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Apostolic Trip of Pope Francis to Panama for the 34th World Youth Day (23-28 January 2019) – Welcome ceremony and opening of WYD in Campo Santa María La Antigua (Cinta Costera)

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This afternoon, at 16.30 local time (22.30 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to Campo Santa María La Antigua (Cinta Costera) for the welcome ceremony and opening of WYD.

Upon arrival, the Pope was received by the archbishop of Panama, H.E. Msgr. José Domingo Ulloa Mendieta, O.S.A., who accompanied him in the popemobile for a tour among the faithful. As they reached the palace, they were welcomed by five young people in traditional dress, from the five continents.

At 17.00 local time (23.00 in Rome) the WYD opening ceremony began with the performance of the anthem,

After a brief greeting to welcome the Holy Father from the archbishop of Panama, and the greeting and presentation of the gift to the Pope by the five young people, a cultural performance took place, followed by the presentation of the patron saints of WYD by young people from El Salvador, Peru, Haiti and Mexico.

Finally, following a Bible reading, the Holy Father gave his address.

Then, after the prayer of the faithful in various languages, the recital of the *Pater Noster* and the final blessing, and after the floral tribute to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Pope Francis returned by car to the apostolic nunciature.

The following is the address given by the Holy Father during the opening ceremony of WYD:

Address of the Holy Father

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" (*Lk* 1:38). 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!