July 1978). In this way, Romero showed us that the pastor, in order to seek and discover the Lord, must learn to listen to the heartbeat of his people. He must smell the “odour” of the sheep, the men and women of today, until he is steeped in their joys and hopes, their sorrows and their anxieties (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 1), and in so doing ponder the word of God (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 13). His must be an approach that listens to the people entrusted to his care, to the point of identifying with them and discovering from them the will of God who calls us (cf. *Address at the Meeting on the Family*, 4 October 2014). An approach free of dichotomies or false antagonisms, for only the love of God is capable of

integrating all our loves in a single feeling and gaze.

For Romero, in a word, to think with the Church means to take part in the Church's glory, which is to live, heart and soul, the *kenosis* of Christ. In the Church, as the saint expressed in his homily of 1 October 1978, Christ lives among us, and so she must be humble and poor, since an aloof, prideful and self-sufficient Church is not the Church of *kenosis*.

3. Living, heart and soul, the kenosis of Christ

This is not only the Church's glory, but also a vocation, a summons to make it our personal glory and our path of holiness. Christ's *kenosis* is not a thing of the past, but a present pledge that we can sense and discover his presence at work in history. A presence that we neither can nor want to silence, since we know from experience that he alone

is “the Way, the Truth and the Life”. Christ’s kenosis reminds us that God saves in history, in the life of each person, and that this is also his own history, from which he comes forth to meet us (cf. SAINT OSCAR ROMERO, *Homily*, 7 December 1978). It is important, brothers, that we not be afraid to draw near and touch the wounds of our people, which are our wounds too, and to do this in the same way that the Lord himself does. A pastor cannot stand aloof from the sufferings of his people; we can even say that the heart of a pastor is measured by his ability to be moved by the many lives that are hurting or threatened. To do this as the Lord does, means allowing this suffering to have an impact on our priorities and our preferences, influencing vigorously the use of our time and money, and even our way of praying. In this way, we will be able to anoint everything and everyone with the consoling friendship of Jesus Christ

within a community of faith that contains and opens a constantly new horizon that gives meaning and hope to life (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49).

Christ's kenosis involves giving up "virtual" ways of living and speaking, in order to listen to the sounds and repeated cries of real people who challenge us to build relationships. Allow me to say this: networks help to build relationships, but not roots; they are incapable of giving us a sense of belonging, of making us feel part of a single people. Without this sense, all our words, meetings, gatherings and writings will be the sign of a faith that failed to accompany the Lord's kenosis, a faith that stopped halfway along the road. Where, even worse – recalling the words of a Latin-American author – we will be the sign of a faith in God without Christ, a Christ without a church, a church without a people.

Christ's kenosis is young

This World Youth Day is a unique opportunity to go out to encounter and draw even closer to the experiences of our young people, so full of hope and desires, but also many hurts and scars. With them, we can interpret our world in a new way and recognize the signs of the times. For as the Synod Fathers affirmed, young people are one of the “theological sources” in which the Lord makes us know some of his expectations and challenges for the shaping of the future (cf. SYNOD ON YOUNG PEOPLE, *Final Document*, 64). With them, we can envision how to make the Gospel more visible and credible in the world in which we live. They are like a barometer for knowing where we stand as a community and as a society.

Young people bring with them a restlessness that we need to appreciate, respect and accompany. This is good for us, because it

unsettles us and reminds us that a pastor never stops being a disciple and a wayfarer. This healthy restlessness both prods and precedes us. The Synod Fathers recognized this: “Young people, in certain aspects, go ahead of their pastors” (ibid., 66). The pastor in relation to his flock does not always go ahead; sometimes he must do so to indicate the way to the faithful; sometimes he must stay in the middle to appreciate what is happening, to understand his own; sometimes he must stay at the rear to protect the vulnerable so that none are left behind in danger of becoming disposable material. We should rejoice to see how the seed sown has not fallen on deaf ears. Many of the concerns and insights of young people took root in the family, encouraged by a grandmother or a catechist. Speaking of grandmothers, it’s already the second time I see her, yesterday and today, an elderly lady,

thin, around my age, who had put on a mitre made of cardboard and with a sign that said “Holiness, we grandmothers also know how to “make a mess”. What a wonderful people! Young people learned much in the family as too in the parish and in educational and youth programmes. They then grew through hearing the Gospel within lively and fervent faith communities that provided rich soil in which they could flourish. How can we not be grateful to have young people concerned with the Gospel! Of course this is tiring and at times testing. A phrase from a Greek philosopher comes to mind which he himself applied to young people: “they are like horseflies on the back of a noble horse, preventing the horse from sleeping” (cf. *Plato*, *The Apology of Socrates*). Aren’t we the horses? This reality encourages us to help them grow by providing them with more and better opportunities to be part of

God's dream. The Church is naturally a Mother, and as such, she engenders life, bears it in her womb and protects it from all that threatens its growth: a "gestation" that takes place in freedom and for freedom. So I urge you to promote programmes and educational centres that can accompany, support and empower your young people. Please, snatch them from the streets before the culture of death can entice their young minds, taking advantage of their restlessness, selling them its smoke and mirrors, or offering its chimerical "solutions" to all their problems. Do so not paternalistically, looking down from on high – which they hate – because that is not what the Lord asks of us, but as true fathers and brothers to all. Young people are the face of Christ for us, and, as Romero said in his homily of 2 September 1979, we cannot reach Christ by descending from above, but by rising up from below.

Sadly, many young people have been taken in by easy answers that end up costing dearly. And there are so many others who have been offered short-sighted illusions within some movements that convert them into Pelagianists or self-sufficient individuals only to be abandoned halfway on the journey. As the Synod Fathers noted, young people find themselves boxed in and lacking opportunities, amid highly conflictual situations with no quick solution: domestic violence, the killing of women – our continent is experiencing a plague of this – armed gangs and criminals, drug trafficking, the sexual exploitation of minors and young people, and so on. It is painful to observe that at the root of many of these situations are experiences of being “orphaned”; without a mother, they are orphaned as the fruit of a culture and a society run amok. Often families have been broken by an economic system that did not

prioritize persons and the common good, but made speculation its “paradise”, without worrying about who would end up paying the price. And so we see our young people without a home, without a family, without a community, without a sense of belonging, easy prey to the first charlatan who comes along.

Let us not forget that “man’s true pain belongs first to God” (George Bernanos, *Diary of a Country Priest*). Let us not separate what he wanted to unite in his Son.

The future demands that we respect the present, by ennobling it and working to value and preserve the cultures of your peoples. Here too, dignity is at stake: in cultural self-esteem. Your peoples are not the “backyard” of society or of anyone. They have a rich history that needs to be appropriated, valued and encouraged. The seeds of the

Kingdom were sown in these lands. We must recognize them, care for them and watch over them, so that none of the good that God has planted will languish, prey to spurious interests that sow corruption and grow rich by plundering the poor. Caring for these roots means caring for the rich historical, cultural and spiritual heritage that this land has for centuries been able to harmonize. Continue to speak out against the cultural and spiritual desertification of your towns that causes a radical poverty, since it weakens their power of resistance, the necessary and vital immunity that preserves their dignity at times of great difficulty. I congratulate you for the initiative whereby this World Youth Day started with the Day of Indigenous Youth – in the Diocese of David I believe – and with the Day of Youth for those of African descent. That

was a good step in showing the multifaceted nature of our people.

In your most recent Pastoral Letter, you pointed out that, “our region has recently been affected by a new kind of migration, massive and organized. This has called attention to the reasons for forced migration and to the dangers it entails for the dignity of the human person” (SEDAC, *Message to the People of God and All Persons of Good Will*, 30 November 2018).

Many migrants have young faces; they are seeking a better life for their families. Nor are they afraid to take risks and to leave everything behind in order to offer them the minimum conditions for a better future.

Realizing this is not enough; we need also to clearly proclaim a message that is “good news”. The Church, by virtue of her universality, can provide the fraternal hospitality and

acceptance that can enable the communities of origin and of destination to dialogue and to help overcome fears and suspicions, and thus to consolidate the very bonds that migrations – in the collective imagination – threaten to break.

“Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating” people can be the four words with which the Church, in this situation of mass migration, expresses her motherhood in the history of our time (cf. SYNOD ON YOUNG PEOPLE, *Final Document*, 147). The Vicar General of Paris, Monsignor Benoist de Sinety, has just published a book on welcoming immigrants (cf. *Il faut que des voix s’élèvent. Accueil des migrants, un appel au courage*, Paris 2018). It is a call to courage, a real gem, and he is here for this World Youth Day.

Every effort made to build bridges between ecclesial, parish and diocesan communities, and between

your episcopal conferences, will be a prophetic gesture on the part of the Church, which is, in Christ, “a sign and instrument both of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). This will help eliminate the temptation simply to call attention to the problem, and become instead a proclamation of the new life that the Lord gives us.

Let us recall the words of Saint John: “If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth” (*1 Jn* 3:17-18).

All of these situations raise questions; they are situations summoning us to conversion, solidarity and decisive efforts to educate our communities. We cannot remain indifferent (cf.

SYNOD ON YOUNG PEOPLE, *Final Document*, 41-44). Whereas the world, the spirit of the world, discards people, as we are painfully aware, Christ's kenosis does not. We have experienced this, and we continue to experience it in our own flesh through forgiveness and conversion. This tension requires that we constantly ask ourselves, "Where do we wish to stand?"

The kenosis of Christ is priestly

We all know about Archbishop Romero's friendship with Father Rutilio Grande, and how much he was affected by his assassination. It seared his heart as a man, a priest and a pastor. Romero was no human resources manager; that was not how he dealt with individuals or organizations, but as a father, a friend and a brother. He can serve as a yardstick, however daunting, to help us measure our own hearts as

bishops and ask, “How much does the life of my priests affect me? How much do I let myself be impacted by what they experience, grieving when they suffer and celebrating their joys? The extent of ecclesial functionalism and clericalism – which represent a caricature and perversion of ministry – can start to be measured by these questions. This has to do not with changes in style, habits or language – all of which are certainly important – but above all with the time we bishops make to receive, accompany and sustain our priests, “real time” to care for them. That is what makes us good fathers.

Our priests are normally the ones responsible for making their flock the people of God. They are on the front lines. They shoulder the burden and the heat of the day (cf. *Mt 20:12*), exposed to an endless number of daily situations that can wear them down. So they need our closeness,

our understanding and encouragement; they need our fatherhood. The outcome of our pastoral work, evangelization and mission does not depend on the material means and resources at our disposal, or on the number of our events and activities, but on the *centrality of compassion*: this is one of the unique things that we, the Church, can offer our brothers and sisters. I am worried about how the compassion of Christ has lost a central place in the Church, even among Catholic groups, or is being lost – not to be so pessimistic. Even in the Catholic media there is a lack of compassion. There is schism, condemnation, cruelty, exaggerated self-praise, the denouncing of heresy... May compassion never be lost in our Church and may the centrality of compassion never be lost in the life of a bishop. Christ's kenosis is the supreme expression of the Father's compassion. Christ's

Church is the Church of compassion, and that begins at home. It is always good to ask ourselves as pastors, “How much does the life of my priests affect me?” Am I able to be a father, or am I content to be a mere executive? Do I allow myself to be bothered? I think back on what Benedict XVI told his compatriots at the beginning of his pontificate: “Christ did not promise us an easy life. Those looking for comfort have dialled the wrong number. Rather, he shows us the way to great things, to goodness, to an authentic human life”(BENEDICT XVI, *Address to German Pilgrims*, 25 April 2005). The bishop must grow in his ability, daily, to let himself be bothered, to be vulnerable to his priests. I am thinking of a former bishop of a large diocese, hard-working, who received visitors all morning. It often happened that when he finished receiving and was looking forward to his lunch, two priests would be

waiting there, not in his diary. The bishop went back and listened to them as if he had the whole morning ahead of him. To allow ourselves to be bothered and to let the spaghetti be overcooked and the meat grow cold. To allow ourselves to be bothered by our priests.

We know that our work, our visits and meetings – especially in parishes – have a necessarily administrative component. This is part of our responsibility, but it does not mean that we should spend all our limited time on administrative tasks. When visiting, the most important thing – the one thing we cannot delegate – is “listening”. Many of our everyday tasks we ought to entrust to others. What we cannot delegate, however, is the ability to listen, the ability to keep track of the good health and the lives of our priests. We cannot delegate to others the door that must be open to them. An open door that

invites trust rather than fear, sincerity rather than hypocrisy, a frank and respectful exchange rather than a stern monologue.

I recall the words of Blessed Rosmini, who was accused of heresy and is today blessed: “There is no doubt that only great men can form other great men... In the early centuries, the bishop’s house was the seminary of priests and deacons. The presence and saintly life of their prelate turned out to be a radiant, constant and sublime lesson, in which one learned theory from his learned words and practice from his diligent pastoral outreach. So the young Athanasius learned from Alexander, and so many others in like manner” (ANTONIO ROSMINI, *The Five Wounds of the Holy Church*).

It is important that the parish priest encounter a father, a shepherd in whom he can see a reflection of

himself, not an administrator concerned about “reviewing the troops”. It is essential that, despite differing viewpoints and even eventual disagreements and arguments (which are normal and to be expected), priests should perceive their bishop as someone who is unafraid to get involved, to confront them, to encourage them and be an outstretched hand when they are bogged down. *A man of discernment able to guide* and to find practical and possible ways to move forward during the difficult times in each person’s life. When I was in Argentina, sometimes I would hear some say: “I called the bishop – priests called – and the secretary told me that his diary was full and that I should call in three weeks’ time. I was not asked why I was calling but told only that the bishop couldn’t receive me and that I would be put on the list”. Of course the priest concerned did not call again and kept

his request to the bishop, good or bad, to himself. I offer this to you, not so much as advice, but rather as something that comes from the heart; yes, do have your diaries full, God be praised, knowing that you have earned your meal, but if you see that a priest has called today, then call him back tomorrow, latest, and say: “You called me. What’s up? Do you need me now or can you wait for such and such a day? That priest will know from that day on that he has a father.

The word “authority” is derived from the Latin root *augere*: “to increase, promote, advance”. The authority of a pastor is based on his ability to help others to grow, to give priority to his priests rather than himself (for that would simply make him a confirmed bachelor, not a father). The joy of a father and pastor lies in seeing his children grow and become fruitful. Brothers, let this be our

authority and the sign of our fruitfulness.

And the final point: The kenosis of Christ is poor

Thinking with the Church means thinking with our faithful people, the suffering and hope-filled people of God. It means realizing that our ministerial identity is born and understood in the light of this unique and constitutive sense of our identity. Here I would repeat to you the words Saint Ignatius wrote to the Jesuits: “Poverty is a mother and a wall”; it gives birth and it encloses. A *mother*, because it asks us to be fruitful, to give life, to be able to give of ourselves in a way impossible for hearts that are selfish or avaricious. A *wall* because it shields us from one of the most subtle temptations we can face as consecrated persons. That is spiritual worldliness, which puts a religious and “pious” veneer over the

desire for power and influence, over vanity and even pride and arrogance. A wall and a mother that can help us be a Church that is increasingly free because centred in the kenosis of her Lord. A Church that does not want her strength to be – as Archbishop Romero used to say – in the backing of the powerful or political leaders – but advances with noble detachment, relying only on the true strength born of the embrace of the crucified Jesus. This translates into clear, practical and visible signs, it challenges us and calls us to examine our consciences about our decisions and priorities in the use of our resources, influence and position. Poverty is a mother and a wall because, above all, it keeps our hearts from slipping into concessions and compromises that sap the freedom and courage that the Lord demands of us.

Brothers, as we now conclude, let us place ourselves beneath the mantle of the Blessed Virgin. Together let us ask her to keep watch over our hearts as shepherds. May she help us to be ever better servants of the body of her Son, the holy and faithful people of God that journeys, lives and prays here in Central America. Let us pray to Our Mother.

[Hail Mary]

May Jesus bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And please, do not forget to pray for me so that I can fulfil all that I have told you.

Thank you very much.

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Welcome Ceremony and Opening of World Youth Day

Dear Young People, good evening!

How good it is to get together again, this time in a land that receives us with such radiance and warmth! As we gather in Panama, World Youth Day is once more a celebration, a celebration of joy and hope for the whole Church and, for the world, a witness of faith.

I remember that in Krakow several people asked me if I was going to be in Panama, and I told them: “I don’t know, but certainly Peter will be there. Peter is going to be there”. Today I am happy to say to you: Peter is with you, to celebrate and renew you in faith and hope. Peter and the Church walk with you, and we want to tell you not to be afraid, to go forward with the same fresh energy and restlessness that helps make us happier and more available, better witnesses to the Gospel. To go forward, not to create a parallel Church that would be more “fun” or “cool” thanks to a fancy youth event,

as if that were all you needed or wanted. That way of thinking would respect neither you nor everything that the Spirit is saying through you.

Not at all! With you, we want to discover and reawaken the Church's constant freshness and youth, always opening ourselves to this grace of the Holy Spirit that so many times achieves a new Pentecost (cf. SYNOD ON YOUNG PEOPLE, *Final Document*, 60). As we experienced at the Synod, this can only happen if, by our listening and sharing, we encourage each other to keep walking and to bear witness by proclaiming the Lord through service to our brothers and sisters, and concrete service at that. This is not just service to "show off"; it is concrete service. If we are going to be walking: young people, always young people, as in the history of America. I am thinking of you who have begun walking for the first time at this Day, you young people from

among the indigenous youth, you were the first in America and the first to walk at this meeting. A big hand, loudly! And then also you young people descended from Africa: you too had your meeting and got here ahead of us. Another big hand!

Now I know getting here was not easy. I know how much effort and sacrifice you made to participate in this Day. The many weeks of work and commitment, and encounters of reflection and prayer, have made the journey itself its own reward. A disciple is not merely someone who arrives at a certain place, but one who sets out decisively, who is not afraid to take risks and keep walking. If you put your feet on the road, you are already a disciple. If you stay still, you have lost. Begin to walk; this is the disciple's great joy: to keep walking. You have not been afraid to take risks and to keep journeying. And today we can celebrate because

this celebration began a long time back in our various communities.

We have just heard in the presentation, we saw from the flags that we come from different cultures and peoples, we speak different languages and we wear different clothes. Each of our peoples has had a different history and lived through different situations. We are different in so many ways! But none of it has stopped us from meeting one another, these many differences could not prevent us from meeting up and being together, from having a good time together, from celebrating together, from professing Jesus Christ together. No difference prevented us. The reason for this, we know, is that Someone unites us, is a brother to us. You, dear friends, have made many sacrifices to be able to *meet one another* and in this way you have become true teachers and builders of the culture of encounter. By all of

this, you become teachers and builders of the culture of encounter, which is not: “Hi, how’s it going? Bye, see you later”. No, the culture of encounter is what makes us walk together with our differences but also with love, everyone united on the same journey. By your actions and your approach, your way of looking at things, your desires and above all your sensitivity, you discredit and defuse the kind of talk that is intent on sowing division, the kind of talk that is intent on excluding or rejecting those who are not “like us”. As we say in different countries of America: “They are not people like us”. You discredit this. Even with our differences, all are people like us. It is because you have that instinct which knows intuitively that “true love does not eliminate legitimate differences, but harmonizes them in a superior unity” (BENEDICT XVI, *Homily*, 25 January 2006). I say it again: “True

love does not eliminate legitimate differences, but harmonizes them in a superior unity”. Do you know who said this? Do you know? Pope Benedict XVI, who is watching, and we are going to give him a hand; let’s give him a hand from here! He is watching us on television. A big hand, everybody, a big hand for Pope Benedict! On the other hand, we know that the father of lies, the devil, always prefers people who are divided and quarrelling. He is the master of division, and he is afraid of people who have learned to work together. This is a criterion for distinguishing people: those who build bridges and those who build walls. The builders of walls seek to sow fear and make people afraid. But you want to be bridge builders! What do you want to be? [The young people answer: “*Bridge builders!*”] You have learned well; I like that!

You teach us that encountering one another does not mean having to look alike, or think the same way or do the same things: parrots do that. To encounter means to know how to do something else: to enter into the culture of encounter. It is a call inviting us together to dare to *keep alive a shared dream*. We have many differences, and we speak different languages. We wear different clothes but, please, let us aim at having a dream in common. We can do this. This does not cancel us out but enriches us. A great dream, a dream that has a place for everyone. The dream for which Jesus gave his life on the cross, for which the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost and brought fire to the heart of every man and woman, to the heart of each one, to yours and yours and yours, to mine – even in yours he tattooed it in the hope of finding room to grow and flourish. A dream named Jesus, sown by the

Father: God like him – like the Father – sent by the Father in the confidence that it would grow and live in every heart. A concrete dream who is a person, running through our veins, thrilling our hearts and making them dance whenever we hear the command: “that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this they will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:34-35). What is our dream called? [The young people answer: “*Jesus!*”] I can’t hear you... [They repeat: “*Jesus!*”] I can’t hear you... [louder: “*Jesus!*”].

A saint from these lands – listen to this – a saint from these lands liked to say that, “Christianity is not a collection of truths to be believed, of rules to be followed, or of prohibitions. Seen that way Christianity puts us off. Christianity is a person who loved me immensely, who demands and asks for my love.

Christianity is Christ” (cf. Saint Oscar Romero, *Homily*, 6 November 1977). Shall we all say it together? [together with the young people] *Christianity is Christ!* One more time: *Christianity is Christ!* Once more: *...is Christ!* It means pursuing the dream for which he gave his life: loving with the same love with which he loved us. He did not love us halfway; he did not love us a little bit. He loved us totally, he filled us with tenderness and love, he gave his life.

We can ask: What keeps us united? Why are we united? What prompts us to encounter each other? Do you know what keeps us united? It's the certainty of knowing that we have been loved with a profound love that we neither can nor want to keep quiet about; a love that challenges us to respond in the same way: with love. It is the love of Christ that urges us on (cf. *2 Cor 5:14*).

You see, a love which unites is a love that does not overwhelm or oppress, cast aside or reduce to silence, humiliate or domineer. It is the love of the Lord, a daily, discreet and respectful love; a love that is free and freeing, a love that heals and raises up. The love of the Lord has to do more with raising up than knocking down, with reconciling than forbidding, with offering new chances than condemning, with the future than the past. It is the quiet love of a hand outstretched to serve, a commitment that draws no attention to itself. It is a love that does not put on airs, a humble love that gives itself to others with an outstretched hand. This is the love that unites us today.

I ask you: Do you believe in this love? [They answer: "Yes!"] Let me ask another question: Is it a love that makes sense? One time, Jesus answered a person who asked a

question by saying: “If you believe this, go and do the same”. In the name of Jesus, I say to you: “Go and do the same”. Do not be afraid to love, do not be afraid of this concrete love, of this love which is tender, which is service, which gives life.

This is the same question and invitation that was addressed to Mary. The angel asked her if she wanted to bear this dream in her womb and give it life, to make it take flesh. Mary was the age of many of you, the age of many girls like yourselves. She answered: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (*Lk1:38*). Let’s close our eyes, everybody, and think of Mary. She was no fool, she knew what her heart felt, she knew what love was and she answered: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word”. In this moment of silence, Jesus says to each

of you – to you, to you, to you and to you – “Do you feel this? Do you want this”? Think of Mary and answer: “I want to serve the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word”. Mary found the courage to say “yes”. She found the strength to give life to God’s dream. This is what is asked of us today: Do you want to make God’s dream take flesh with your hands, with your feet, with your gaze, with your heart? Do you want the Father’s love to open new horizons for you and bring you along paths never imagined or hoped for, dreamt or expected, making our hearts rejoice, sing and dance?

Do we have the courage to say to the angel, as Mary did: “Behold the servants of the Lord; let it be done”? Don’t answer now; each one has to answer in his or her heart. These are questions which we can answer only in silence.

Dear young friends, the most hope-filled result of this Day will not be a final document, a joint letter or a programme to be carried out. The most hope-filled result of this meeting will be your faces and a prayer. This will give hope: the face with which you return home, the changed heart with which you return home, the prayer you have learned to offer from this changed heart. What will give hope from this encounter will be your faces and your prayer. Each of you will return home with the new strength born of every encounter with others and with the Lord. You will return home filled with the Holy Spirit, so that you can cherish and keep alive the dream that makes us brothers and sisters, and that we must not let grow cold in the heart of our world. Wherever we may be and whatever we may do, we can always look up and say, "Lord, teach me to love as you have loved us". Will you repeat those words

with me? “Lord, teach me to love as you have loved us”. [The young people repeat with the Pope]. Once more. [*“Lord, teach me to love as you have loved us”*]. Louder, you are hoarse. [*“Lord, teach me to love as you have loved us”*].

Now since we want to be good and polite, we cannot conclude this first encounter without giving thanks. Thank you to all those who have prepared this World Youth Day with so much enthusiasm. Huge thanks! Thank you for encouraging one another to build up and to welcome, and for saying “yes” to God’s dream of seeing his sons and daughters gathered. Thank you to Archbishop Ulloa and his team who have helped Panama to be today not only a channel that joins oceans, but also a channel where God’s dream continues to find new streams that enable it to grow, to multiply and to spread to every corner of the earth.

Dear friends, may Jesus bless you! I wish this for you with all my heart. May Santa Maria Antigua ever accompany you and protect you, so that we can say without fear, as she does: “I am here. Let it be done”.

Thank you!

Penitential Liturgy with Young Detainees

“He receives sinners and eats with them”. We just heard this in the Gospel reading (*Lk 15:2*). They are the words muttered by some of the Pharisees and scribes, doctors of the law, who were greatly upset and scandalized by the way Jesus was behaving.

With those words, they tried to discredit and dismiss Jesus in the eyes of everyone. But all they

managed to do was point out one of his most ordinary, most distinctive, most beautiful ways of relating to others: “He receives sinners and eats with them”. Now we are all sinners, all of us, and for that reason Jesus receives with care all of us who are here, and if anyone does not feel that they are sinners – among all of us who are here – they should know that Jesus is not going to receive them, and they would miss out on the best part.

Jesus is not afraid to approach those who, for countless reasons, were the object of social hatred, like the publicans – we know that tax collectors grew rich by exploiting their own people and they caused great resentment – or those on the receiving end of social hatred because they had made an error in their lives, because of their errors and mistakes, some fault, and now they were called sinners. Jesus does

this because he knows that in heaven there is more joy for a single one of those who make mistakes, for a single converted sinner, than for ninety-nine righteous people who remain good (*Lk 15:7*).

And whereas these people were content to grumble or complain because Jesus was meeting people who were marked by some kind of social error, some sin, and closed the doors on conversion, on dialogue with him – Jesus approaches and engages, Jesus puts his reputation at risk. He asks us, as he always does, to lift our eyes to a horizon that can renew our life, that can renew our history. All of us, all have a horizon. All of us. Someone may say: “I do not have one”. Open the window and you will find it, open the window of love which is Jesus and you will find him. We all have a horizon. They are two very different, contrasting approaches, Jesus’ one, and that of

the doctors of the law. A sterile, fruitless approach – that of complaining and gossip, the person who is always speaking badly about others and is self-righteous – and another, one that invites us to change and to conversion, which is the Lord's approach, a new life as you have just said a short while ago [turning to the young man who gave testimony].

The approach of complaining and of gossip

Now this is not something from a long time ago, it is current. Many people do not tolerate this attitude of Jesus; they don't like it. First by complaining under their breath and then by shouting, they make known their displeasure, seeking to discredit Jesus' way of acting and that of all those who are with him. They do not accept and they reject this option of drawing near to others and giving

them another chance. These people condemn once and for all, they discredit once and for all and forget that in God's eyes they are disqualified and need tenderness, need love and understanding, but do not wish to accept it. Where people's lives are concerned, it seems easier to attach signs and labels that petrify and stigmatize not only people's past but also their present and future. We put labels on people: "this one is like that", "this one did that thing, and that's it", and he has to bear this for the rest of his days. That's how people are who mutter – the gossips – they are like this. And labels ultimately serve only to divide: good people over here, and bad ones over there; the righteous over here and sinners over there. And this Jesus does not accept; this is the culture of the adjective; we delight in "adjectivizing" people, it gives us delight: "What is your name? My name is 'good'". No, that is an

adjective. “What is your name?” Go to the person’s name: Who are you? What do you do? What dreams do you have? What does your heart feel? Gossips are not interested in this; they are quickly looking for a label to knock someone down off their pedestal. The culture of the adjective which discredits people. Think about that so as not to fall into what society so easily offers us.

This attitude spoils everything, because it erects an invisible wall that makes people think that, if we marginalize, separate and isolate others, all our problems will magically be solved. When a society or community allows this, and does nothing more than complain, gossip and backbite, it enters into a vicious circle of division, blame and condemnation. Strange that these people who do not accept Jesus, and what Jesus is teaching us, are people who are always on bad terms with

each other, among those who call themselves righteous. And what's more, it is an attitude of discrimination and exclusion, of confrontation leading people to say irresponsibly, like Caiaphas: "It is better that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish" (*Jn 11:50*). Better that they should all be kept over there, so that they will not give trouble; we want to live in peace. This is hard-hearted, and Jesus had to confront this; and we are also confronted with this today. Normally the thread is cut at the thinnest part: that of the poor and the defenceless. And it is they who suffer the most from this social disapproval that does allow them to raise themselves up.

How painful it is to see a society concentrate its energies more on complaining and backbiting than on fighting tirelessly to create opportunities and change.

The approach of conversion: the other approach

The Gospel, on the other hand, is completely characterized by this other approach, which is nothing more or less than that of God's own heart. God never chases you away, God never chases anyone away; God says to you: "Come". God waits for you and embraces you, and if you do not know the way, he is going to show you, as this shepherd did with the sheep. The other approach, however, excludes. The Lord wants to celebrate when he sees his children returning home (*Lk* 15:11-31). And Jesus testified to this by showing to the very end the merciful love of the Father. We have a Father – you said it yourself – I enjoyed your testimony: we have a Father. I have a Father who loves me, a beautiful thing. A love, Jesus' love, that has no time for complaining, but seeks to break the circle of useless,

needless, cold and sterile criticism. “I give you thanks, Lord – said that doctor of the law – that I am not like that one, I am not like him. The ones who believe they have a soul ten times purified in the illusion of a sterile life that is no good for anything. I once heard a country farmer saying something that struck me: “What is the purest water? Yes, distilled water”, he said; “You know, Father, that when I drink it, it has no flavour at all”. This is how life is for those who criticize and gossip and separate themselves from others: they feel so pure, so sterile, that they have no flavour at all; they are incapable of inviting someone; they live to take care of themselves, to have cosmetic surgery done on their souls and not to hold out their hand to others and help them to grow, which is what Jesus does; he accepts the complexity of life and of every situation. The love of Jesus, the love of God, the love of God our Father –

as you said to us – is a love that initiates a process capable of inventing ways, offering means for integration and transformation, healing, forgiveness and salvation. By eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus shatters the mentality that separates, that excludes, that isolates, that falsely separates “the good and the bad”. He does not do this by decree, or simply with good intentions, or with slogans or sentimentality. How does Jesus do it? By creating bonds, relationships capable of enabling new processes; investing in and celebrating every possible step forward. That’s why Jesus does not say to Matthew when he converts – you will see it in the Gospel: “Well, this is good, I congratulate you, come with me”. No, he says to him: “Let us celebrate in your home”, and he invites all his friends, who with Matthew had been condemned by the society, to celebrate. The gossipmonger, the one

who separates, does not know how to celebrate because he has an embittered heart.

Creating relationships, celebrating. This is what Jesus does, and that way he breaks with another form of complaining, one even harder to detect, one that “stifles dreams” because it keeps whispering: “you can’t do it, you can’t do it”. How many times you have heard this: “you can’t do it”. Watch out! This is like a woodworm that eats you from the inside out. Watch out when you feel “you can’t do it”, give yourself a slap: “Yes, I can and I will show you”. The whisper, the interior whisper that haunts those who repent of their sin and acknowledge their mistakes, but don’t think that they can change. And this happens when they think that those who are born publicans will always die publicans; and that is not true. The Gospel tell us quite the opposite. Eleven of the twelve

disciples were bad sinners, because they committed the worst sin: they abandoned their Master, others disowned him, others ran far away. The Apostles betrayed him, and Jesus went to look for them one by one, and they are the ones who changed the whole world. It did not occur to any of them to say: “you can’t do it”, because having seen Jesus’ love after their betrayal, “I am going to be able to do it, because you give me the strength”. Watch out for the “you-can’t-do-it” woodworm, be very careful.

Friends, each of us is much more than our labels which people attach to us; each is much more than the adjectives that they want to give us, each is much more than the condemnation foisted on us. And that is what Jesus teaches us and asks us to believe. Jesus’ approach challenges us to ask and seek help when setting out on the path of

improvement. There are times when complaining seems to have the upper hand, but don't believe it, don't listen to it. Seek out and listen to the voices that encourage you to look ahead, not those that pull you down. Listen to the voices that open the window for you and let you see the horizon: "Yes, but it's far off". "But you can do it. Focus on it carefully and you will be able to do it". And every time the woodworm comes with "you can't do it", answer it from within: "I can do it", and focus on the horizon.

The joy and hope of every Christian – of all of us, and the Pope too – comes from having experienced this approach of God, who looks at us and says, "You are part of my family and I cannot leave you at the mercy of the elements"; this is what God says to each one of us, because God is Father – you said it yourself: "You are part of my family and I am not going to leave you to the mercy of the

elements, I am not going to leave you lying in the ditch, no, I cannot lose you along the way – God says to us, to each of us, by name and surname – I am here at your side”. Here? Yes, Lord. It is that feeling that you, Luis, described at those times when it seemed it was all over, yet something said: “No! It is not all over”, because you have a bigger purpose that lets you see that God our Father is always with us. He gives us people with whom we can walk, people to help us achieve new goals.

So Jesus turns complaining into celebration, and tells us: “Rejoice with me, we are going to celebrate!” In the parable of the prodigal son – I like a translation I found once – it says that the father said, when he saw his son who had returned home: “We are going to celebrate”, and then the feast began. And one translation said: “And then the dance began”. The joy, the joy with which God

receives us, with the Father's embrace; the dance began.

Brothers and sisters: You are part of the family; you have a lot to share with others. Help us to discern how best to live and to accompany one another along the path of change that we, as a family, all need.

A society grows sick when it is unable to celebrate change in its sons and daughters. A community grows sick when it lives off relentless, negative and heartless complaining, gossip. But a society is fruitful when it is able to generate processes of inclusion and integration, of caring and trying to create opportunities and alternatives that can offer new possibilities to the young, to build a future through community, education and employment. Such a community is healthy. Even though it may feel the frustration of not knowing how to do so, it does not

give up, it keeps trying. We all have to help each other to learn, as a community, to find these ways, to try again and again. It is a covenant that we have to encourage one another to keep: you, young men and women, those responsible for your custody and the authorities of the Centre and the Ministry, and all your families, as well as your pastoral assistants. Keep fighting, all of you – but not among yourselves, please – fighting for what? – to seek and find the paths of integration and transformation. And this the Lord blesses, this the Lord sustains and this the Lord accompanies.

Shortly we will continue with the penitential service, where we will all be able to experience the Lord's gaze, which never looks at adjectives, but looks at a name, looks into our eyes, looks at our heart; he does not look at labels and condemnation, but at his sons and daughters. That is God's

approach, his way of seeing things, which rejects exclusion and gives us the strength to build the covenants needed to help us all to reject complaining: those fraternal covenants that enable our lives to be a constant invitation to the joy of salvation, to the joy of keeping a horizon open before us, to the joy of the son's feast. Let us go this way. Thank you.

Via Crucis with Young People

Dear Young People of the world,

To walk with Jesus will always be a grace and a risk:

a grace, because he commits us to living in the faith and to knowing him by entering the deepest part of his heart and understanding the power of his word;

a risk, because the words, gestures and actions of Jesus stand in contrast to the spirit of the world with its human ambition, with its cultural designs that discard and are loveless.

There is a certainty that fills this Way of the Cross with hope: Jesus walked it with love. And the Glorious Virgin experienced it too, she who from the beginning of the Church has wanted, by her tenderness, to sustain the way of evangelization.

Address of the Holy Father

Lord, Father of mercy, in this Coastal Beltway, together with so many young people from all over the world, we have accompanied your Son on his Way of the Cross: the way he wanted to walk for us, in order to show us how much you love us and how much you care about our lives.

The way of Jesus leading to Calvary is a way of suffering and solitude that

continues in our own time. He walks and suffers in all those faces hurt by the complacent and anesthetizing indifference of our society, a society that consumes and is consumed, that ignores and is ignorant, blind to the pain of our brothers and sisters.

Lord, we too, your friends, have given in to apathy and inaction. All too often, we have ended up going along with the crowd, and this has paralyzed us. It has been hard to see you in our suffering brothers and sisters. We have looked away in order not to see; we have taken refuge in noise in order not to hear; we have covered our mouths in order not to cry out.

The temptation is always the same. It is easier and “it pays” to be friends in triumphs and in glory, in success and applause; it is easier to be around someone who is considered popular and a winner.

How easy it is to fall into a culture of bullying, harassment, intimidation, of cruelty to the weak.

It is not like that for you, Lord: on the cross, you identified yourself with all those who suffer, with all those who feel forgotten.

It is not like that for you, Lord: because you wanted to embrace all those whom we so often consider unworthy of an embrace, a caress, a blessing; or, worse yet, do not even realize that they need it; we ignore them.

It is not like that for you, Lord: on the cross, you unite yourself to the way of the cross of every young person, of every situation, in order to turn it into a way of resurrection.

Father, today your Son's way of the cross continues:

it continues in the muffled cry of children kept from being born and of so many others denied the right to a childhood, a family, an education; of children not able to play, sing or dream...

it continues in women who are mistreated, exploited and abandoned, stripped of their dignity and treated as nothing;

and in the saddened eyes of young people who see their hopes for the future snatched away for lack of education and dignified work;

it continues in the anguish of young faces, our friends, who fall into the snares of unscrupulous people – including people who claim to be serving you, Lord – snares of exploitation, criminal activity, and abuse which feed on their lives.

Your Son's way of the cross continues in all those young people and

families who, caught up in a spiral of death as a result of drugs, alcohol, prostitution and human trafficking, are deprived not only of a future but also of a present. Just as they divided your garments, Lord, their dignity is divided and mistreated.

Your Son's way of the cross continues in those young people with downcast faces who have lost the ability to dream, create and shape their future, and have already chosen to "retire" in glum resignation or complacency, one of the narcotics most consumed in our time.

It continues in the quiet and anger-filled pain of those who, instead of solidarity from an opulent society, encounter rejection, sorrow and misery, and are singled out and treated as responsible for all society's ills.

Your Son's passion continues in the despairing solitude of the elderly,

whom we have discarded and abandoned.

It continues in the indigenous peoples whom others strip of their lands, their roots and their culture, ignoring and silencing the great wisdom that they have and can bring us.

Father, your Son's way of the cross continues in the plea of our mother earth, profoundly wounded by the pollution of her skies, the barrenness of her fields, the contamination of her waters, trampled underfoot by disregard and a fury of consumption beyond all reason.

It is prolonged in a society that has lost the ability to weep and to be moved by suffering.

Yes, Father, Jesus keeps walking, carrying his cross and suffering in all these faces, while an uncaring world

is caught up in comfortable cynicism
and in the drama of its own frivolity.

And we, Lord, what are we to do?

How are we to react to Jesus as he
suffers, walks, emigrates in the faces
of many our friends, or of all those
strangers that we have learned to
make invisible?

And we, Father of mercy,

do we console and accompany the
Lord, helpless and suffering in the
poorest and most abandoned of our
brothers and sisters?

do we help carry the burden of the
cross, like Simon of Cyrene, by being
peacemakers, builders of bridges, a
leaven of fraternity?

do we have the courage to remain,
like Mary, at the foot of the cross?

Let us look to Mary, woman of
strength. From her let us learn how

to stand beneath the cross with her same determination and courage, without evasions or illusions. She accompanied the suffering of her Son, your Son, Father; she supported him by her gaze and protected him with her heart. She shared his suffering, yet was not overwhelmed by it. She was the woman of strength who uttered her “yes”, who supports and accompanies, protects and embraces. She is the great guardian of hope.

We too, Father, want to be a Church that supports and accompanies, that is able to say, “Here I am!” in the lives and amid the crosses of all those Christs who walk by our side.

From Mary we learn how to say “yes” to the patience and perseverance of the many mothers, fathers and grandparents who never cease to support and accompany their

children and grandchildren in trouble.

From her we learn how to say “yes” to the stubborn endurance and creativity of those who, undaunted, are ready to start over again in situations where everything appears to be lost, in an effort to create spaces, homes and centres of care that can be an outstretched hand to all those in difficulty.

In Mary, we learn the strength to be able to say “yes” to those who have refused to remain silent in the face of a culture of mistreatment and abuse, disparagement and aggression, and who work to provide opportunities and to create an atmosphere of safety and protection.

In Mary, we learn how to welcome and take in all those abandoned, and forced to leave or lose their land, their roots, their families, their work.

Father, like Mary, we want to be Church, a Church that fosters a culture that welcomes, protects, promotes and integrates; that does not stigmatize, much less indulge in a senseless and irresponsible condemnation of every immigrant as a threat to society.

From her we want to learn to stand beneath the cross, but not with hearts tightly shut, rather with hearts that can accompany, that feel tenderness and devotion, that show mercy and treat others with respect, sensitivity and understanding. We want to be a Church of memory, which appreciates and respects the elderly and gives them their rightful place as guardians of our roots.

Father, like Mary we want to learn what it means to “stand”.

Lord, teach us to stand, at the foot of the cross, at the foot of every cross. Open our eyes and hearts this night,

and rescue us from paralysis and uncertainty, from fear and from desperation. Father, teach us to say: Here I stand, alongside your Son, alongside Mary and alongside all those beloved disciples who desire to welcome your Kingdom into their heart. Amen.

After having experienced the Lord's Passion together with Mary at the foot of the cross, we now go with quiet and peaceful hearts, filled with joy and a great desire to follow Jesus. May Jesus accompany you and Our Lady take care of you. Goodbye!

**Homily at the Holy Mass at the
Cathedral Basilica of Santa Maria
La Antigua with Priests,
Consecrated Persons and Lay
Movements**

I want to firstly congratulate the Archbishop, who, for the first time in almost seven years, is able to meet his spouse, this Church, widowed temporarily during this time. And I want to congratulate the widow who stops being a widow today, on meeting her husband. I also want to thank all those who made this possible: the authorities and the entire People of God, for everything done to ensure the Archbishop could meet his people, not in a borrowed home but in his own. Thank you!

The programme for this ceremony envisaged, due to the limited time, two aspects: the consecration of the altar and the meeting with priests, male and female religious as well as other consecrated lay-faithful. What I will tell you, therefore, will more or less follow along these lines, thinking of the priests, religious and other consecrated faithful, especially those

who carry out an apostolate in this particular Church.

“Jacob’s well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’” (*Jn 4:6-7*).

The Gospel we have heard does not shrink from showing us Jesus, wearied from his journey. At midday, when the sun makes all its strength and power felt, we encounter him beside the well. He needed to relieve and quench his thirst, to refresh his steps, to recover his strength in order to continue with his mission.

The disciples personally experienced the extent of the Lord’s commitment and readiness to bring the Good News to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners,

to comfort those who mourn and to proclaim a year of favour to all (cf. *Is* 61:1-3). These are all situations that consume life and energy; yet they show us many important moments in the life of the Master, moments in which our humanity, too, can find a word of Life.

Weary from the journey

It is relatively easy for us, compulsively busy as we are, to imagine and enter into communion with the Lord's activity. Yet we do not always know how to contemplate and accompany his "weariness"; it seems this is not something proper to God. The Lord knew what it was to be tired, and in his weariness so many struggles of our nations and peoples, our communities and all who are weary and heavily burdened (cf. *Mt* 11:28) can find a place.

There are many reasons for weariness on our journey as priests, consecrated men and women, and members of lay movements: from long hours of work, which leave little time to eat, rest, pray and be with family, to “toxic” working conditions and relationships that lead to exhaustion and disappointment. From simple daily commitments to the burdensome routine of those who do not find the relaxation, appreciation or support needed to move from one day to the next. From the usual and predictable little problems to lengthy and stressful periods of pressure. A whole array of burdens to bear.

It would be impossible to try to cope with all these situations that assail the lives of consecrated persons, but in all of them we feel the urgent need to find a well to quench our thirst and relieve our weariness from the journey. All these situations demand,

like a silent plea, a well from which we can set out once more.

For some time now, a subtle weariness seems to have found a place in our communities, a weariness that has nothing to do with the Lord's weariness. And here we need to be careful. It is a temptation that we might call *the weariness of hope*. This weariness is felt when – as in the Gospel – the sun beats down mercilessly and with such intensity that it becomes impossible to keep walking or even to look ahead. Everything becomes confused. I am not referring here to that “peculiar heaviness of heart” (cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, 17; *Evangelii Gaudium*, 287) felt by those who feel “shattered” at the end of the day, yet manage a serene and grateful smile. I am speaking of that other weariness, which comes from looking ahead once reality “hits” and calls into question the energy, resources and

viability of our mission in this changing and challenging world.

It is a weariness that paralyzes. It comes from looking ahead and not knowing how to react to the intense and confusing changes that we as a society are experiencing. These changes seem to call into question not only our ways of speaking and engaging, our attitudes and habits in dealing with reality, but in many cases they call into doubt the very viability of religious life in today's world. And the very speed of these changes can paralyze our options and opinions, while what was meaningful and important in the past can now no longer seem valid.

Sisters, and brothers, the weariness of hope comes from seeing a Church wounded by sin, which so often failed to hear all those cries that echoed the cry of the Master: "My

God, why have you forsaken me?” (*Mt 27:46*).

And we can get used to living with a weariness of hope before an uncertain and unknown future, and this can pave the way for a grey pragmatism to lodge in the heart of our communities. Everything apparently goes on as usual, but in reality, faith is crumbling and failing. Communities and priests disappointed by a reality that we do not understand or that we think has no room for our message, we can open the door to one of the worst heresies possible in our time: the notion that the Lord and our communities have nothing to say or contribute in the new world now being born (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 83). What once arose to be the salt and light for the world ends up stale and worn.

Give me a drink

Weariness from the journey can happen; it can make itself felt. Like it or not, we do well to have the same courage as the Master, and to say, “Give me a drink”. As was the case with the Samaritan woman and perhaps with each one of us, we want to quench our thirst not with any water but with the “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (*Jn4:14*). Like the Samaritan woman who for years had been carrying the empty pitchers of failed loves, we know that not just any word can help us regain energy and prophecy in our mission. Not just any novelty, however alluring it may seem, can quench our thirst. We know, as she did, that neither knowledge of religion nor upholding options and traditions past or novelties present, always makes us fruitful and passionate “worshipers in spirit and truth” (*Jn4:23*).

The Lord says, “Give me a drink”, he asks us to say those same words. As we say them, let us open the door and let our wearied hope return without fear to the deep well of our first love, when Jesus passed our way, gazed at us with mercy, and he chose us and asked us to follow him. To say those words, let us revive the memory of that moment when his eyes met ours, the moment when he made us realize that he loved us, that he loved me, not only personally but also as a community (cf. *Homily at the Easter Vigil*, 19 April 2014). To be able to say “give me a drink” means retracing our steps and, in creative fidelity, listening to how the Spirit inspired no specific works, pastoral plans or structures, but instead, through any number of “saints next door” – including the founders of your secular institutes and the bishops and parish priests who laid the bases for your communities – through those saints next door he

gave life and fresh breath to a particular moment of history when all hope and dignity seemed to be stifled and crushed.

“Give me a drink” means finding the courage to be purified and to recapture the most authentic part of our founding charisms – which are not only for religious life but for the life of Church as a whole – and to see how they can find expression today. This means not only looking back on the past with gratitude, but seeking the roots of their inspiration and letting them resound forcefully once again in our midst (cf. Pope Francis-Fernando Prado, *The Strength of a Vocation*, 42).

“Give me a drink” means recognizing that we need the Spirit to make us women and men mindful of an encounter and of a passage, the salvific passage of God. And trusting that, as he did yesterday, he will still

do tomorrow: “Going to the roots helps us without a doubt to live in the present without fear. We need to live without fear, responding to life with the passion of being engaged with history, immersed in things. With the passion of lovers” (cf. *ibid.*, 44).

A wearied hope will be healed and will enjoy that “particular tiredness of heart” when it is unafraid to return to the place of its first love and to find, in the peripheries and challenges before us today, the same song, the same gaze that inspired the song and the gaze of those who have gone before us. In this way, we will avoid the danger of starting with ourselves; we will abandon a wearisome self-pity in order to meet Christ’s gaze as he continues today to seek us, to call us and to invite us to the mission, as he did in that first meeting, that meeting of our first love.

* * *

For me it is truly no small thing that this cathedral now reopens its doors after a lengthy renovation. It has experienced the passage of the years as a faithful witness of the history of this people, and now with the help and work of many it wants once more to show us its beauty. More than a formal restoration, which always attempts to reproduce the original appearance, this restoration has sought to preserve the beauty of the past while making room for all the newness of the present. A Spanish, Indian, Afro-American cathedral thus becomes a Panamanian cathedral, belonging both to past generations and to those of today who made this reality possible. It no longer belongs only to the past, but it is a thing of beauty for the present.

Today it is once more a place of peace, that encourages us to renew and nurture our hope, to discover how yesterday's beauty becomes a basis for creating the beauty of tomorrow.

That is how the Lord works. Hope does not weary; yes, there is the peculiar tiredness of the heart that bears daily with everything that was entrusted to it with that gaze of our first love.

Brothers and sisters, may we not allow ourselves to be robbed of the hope and the beauty we have inherited from our ancestors. May it be a living root, a fruitful root that will help us continue to make beautiful and prophetic the history of salvation in these lands.

Address at the Vigil with Young People

Dear young friends, good afternoon!

We've seen this beautiful presentation about the Tree of Life. It shows us how the life that Jesus gives us is a love story, a life history that wants to blend with ours and sink roots in the soil of our own lives. That life is not a salvation up "in the cloud" and waiting to be downloaded, a new "app" to be discovered, or a technique of mental self-improvement. Still less is that life a "tutorial" for finding out the latest news. The salvation that God offers us is an invitation to be part of a love story interwoven with our personal stories; it is alive and wants to be born in our midst so that we can bear fruit just as we are, wherever we are and with everyone all around us. The Lord comes there to sow and to be sown. He is the first to say "yes"

to our lives, he always precedes us. He's the first to say yes to our history, and he wants us to say "yes" along with him. He always precedes us, he's first.

That was how he surprised Mary, and asked her to be part of this love story. Obviously, the young woman of Nazareth was not part of the "social networks" of the time. She was not an "influencer", but without wanting or trying to, she became the most influential woman in history. So we can say, with the confidence of children: Mary, the "influencer" of God. With just a few words, she was able to say "yes" and to trust in the love and promises of God, who is the only force capable of renewing, of making all things new. And all of us today have something that needs to be renewed within. Today we have to allow God to renew something in our hearts. Let us reflect: what do I want God to renew in my heart?

We are always struck by the strength of that young woman's "yes", the power of those words "be it done" that she spoke to the angel. This was no merely passive or resigned acceptance. It was different to a faint "yes", as if to say, "well, let's give it a try, and see what happens". Mary did not know that expression: let's see what happens. She was determined, she knew what was at stake and said "yes", getting straight to the point. It was something more, something different. It was the "yes" of someone prepared to be committed, someone willing to take a risk, ready to stake everything she had, with no more security than the certainty of knowing that she was the bearer of a promise. And I ask each one of you: do you see yourselves as bearers of a promise? What promise is there within my heart to take forward? Mary's would undoubtedly be a difficult mission, but the challenges that lay ahead were no reason to say

“no”. Things would get complicated, of course, but not in the same way as happens when cowardice paralyzes us because things are not clear or sure in advance. Mary did not take out an insurance policy! Mary took the risk and for this reason she is strong, for this reason she is an “influencer”, the “influencer” of God! The “yes” and the desire to serve were stronger than any doubts and difficulties.

This afternoon we also heard how Mary’s “yes” echoes and expands in every generation. Many young people, like Mary, take a risk and stake their future on a promise. Thank you, Erika and Rogelio, for the witness you gave us. They’ve been courageous and deserve an applause. Thank you. You shared your fears and difficulties and the risks you faced with the birth of your daughter Inés. At one point, you said, “We parents, for various

reasons, find it hard to accept that our child will be born with an illness or disability”.That is true, it is understandable.Yet the amazing thing was what you went on to say, “When our daughter was born, we decided to love her with all our heart”.Before her birth, when faced with all the issues and problems that came up, you made a decision and said, like Mary, “let it be done”; you decided to love her.Presented with the life of your frail, helpless and needy daughter, your answer, Erika and Rogelio, was “yes”, and so we have Inés.You found the courage to believe that the world is not only for the strong!Thank you!

Saying “yes” to the Lord means preparing to embrace life as it comes, with all its fragility, its simplicity, and often enough too, with its conflicts and annoyances, and to do so with the same love with which Erika and Rogelio spoke.To embrace life as it

comes. It means embracing our country, our families and our friends as they are, with all their weak points and their flaws. Embracing life is also seen in accepting things that are not perfect, pure or “distilled”, yet no less worthy of love. Is a disabled or frail person not worthy of love? I ask you: is a disabled person, a frail person not worthy of love? [young people reply: “Yes!"]. I can’t hear you very well... [“Yes!"]. Another question and let’s see how you reply. Someone who happens to be a foreigner, someone who made a mistake, someone ill or in prison, is that person not worthy of love? [“Yes!"] And we know what Jesus did: he embraced the leper, the blind man, the paralytic, the Pharisee and the sinner. He embraced the thief on the cross and even embraced and forgave those who crucified him.

Why did he do this? Because only what is loved can be saved. You

cannot save a person, you cannot save a situation, if you do not love it. Only that which is loved can be saved. Can we repeat this together? Only that which is loved can be saved. Once again. [young people repeat: "Only that which is loved can be saved"]. Let's not forget. For this reason we're saved by Jesus, because he loves us and can't go against his nature. We can do any number of things against him, yet he loves us and he saves us. Because only that which is loved can be saved. Only that which is embraced can be transformed. The Lord's love is greater than all our problems, frailties and flaws. Yet it is precisely through our problems, frailties and flaws that he wants to write this love story. He embraced the prodigal son, he embraced Peter after the denials and he always, always, always embraces us whenever we fall: he helps us to get up and get back on our feet. Because the worst fall, and

pay attention to this, the worst fall, that can ruin our lives, is to remain down and not allow ourselves to be helped up. There is a beautiful alpine tune that is sung while going up a mountain: “In the art of climbing, the victory lies not so much in not falling down, but in not staying fallen down”. Don’t stay down.

So, the first step is not to be afraid to welcome life as it comes, not to be afraid to embrace life as it is! This is the tree of life that we have seen today.

Thank you, Alfredo, for your testimony and your courage in sharing it with us all. I was impressed when you told us: “I started working on a construction project, but once it was finished, I was without a job and things changed fast: without an education, a trade and a job”. Let me summarize this in four “withouts” that left our life rootless and

parched: without work, without education, without community and without family. In other words, life without roots. Without work, without education, without community and without family. These are the four “withouts” that kill.

It is impossible for us to grow unless we have strong roots to support us and to keep us firmly grounded. It is easy to drift off, when there is nothing to clutch onto, to hold onto. And here is a question that we older people have to ask ourselves, those of us who are here, but also a question that you need to ask us, a question that you, young people, need to ask us, older people, and which we have to answer: What roots are we providing for you, what foundations are we providing for you to grow as persons? It is a question for us older persons. It is easy enough to criticize and complain about young people if we are depriving

them of the jobs, education and community opportunities they need to take root and to dream of a future. Without education, it is difficult to dream of a future; without work, it is very difficult to dream of a future; without a family and without a community, it is almost impossible to dream of a future. Because dreaming of a future means learning how to answer not only the question what I am living for, but also who I am living for, the one who makes it worthwhile for me to offer my life. And that is something we, older persons, must facilitate by providing work, education, community and opportunities.

As Alfredo told us, when we find ourselves at a loss and without work, without education, without community and without family, at the end of the day we feel empty and we end up filling that emptiness with anything we can, any useless

thing. Because we no longer know for whom to live, to fight and to love. To the older persons who are here and to those who are following us I ask: What are you doing to build the future and to foster aspirations for the future in today's young people? Are you able to make determined efforts so that they can have education, work, family and community? Each of us older persons can respond to this question in our hearts.

I remember once talking with some young people, and one of them asked me: "Why are so many young people today not interested in whether God exists or find it difficult to believe in him, and they seem so bored and aimless in life? I asked them in return what they thought. I remember one particular answer that touched me and it relates to the experience Alfredo shared – "Father, it's because many of them feel that, little by little,

they stopped existing for others; often they feel invisible". Many young people feel that they have stopped existing for others, for the family, for society, for the community... They often feel, as a result, invisible. This is the culture of abandonment and lack of concern for others. Not everyone, but many people feel that they have little or nothing to contribute, because there is no one around to ask them to get involved. How can they think that God exists, if they, these young people, have long since stopped thinking that they exist for their brothers and sisters and for society? In this way we are encouraging them not to look to the future and to fall into the clutches of drugs and anything that destroys them. We can ask ourselves: What do I do for the young people I see? Do I criticize them or am I disinterested in them? Do I help them or show disinterest? Can it be true that, for

me, they stopped existing a long time ago?

We know well that to feel acknowledged or loved it is not enough to be connected all day long. To feel respected and asked to get involved is greater than simply being “on-line”. It means finding spaces where, with your hands, your heart and your head, you can feel part of a larger community that needs you and that you yourselves, young people, need.

The saints understood this very well. I think, for example, of Saint John Bosco [young people applaud]. He did not go off to seek young people in far-off places – I can see here those who love Don Bosco, an applause! Don Bosco did not go off to seek young people in far-off or special places; he simply learned to see with God’s eyes everything that was going on around him in his

city. Thus he was deeply affected by the hundreds of children and young people left to themselves, without education, without work and without the helping hand of a community. Many other people were living in the same city, and many criticized those young people, but they were unable to see them with God's eyes. We need to see young people with God's eyes. Don Bosco did, and found the energy to take the first step: to embrace life as it presented itself. From there, he was not afraid to take the second step: to create a community, a family with them, where through work and study they could feel loved. He gave them roots from which they could reach up to heaven. So that they could be someone in society. To give them roots to hold onto and to help them stand securely when the first stormy winds come their way. That is what Saint John Bosco did, this is what the saint did, this is what communities

do that know how to look at young people with God's eyes. Would you older persons like to look at young people with God's eyes? ["Yes!"]

I think of many places in our Latin America that promote what they call familia grande hogar de Cristo. With the same spirit as other centres, they seek to accept life as it comes, in its totality and complexity, because they know that the tree always holds a hope: "if it be cut down, it will sprout again, and its shoots will not cease" (Job 14:7).

It is always possible to "sprout shoots and grow", it is always possible to start again when there is a community, a warm home that enables us to take root, that provides the confidence we need and prepares our hearts to discover a new horizon: the horizon of a beloved son or daughter who is sought, found and entrusted with a mission. Through

real faces, the Lord makes himself present. To say “yes”, like Mary, to this love story is to say “yes” to becoming a means of building in our neighbourhoods those ecclesial communities capable of walking the streets of our cities, embracing and weaving new relationships. To be an “influencer” in the twenty-first century is to be guardians of roots, guardians of all that prevents our life from dissipating and evaporating into nothingness. You, older people, be guardians of everything that can make us feel part of one another. Guardians of all that which makes us feel that we belong.

That was what Nirmeen experienced at World Youth Day in Krakow. She found a lively, happy community that welcomed her, gave her a sense of belonging and therefore identity, and allowed her to live the joy that comes from being found by Jesus. Nirmeen avoided Jesus. She avoided him. She

kept her distance until someone helped her to see the roots, gave her a sense of belonging. That community encouraged her to embark on the journey she spoke to us about.

A Latin American saint once asked: “Will the progress of society consist only in owning the latest car or buying the newest gadget on the market? Is that the extent of our greatness as human beings? Is that all there is to live for?” (cf. SAINT ALBERTO HURTADO, *Holy Week Meditation for Young People*, 1946). So let me ask you young people: Do you want that greatness? Or not? [“No!”] You don’t seem sure. I can’t hear you well here... What’s wrong? [“No!”] Greatness is not only about acquiring the latest car or the newest gadget on the market. You were created for something greater. The Virgin Mary understood this and said, “Let it be done!” Erika and Rogelio understood this and said,

“Let it be done!” Alfredo understood this and said, “Let it be done!” Nirmeen understood this and said, “Let it be done!” We heard it here. Young friends, I ask you: Are you willing to say “yes”? [“Yes!”] Now you are learning how to reply and I like it more! The Gospel teaches us that the world will not be better because there are fewer sick, weak, frail or elderly people to be concerned about, or because there are fewer sinners. No, the world will not be better on account of this. It will be better when more people, like these friends who have spoken to us, are willing and enthused enough to give birth to the future and believe in the transforming power of God’s love. To you, young people, I ask: are you willing to be an “influencer” like Mary? [“Yes!”] She dared to say, “Let it be done”. Only love makes us more human, not fights, not bullying, not studies on their own: only love makes us more human and fulfilled;

everything else is a pleasant but useless placebo.

In a few moments, we will encounter Jesus, the living Jesus, in the Eucharistic. You will surely have many things to say to him, many things to tell him about the different situations in your lives, families and countries.

Face to face with Jesus, have courage and don't be afraid to open your heart to him so that he may renew the fire of his love, so that you can embrace life with all its frailty and flaws, but also with its grandeur and beauty. May Jesus help you to discover the beauty of being alive and awake. Alive and awake.

Do not be afraid to tell Jesus that you too want to be a part of his love story in this world, that you are ready for something greater!

Friends: when you meet Jesus face to face, be good and ask him for me, that I too will be unafraid to embrace life, so that I will be able to care for its roots and to say, like Mary, “Let it be done, according to your word!”.

Homily at the Holy Mass for World Youth Day

“The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them: ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’” (*Lk* 4:20-21).

With these words, the Gospel presents the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. It started in the synagogue that saw him grow up; he was in the midst of neighbours and people he knew, and perhaps even some of his childhood “catechists” who had taught him the Law. It was

an important moment in the life of the Master: the child who was educated and grew up in that community, stood up and took the floor to proclaim and put into action God's dream. A word previously proclaimed only as a future promise, but now, on the lips of Jesus alone, could be spoken in the present tense, as it became a reality: "Today it has been fulfilled".

Jesus reveals the *now of God*, who comes to meet us and call us to take part in his *now* of "proclaiming good news to the poor... bringing liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed, announcing the year of the Lord's favour" (Lk 4:18-19). This is the *now of God*. It becomes present with Jesus: it has a face, it is flesh. It is a merciful love that does not wait for ideal or perfect situations to show itself, nor does it accept excuses for its appearance. It

is God's time, that makes every situation and place both right and proper. In Jesus, the promised future begins and becomes life.

When? Now. Yet not everyone who was listening felt invited or called. Not all the residents of Nazareth were prepared to believe in someone they knew and had seen grow up, and who was now inviting them to realize a long-awaited dream. Not only that, but they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" (*Lk 4:22*).

The same thing can also happen with us. We do not always believe that God can be that concrete and commonplace, that close and real, and much less that he can become so present and work through somebody like a neighbour, a friend, a relative. We do not always believe that the Lord can invite us to work and soil our hands with him in his Kingdom in that simple and blunt a way. It is

hard to accept that “God’s love can become concrete and can almost be experienced in history with all its painful and glorious vicissitudes” (BENEDICT XVI, General Audience, 28 September 2005).

Often we too behave like the neighbours in Nazareth: we prefer a *distant* God: nice, good, generous, well depicted, yet far-off, and above all a God who does not inconvenience us, a “domesticated” God. Because a close and everyday God, a God who is friend and brother, demands that we be concerned with our surroundings, everyday affairs and above all fraternity. God chose not to reveal himself as an angel or in some spectacular way, but to give us a face that is fraternal and friendly, concrete and familiar. God is real because love is real; God is concrete because love is concrete. Indeed, this “concrete manifestation of love is

one of the essential elements in the life of Christians” (BENEDICT XVI, *Homily*, 1 March 2006).

We can also run the same risks as the neighbours at Nazareth, when within our communities the Gospel seeks to be lived concretely. We begin to say: But these young people, aren't they the children of Mary, Joseph, aren't they the brothers and sisters of... related to...? Are these not the youngsters we saw grow up? They should keep quiet; how can we believe them? That one over there, wasn't he the one who kept breaking windows with his ball? What was born as prophecy and proclamation of the kingdom of God gets domesticated and impoverished. Wanting to domesticate the word of God is a daily temptation.

You too, dear young people, can experience this whenever you think that your mission, your vocation,

even your life itself, is a promise far off in the future, having nothing to do with the present. As if being young were a kind of waiting room, where we sit around until we are called. And in the “meantime”, we adults or you yourselves invent a hygienically sealed future, without consequences, where everything is safe, secure and “well insured”. We don’t want to offer you a laboratory kind of future. This is a “make-believe” happiness, not the happiness of today, of what is concrete, of love. And so, with this “make-believe” happiness, we “tranquilize” you, we numb you into keeping quiet, so that you don’t make too much of a nuisance, so that you don’t question yourselves or question us; and in that “meantime” your dreams lose their buoyancy, they seem to move slowly, they begin to become flat and dreary, petty and plaintive (cf. *Palm Sunday Homily*, 25 March 2018). Only because we think,

or you think, that your *now* has not yet come, that you are too young to be involved in dreaming about and working for the future. And that's how we keep procrastinating... And do you know something? A lot of young people like this. Please let us help them to not like this, to rebel, and to want to live the "now" of God.

One of the fruits of the last Synod was the enrichment that came from being able to meet and above all to listen to one another. The enrichment of intergenerational dialogue, the enrichment of exchange and the value of realizing that we need one another, that we have to work to create channels and spaces that encourage dreaming of and working for tomorrow, starting today. And this, not in isolation, but rather side by side, creating a common space. A space that is not simply taken for granted, or won in a lottery, but a space for which you too

must fight. You young people must fight for your space today, because life is living for today. No one can make promises to you about a day in the future. Your life today is today. Your taking risks is today. Your space is today. How are you reacting to this?

You, dear young people, are not the future. We like to say, “you are the future”. No, you are the present. You are not the future of God, you young people are the *now of God*. He invites you and calls you in your communities and cities to go out and find your grandparents, your elders; to stand up and with them to speak out and realize the dream that the Lord has dreamed for you.

Not tomorrow, now, for wherever your treasure is now, there will your heart also be (cf. *Mt 6:21*). Whatever you fall in love with, it will win over not only your imagination, it will

affect everything. It will be what makes you get up in the morning, what keeps you going at times of fatigue, what will break open your hearts and fill you with wonder, joy and gratitude. Realize that you have a mission and fall in love; that will decide everything (cf. PEDRO ARRUIPE, S.J., *Nada es más práctico*). We may possess everything, but, dear young friends, if we lack the passion of love, we will have nothing. The passion of love today! Let us allow the Lord to make us fall in love and let him take us into the future!

For Jesus, there is no “meantime”, but only a merciful love that wants to enter into and win over our hearts. He wants to be our treasure, because Jesus is not a “meantime”, an interval in life or a passing fad; he is generous love that invites us to entrust ourselves.

He is concrete, close, real love, today. He is festive joy, born of opting for and taking part in the miraculous draught of hope and charity, solidarity and fraternity, despite the paralyzed and paralyzing gaze born of fear and exclusion, speculation and manipulation.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord and his mission are not a “meantime” in our life, something temporary, they are not only a World Day of Youth, they are our life today, our life of journeying ahead!

In a special way throughout these days, Mary’s *fiat* has been whispering like a kind of music in the background. She not only believed in God and in his promises as something possible, she believed God himself and dared to say “yes” to taking part in this *now* of the Lord. She felt she had a mission; she fell in love and that decided everything.

May you feel that you have a mission, may you fall in love; the Lord will decide everything.

As in the synagogue of Nazareth, the Lord stands up again among us his friends and acquaintances; he takes the book and says to us “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (*Lk 4:21*).

Dear young friends, do you want to live out your love in a practical way? May your “yes” continue to be the gateway for the Holy Spirit to give us a new Pentecost for the Church and for the world.

Farewell

At the conclusion of this celebration, I thank God for having given us the opportunity to share these days together and to experience once more this World Youth Day.

In particular, I want to thank the President of Panama, Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez, the Presidents of other nations and the other political and civil authorities for their presence at this celebration.

I thank Bishop José Domingo Ulloa Mendieta, Archbishop of Panama, for his generosity and hard work in hosting this World Youth Day in his diocese, as well as the other bishops of this and the neighbouring countries, for all they have done in their communities to provide accommodation and assistance to the great numbers of young people.

My thanks also go to all those who have supported us with their prayers, and who have helped by their efforts and hard work to make this World Youth Day dream come true in this country.

And to you, dear young people, a big “thank you”. Your faith and joy have

made Panama, America and the entire world shake! As we have heard so many times in these days in the song of this World Youth Day: “As your pilgrim people we are gathered here today from every continent and city”. We are on a journey, keep walking, keep living the faith and sharing the faith. Do not forget that you are not the tomorrow, you are not the “meantime”; you are the *now of God*.

The venue for the next World Youth Day has already been announced. I ask you not to let the fervour of these days grow cold. Go back to your parishes and communities, to your families and your friends, and share what you have lived, so that others can resonate with the strength and concrete enthusiasm that is yours. And with Mary, keep saying “yes” to the dream that God has sown in you.

And, please, do not forget to pray for me.

Visit to the Casa Hogar Del Buen Samaritano

Dear Young Friends,

Dear Directors, Associates and Pastoral Workers,

Dear Friends,

Thank you, Father Domingo, for your words of greeting on behalf of all present. I wanted this meeting with you here from this Good Samaritan Home, and also with the other young people from the John Paul II Centre, the Saint Joseph Home of the Sisters of Charity and the “House of Love” of the Congregation of the Brothers of Jesus of Kkottonngae. Being with you

today gives me reason for renewed hope. Thank you for giving me this.

In preparing for this meeting, I was able to read the testimony of a member of this Home that touched my heart. It said: “Here I was reborn”. This home, and all the centres you represent, are a sign of the new life that the Lord wants to give us. It is easy to confirm the faith of some of our brothers and sisters when we see it at work in anointing wounds, renewing hope and encouraging faith. Nor are those we might call the “primary beneficiaries” of your homes the only ones to be reborn; here the Church and the faith are also born; here the Church and the faith are continually recreated through love.

We begin *to be reborn* when the Holy Spirit grants us eyes to see others, as Father Domingo said to us, not only as the people we live with – and that

is already saying a lot – but as *our neighbours*. To see others as our neighbours.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus was asked one day: “Who is my neighbour?” (cf. *Lk 10:29*). He did not respond with theories, or give a fine, lofty speech. Instead he told a story – the parable of the Good Samaritan – a concrete example drawn from the real life that you all know and experience. My neighbour is a person, *a face* that I meet along the way, one that makes us move and be moved. To move from our fixed ways of doing things and our priorities, and to be moved so deeply by what that person is experiencing that we stop and make room for him or her on our journey. That is what the Good Samaritan realized when he saw the man left half-dead on the side of the road, not only by bandits but also by the indifference of a priest and a levite who could not be

bothered to come to his aid. For indifference can also kill; it can wound and kill. Some for a few miserable coins, others for fear of becoming unclean. Whatever their reason, whether contempt or social aversion, they saw nothing wrong in leaving that man lying on the roadside. The Good Samaritan, whether in the parable or in all of your homes, shows us that our neighbour is first of all a person, someone with a real, particular face, not something to avoid or ignore, whatever his or her situation may be. And that face reveals our humanity, so often suffering and overlooked.

Our neighbour, then, is a face that wonderfully inconveniences our lives, because it reminds us and points our steps towards what is really important, and it frees us from all that is trite and superficial in the way we follow the Lord.

To be here is to touch the maternal face of the Church, which is capable of prophesying and *creating a home, creating community*. The Church's face is usually unseen; it passes by unnoticed. Yet it is a sign of God's concrete mercy and tender love, a living sign of the good news of the resurrection that even now is at work in our lives.

To create a "home" is to create a family. It is to learn to feel connected to others by more than the utilitarian and practical bonds, to be united in such a way so as to feel that our life is a bit more human. To create a home is to let prophecy take flesh and make our hours and days less cold, less indifferent and anonymous. It is to create bonds by simple, everyday acts that all of us can do. A home, and this we all know very well, demands that everyone work together. No one can be indifferent or aloof, since each is a stone needed

to build the home. And that also means asking the Lord to grant us the grace to learn to be patient, to forgive one another, to start over each day. How many times should I forgive and start over? Seventy times seven times, as many times as necessary. To create strong bonds requires confidence and trust nurtured daily by patience and forgiveness.

And that is how the miracle takes place: we feel that here we are reborn, here we are all reborn, because we feel God's caress that enables us to dream of a more human world, and therefore of a world more divine.

I thank all of you for your example and your generosity. I also thank your institutions, and the volunteers and benefactors. I thank all those who have made it possible for God's love to become ever more concrete,

more real by gazing into the eyes of those around us and acknowledging that we are all neighbours.

Now that we are about to pray the Angelus, I entrust you to our Blessed Lady. We ask her, as a good Mother, full of tender love and closeness, to teach us to make an effort each day to discover who our neighbours are, and to help us go out quickly to meet them, to give them a home, an embrace, where care and fraternal love meet. This is a mission involving every one of us.

I encourage you now to place beneath her mantle all the concerns and needs you may have, all your sorrows and hurts, so that, as a Good Samaritan, she will come to us and aid us by her maternal love and with her smile, the smile of a Mother.

Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae...

Message after the Angelus Prayer

Dear brothers and sisters,

today is the International Day in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. We need to keep alive the memory of the past, the tragedies of the past, and to learn from the pages of history so as to never again repeat the same mistakes. We continue to make relentless efforts to cultivate justice, to increase concord and to sustain integration, in order to be instruments of peace and builders of a better world.

I wish to express my grief for the tragedies that have struck the State of Minas Gerais in Brasil and the State of Hidalgo in Mexico. I entrust to the mercy of God all the victims and, at the same time, I pray for the injured while conveying the assurances of affection and spiritual closeness to their families and the entire population.

Here in Panama my mind has often turned to the people of Venezuela, to whom I feel particularly united in these days. In view of the grave situation that they are experiencing, I pray to the Lord that a just and peaceful solution may be pursued and reached, in respect of human rights while seeking exclusively the good of all the inhabitants of the country. I invite you to pray, placing this request under the protection of Our Lady of Coromoto, Patroness of Venezuela.

To Christ and to the Blessed Virgin, we likewise entrust the victims of the terrorist attack perpetrated this Sunday in the Cathedral of Polo in the Philippine, while Mass was being celebrated. I reiterate my firm condemnation of this act of violence, which brings new grief to this Christian community, and I offer up my prayers for the deceased and for the injured. May the Lord, Prince of

Peace, convert the hearts of the violent and grant to the people of that region a peaceful coexistence.

And today, on the final day of the World Youth Day, as part of the Offertory at Mass, I was given a list of twenty young people who were not able to know how the World Day was progressing via television or radio, the young students from the Police School of Cadets, “General Francisco de Paula Santander”, in Colombia, killed by terrorist hatred. An offering was made for them during Mass, and in their memory during this Angelus I wish to present their names, and every one, in their hearts, if not aloud but in the silence of the heart, bring to mind that word that is used in these institutions when a dead member is named: “present”. May they be present before God. Cadet Luis Alfonso Mosquera Murillo; Cadet Óscar Javier Saavedra Camacho; Cadet Jonathan

Efraín Suescón García; Cadet
Manjardez Contreras Juan Felipe;
Cadet Juan Diego Ayala Anzola; Cadet
Juan David Rodas Agudelo; Cadet
Diego Alejandro Pérez Alarcón; Cadet
Jonathan Ainer León Torres; Cadet
Alán Paul Bayona Barreto; Cadet
Diego Alejandro Molina Peláez; Cadet
Carlos Daniel Campaña Huertas;
Cadet Diego Fernando Martínez
Galvéz; Cadet Juan Esteban
Marulanda Orozco; Cadet César
Alberto Ojeda Gómez; Cadet Cristian
Fabián González Portilla; Cadet
Fernando Alonso Iriarte Agresoth;
Cadet Ercia Sofía Chico Vallejo; Cadet
Cristian Camilo Maquilón Martínez;
Cadet Steven Rolando Prada Riaño;
Cadet Iván René Muñoz Parra. We
ask you Lord, to grant them peace,
and grant peace to the people of
Colombia. Amen.

[Blessing]

Once again I thank you for what you are doing here: it is great and wonderful. May God bless you, and pray for me. Thank you!

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