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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.30 a.m. in the Paul VI Hall, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian the Pope focused on his recently concluded Apostolic Trip to Panama for the 34th World Youth Day (Bible passage: from the *Gospel according to Luke 1: 38-39*).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present.

The General Audience concluded with the recital of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today I will talk to you about the apostolic trip I made in recent days to Panama. I invite you to give thanks with me to the Lord for this grace that He has wished to give to the Church and to the people of that dear country. I thank Mr. President of Panama and the other authorities, the bishops; and I thank all the volunteers – there were many of them – for their warm and familiar welcome, the same we saw in the people who the same that we saw in people who everywhere rushed to greet us with great faith and enthusiasm. One thing that struck me so

much: people lifted up their children in their arms. When the popemobile passed, everyone with children lifted them up as if to say: "Here is my pride, here is my future!". And they showed their children. But they were so many! And the fathers or mothers are proud of that child. I thought: how much dignity in this gesture, and how eloquent it is for the demographic winter we are living in Europe! The pride of that family is the children. The security for the future is children. The demographic winter, without children, is hard!

The reason for this trip was the World Youth Day, however, the meetings with the young were interspersed with others on aspects of the country: the authorities, the bishops, young detainees, consecrated persons and a group home. Everything was "infected" and "amalgamated" with the joyful presence of young people: a celebration for them and a celebration for Panama, and also for all Central America, marked by so many dramas and in need of hope and peace, and also justice.

This World Youth Day was preceded by the meeting of young people from native and Afro-American populations. A beautiful gesture: they spent five days in meetings, the young indigenous people and the young Afro-descendants. There are many of them in that region. They opened the door to the World Day. And this is an important initiative that manifested even better the multifaceted face of the Church in Latin America: Latin America is mixed. Then, with the arrival of groups from all over the world, a great symphony of faces and languages, typical of this event, was formed. To see all the flags parade together, dancing in the hands of joyful young people, is a prophetic sign, counter to the sad current trend of conflicting nationalisms, that raise walls and close up against universality, against the encounter between peoples. It is a sign that young Christians are a leaven of peace in the world.

This World Youth Day had a strong Marian imprint, because its theme was the Virgin's words to the Angel: "I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1: 38). It is powerful to hear these words pronounced by the representatives of young people from the five continents, and above all to see them appear on their faces. As long as there are new generations capable of saying "Here I am" to the Lord, there will be a future in the world.

Among the phases of WYD there is always the *Via Crucis*. Walking with Mary behind Jesus Who carries the cross is the school of Christian life: there one learns patient, silent and concrete love. I will confide to you: I like the *Via Crucis* a lot, because it is going with Mary behind Jesus. And I always carry with me, so as to do it in any moment, a pocket *Via Crucis*, which was given to me as a gift by a very apostolic person in Buenos Aires. And when I have time, I take and follow the *Via Crucis*. You do the *Via Crucis* too, because it is following Jesus with Mary on the way of the cross, where He gave His life for us, for our redemption. In the *Via Crucis* one learns patient, silent and concrete love. In Panama the young people bore with Jesus and Mary the burden of the condition of many brothers and sisters who suffer in Central America and in the entire world. Among these there are many young victims of various forms of slavery and poverty. And in this sense, the *penitential Liturgy* celebrated in a *rehabilitation centre for minors* and the visit to the "*Good Samaritan*" group home, which houses people affected by HIV/AIDS, were very meaningful moments.

The climax of World Youth Day and of the trip were the *Vigil* and the *Mass* with young people. In the vigil – in that field full of young people who carried out the vigil, who slept there and at 8 in the morning participated in the Mass – in the Vigil a lively dialogue was resumed with all the boys and girls, enthusiastic yet also capable of silence and listening. They passed from enthusiasm to listening and to silent prayer. I showed them Mary as she who, in her smallness, "influenced" the history of the world more than any other: we called her God's "*influencer*". In her "*fiat*" the beautiful and powerful testimonies of some of the young people are reflected. On Sunday morning, in the great final Eucharistic celebration, the Risen Christ, with the force of the Holy Spirit, spoke once again to the young people of the world, calling them to live the Gospel *today*, because the young are not "tomorrow"; no, they are the "today" for "tomorrow". They are not the "in the meantime", they are the today, the now, of the Church and of the world. And I made an appeal to the responsibility of adults, so that the new generations may not lack instruction, work, community and family. And this is the key in this moment in the world, because these things are lacking. Instruction, that is, education. Work: how many young people are without it! Community: so that they may feel welcomed, in the family and in society.

The meeting with all the *bishops* of Central America was for me a moment of special consolation. Together we let ourselves be taught by the witness of the bishop Saint Oscar Romero, to learn how to “feel with the Church” – it was his episcopal motto – in closeness to the young, to the poor, to priests, and to the holy faithful people of God.

And the consecration of the altar of the restored Cathedral of Santa María La Antigua, in Panama, had strong symbolic value. A sign of rediscovered beauty, in glory to God and for the faith and celebration of His people. The Chrism that consecrates the altar is the same that anoints the baptised, confirmands, priests and bishops. May the family of the Church, in Panama and in the whole world, draw new fruitfulness from the Holy Spirit, so that the pilgrimage of young missionary disciples of Jesus Christ continue and spread throughout the world.

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet French-speaking pilgrims, especially the priests of the diocese of Versailles, accompanied by their bishop, Msgr. Aumonier. I invite you, dear brother priests, to follow these World Youth Days, to always “feel with the Church”, close to the young, the poor and all the faithful, to draw an ever new fruitfulness from the Holy Spirit. God bless you.

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s audience, especially those from the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord’s blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

German

I am pleased to welcome pilgrims from German-speaking countries. I address a special greeting to the many young people present at this audience. The Lord calls us to live the Gospel today. May the Virgin Mary help us to say our “yes”, to bring God and His hope to our neighbours. I wish you a good stay in Rome. I bless you all from my heart.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims from Spain and Latin America. I entrust young people to the Virgin Mary in a special way, so that the Holy Spirit may fill them with the grace of their gifts and that, journeying as authentic missionary disciples of Christ, they may be a leaven of peace and joy in the world. God bless you. Thank you.

Portuguese

I greet Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, especially the *Colegio São José* group from Coimbra. Dear friends, the world needs a young, joyful and welcoming Church: let us renew our efforts so that our communities may become places where one experiences God’s love, which excludes no-one. And the next Day will be in Portuguese! May the Lord bless you all!

Arabic

I extend a cordial welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from the Middle East! Dear brothers

and sisters, standing before Jesus, do not be afraid to open your heart, so that you may renew in yourselves the fire of His love, so that He may encourage you to embrace life with all its fragility, but also with all its greatness and beauty. Do not be afraid to tell Jesus that you too want to participate in His story of love in the world, that you are made for “more”! May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I welcome Polish pilgrims. In a special way I greet the university students of the Church of San Stanislaus in Rome. Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for accompanying me in prayer during my trip to Panama. It was good to meet the young people of the world, to share their joy and enthusiasm of faith, celebrating, but also reflecting on their lives in the light of Mary, the young Mother of God, who – with her “*fiat*” – influenced the history of the world. In Panama I had the joy of meeting the ship of the young Poles – so good! – who are travelling around the world and have arrived at World Youth Day. May Mary’s maternal protection accompany you always. God bless you!

Italian

I address a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am glad to welcome the Nuns of the Passion of Jesus Christ (Passionists) on the occasion of their General Chapter; the women religious of the “*Talitha Kum*” worldwide network; the Brothers of Charity and the members of the *Missio Christi* Institute.

I greet the families of the travelling show: it is certain that Sister Geneviève is there!; the Association of European volunteer workers; the group “*Salvadè* for Africa” and the school institutes, in particular that of Cisterna di Latina and Ginosa.

I address a special thought to the young, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds.

Tomorrow we celebrate the memorial of Saint John Bosco, father and teacher of the young: a good priest, this one! Don Bosco knew how to make God’s embrace felt to all the young people he encountered, offering them hope, a home, a future. May his witness help us all to consider how important it is to educate the new generations in authentic human and spiritual values.
