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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Portugal on the occasion of the 37th World Youth Day (2 to 6 August 2023) – Confession of some young people of WYD and Meeting with Representatives of some Aid and Charity Centres in the Centro Paroquial de Serafina

Confession of some young people of WYD at the *Vasco da Gama* Garden

Meeting with Representatives of some Aid and Charity Centres in the Centro Paroquial de Serafina

Confession of some young people of WYD at the *Vasco da Gama* Garden

This morning, after celebrating Holy Mass in private, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to the *Vasco da Gama* Garden where, at 9.00 (10.00 in Rome), he confessed some young people participating in World Youth Day. He then transferred by car to the *Centro Paroquial de Serafina*.

Before leaving the nunciature, this morning Pope Francis briefly met with a 106-year-old woman, Maria da Conceição Brito Mendonça, born on 13 May 1917, the day of the apparitions in Fatima, and the young Edna Pina Lopes Rodrigues, who suffers from a serious illness and to whom the Pope had sent a message of affection and prayer last June.

Meeting with Representatives of some Aid and Charity Centres in the Centro Paroquial de Serafina

This morning, after the confession of some young people participating in World Youth Day, at 9.45 (10.45 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis met with some representatives of some Aid and Charity Centres in the *Centro Paroquial de Serafina*. The meeting was attended by the *Centro Paroquial de Serafina*, the *Ajuda de Berço* Children's Home and the *Acreditar* Association.

The initial prayer and welcome from the parish priest and director of the Centre were followed by presentations by the *Centro Paroquial de Serafina*, the *Ajuda de Berço* Children's Home and the *Acreditar* Association. The Pope then delivered his address.

At the end of the meeting, after the recitation of the Lord's Prayer, the final blessing and the singing of a hymn, the Holy Father returned to the Apostolic Nunciature of Lisbon where, at 12.00 (13.00 in Rome), he dined with the Patriarch of Lisbon, His Eminence Cardinal Manuel Clemente, and ten young people of various nationalities. Before dining with the young people, Pope Francis also briefly met the Israeli journalist Henrique Cymerman.

Upon his return to the nunciature, Pope Francis received a visit from a delegation from the KAICIID international dialogue centre, accompanied by Cardinal Ayuso.

In greeting the delegation, he expressed his gratitude for their visit and addressed some words to them on the value of fraternity and dialogue, and the danger of monologue and proselytism.

Pope Francis went on to converse with Rahim Aga Khan, son of the leader of the Ishmaelite Community, which has its centre in Lisbon.

Finally, the Pope received a group of religious and people of various faiths and Christian denominations involved in the ecumenical and interreligious effort of the Portuguese Church.

The Holy Father thanked those present for their fraternity and for their efforts in dialogue, reminding them to take care of the young, who "are cheerful, but not superficial", and risk being "anaesthetized" by the surrounding world.

The following are Pope Francis' address and impromptu words during the meeting with the representatives of aid and charity centres:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I thank the Parish Priest for his words, and I greet all of you, especially the friends of the *Centro Paroquial da Serafina* of the *Casa Familia Ajuda de Berço* and the *Associazione Acreditar*. And I thank those of you who spoke of the work being done here. It is nice to be here together, during the celebration of this World Youth Day, as we reflect on the Virgin Mary setting out to help another person (cf. *Lk* 1:39). Indeed, charity is the origin and goal of our Christian journey, and your presence, which is a concrete reminder of "love in action", helps us remember the meaning of what we do and how we are to do it. Thank you for your testimonies. I would like to emphasize three aspects of them: *doing good together*, *acting concretely* and *being close to the most vulnerable*. Doing good together, that is, by acting concretely, not only with ideas but concretely, and being close to those who are most in need.

First, *doing good together*. "Together" is the key word, and I have heard you repeat it many times in the testimonies. Living, helping and loving *together*: young and old, the healthy and sick, all together. João told us something very important: that we must not allow ourselves to be "defined" by our sickness, but instead make it a constructive part of our contribution to the wider community. That is true: we must not let ourselves be "defined" by sickness or difficulty, for none of us "is" an illness or problem: each of us is a *gift*, a unique gift, with our own limitations, a precious and sacred gift for God, and for the Christian and human community. In this way, let us enrich everyone together, and may everyone together enrich us, just as we are!

Second, *acting concretely*. This too is vital. As Father Francisco reminded us, with the words of Saint John XXIII, the Church “is not an archaeological museum. Some people think that, but it isn’t true. It is the ancient village well that provides water for the people of today and for those of the future” (cf. *Homily for the Liturgy in the Byzantine-Slavic Rite in honour of Saint John Chrysostom*, 13 November 1960). That well is for quenching the thirst of those who come to it, bearing the burden and fatigue of their journey! Acting concretely, paying attention to the “here and now”, as you are already doing, with an eye for detail and practical sense, are fine virtues typical of the Portuguese people.

When we do not waste time complaining about things, but instead focus on meeting people’s concrete needs, with joy and trust in God’s providence, then wonderful things can happen. Indeed, your stories testify to this: from the encounter with the glance of an elderly man by the roadside, an “all-round” charity centre was founded, just like this one here; from the response to a moral and social challenge, and from the “campaign for life”, an association was born that helps expectant mothers and families, babies, children and young people in difficulty, so that, as Sandra told us, they may find the possibility of a secure life; from the experience of illness, a community was formed to support those facing the battle with cancer, especially children, so that, as João told us, “the development of treatment and a better quality of life will become a reality for them”. Thank you for all that you do! Carry on, with gentleness and kindness, taking up challenges, with their old and new forms of poverty, and responding in concrete ways, with creativity and courage.

The third aspect: *being close to the most vulnerable*. While we are all fragile and in need, the Gospel’s compassionate outlook leads us to see the needs of the most vulnerable. It likewise impels us to serve the poor – the excluded, the outcast, the discarded, the little ones, the defenceless – those most beloved of God, who made himself poor for us (cf. *2 Cor 8:9*). They are the Church’s real treasure, they are God’s “favourites”! Let us also remember not to differentiate between them, since we Christians can never express preferences when faced with those in need who knock at our door: fellow citizens or foreigners, those belonging to one group or another, young or old, likeable or disagreeable, and so on.

With regard to charity, I would now like to tell you a story, especially to those young people who may not be familiar with it. It is a true story of a young Portuguese man who lived long ago. His name was John Ciudad, and he lived in *Montemor-o-Novo*. He dreamed of an adventurous life and so, as a youngster, he left home in search of happiness. He found it, after many years and many adventures, when he encountered Jesus. He was so happy to have discovered the Lord, that he even decided to change his name. From then on, he was no longer called John Ciudad, but *John of God*. He then did something daring: he went into the city and started begging in the streets, saying to people: “Do good, brothers, to yourselves!” Do you see? He was asking for charity, but told those who gave it that, by helping him, they were in fact helping themselves first! In other words, he was explaining how, first and foremost, loving gestures are a gift for those who make them, even before they benefit those who receive them; for whatever we hoard for ourselves will be lost, while whatever we give out of love will never be wasted, but will be treasure for us in heaven.

That is why John of God said: “Do some good, brothers, to yourselves!”. Moreover, love makes us happy not only in heaven but here on earth too, because it expands our hearts and allows us to embrace the meaning of life. If we want to be truly happy, then, let us learn to transform everything into love, offering to others our work and our time, speaking kindly words and doing good deeds with a smile, an

Finally, do you know what happened to John? They did not understand him! They thought he was crazy and put him in an asylum. Yet he did not lose heart, for love never gives up, and those who follow Jesus never lose their peace of mind and do not weep for themselves. And it was right there, in the asylum, as he carried his cross, that God inspired him. John realized how much the sick needed help, and when they finally let him out, after a few months, he began to care for the sick together with some companions, and he founded a religious order: the *Brothers Hospitallers*. Some, however, started referring to them by a different name, with the very words which that young man had used when he said to everyone: “Do-some-good-brothers”! In Rome, that is what we call them: the “Fatebenefratelli” [*Do-Good Brothers*]. What a marvellous name, what an important lesson! Helping others is a gift for ourselves and does everyone some good. Yes, loving is a gift for all! Let us remember: “*o amor é um presente para todos!*”. Let us repeat it together: *o amor é um presente para todos!*

Let us love in that way! Please, carry on making life a gift of love and joy. I thank you, and ask you – everyone, but especially the young – to continue praying for me. *Obrigado!*

[The Pope consigned the address and then spoke off the cuff]

There are many things I would like to tell you now, but, as it turns out, my “headlights” are not doing the job and I cannot read well. So I am going to hand over this address so that it can be published later, and not strain my eyes and read it poorly. That is not something I want to do.

I just want to mention something that wasn’t written there, but is part of the spirit of this meeting: and that is concreteness. There is no such thing as love in the abstract; it doesn’t exist. Platonic love is somewhere out in space, not here in the real world. Love is concrete; it dirties its hands. Each of us can ask: is the love that I feel for everyone here, that I feel for others, concrete or abstract? When I offer my hand to a person in need, to a sick person or an outcast, do I immediately do this after [wipe my hand on my clothing], so I am not infected? Do I feel repelled by poverty, the poverty of other people? Am I constantly seeking an antiseptic, “distilled” life, a life that exists in my dreams, but not in reality. How many lives are there that are distilled and useless. Lives lived without leaving behind a single trace, since those lives have no weight!

And here we have something that does leave a trace, something that has been going on for *many years* and has left a trace that is inspiring to others. There could be no World Youth Day without realizing this, because it is also part of being young, the fact that you are constantly generating new life. By your way of living, your involvement with others, your willingness to dirty your hands to touch the real situations and the poverty in which others are living: all these things are a source of inspiration; they generate life, and I thank you for that. Keep moving ahead and never lose heart! And if ever you grow discouraged, stop and drink a glass of water, and then keep moving ahead.
