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Message of the Holy Father for the 35th World Youth Day 2020 (Palm Sunday, 5 April)

The following is the Holy Father's Message for the 35th World Youth Day 2020, to be celebrated at diocesan level throughout the world this coming 5 April, Palm Sunday, on the theme "Young man, I say to you, arise!" (Lk 7: 14):

Message of the Holy Father

"Young man, I say to you, arise!" (Lk 7:14)

Dear Young People,

In October 2018, with the Synod of Bishops on *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, the Church undertook a process of reflection on your place in today's world, your search for meaning and purpose in life, and your relationship with God. In January 2019, I met with hundreds of thousands of your contemporaries from throughout the world assembled in Panama for World Youth Day. Events of this type – the Synod and World Youth Day – are an expression of a fundamental dimension of the Church: the fact that we "journey together".

In this journey, every time we reach an important milestone, we are challenged by God and by life to make a new beginning. As young people, you are experts in this! You like to take trips, to discover new places and people, and to have new experiences. That is why I have chosen the city of Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, as the goal of our next intercontinental pilgrimage, to take place in 2022. From Lisbon, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, great numbers of young people, including many missionaries, set out for unknown lands, to share their experience of Jesus with other peoples and nations. The theme of the Lisbon World Youth Day will be: "Mary arose and went with haste" (Lk 1:39). In these two intervening years, I want to reflect with you on two other biblical texts: for 2020, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" (Lk 7:14) and for 2021, "Stand up. I appoint you as a witness of what you have seen" (cf. Acts 26:16).

As you can see, the verb “*arise*” or “*stand up*” appears in all three themes. These words also speak of resurrection, of awakening to new life. They are words that constantly appear in the Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (Christ is Alive!) that I addressed to you following the 2018 Synod and that, together with the Final Document, the Church offers you as a lamp to shed light on your path in life. I sincerely hope that the journey bringing us to Lisbon will coincide with a great effort on the part of the entire Church to implement these two documents and to let them guide the mission of those engaged in the pastoral care of young people.

Let us now turn to this year’s theme: “*Young man, I say to you, arise!*” (cf. *Lk* 7:14). I mentioned this verse of the Gospel in *Christus Vivit*: “If you have lost your vitality, your dreams, your enthusiasm, your optimism and your generosity, Jesus stands before you as once he stood before the dead son of the widow, and with all the power of his resurrection he urges you: ‘Young man, I say to you, arise!’” (No. 20).

That passage from the Bible tells us how Jesus, upon entering the town of Nain in Galilee, came upon the funeral procession of a young person, the only son of a widowed mother. Jesus, struck by the woman’s heartrending grief, miraculously restored her son to life. The miracle took place after a sequence of words and gestures: “When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, ‘Do not weep’. Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still” (*Lk* 7:13-14). Let us take a moment to meditate on these words and gestures of the Lord.

The ability to see pain and death

Jesus looks carefully at this funeral procession. In the midst of the crowd, he makes out the face of a woman in great pain. His ability to see generates encounter, the source of new life. Few words are needed.

What about my own ability to see? When I look at things, do I look carefully, or is it more like when I quickly scroll through the thousands of photos or social profiles on my cell phone? How often do we end up being eyewitnesses of events without ever experiencing them in real time! Sometimes our first reaction is to take a picture with our cell phone, without even bothering to look into the eyes of the persons involved.

All around us, but at times also within us, we can see realities of death: physical, spiritual, emotional, social. Do we really notice them, or simply let them happen to us? Is there anything we can do in order to restore life?

I think too of all those negative situations that people of your age are experiencing. Some stake everything on the present moment and risk their own lives in extreme experiences. Others are “dead” because they feel hopeless. One young woman told me: “Among my friends I see less desire to get involved, less courage to get up”. Sadly, depression is spreading among young people too, and in some cases even leads to the temptation to take one’s own life. How many situations are there where apathy reigns, where people plunge into an abyss of anguish and remorse! How many young people cry out with no one to hear their plea! Instead, they meet with looks of distraction and indifference on the part of people who want to enjoy their own “happy hour”, without being bothered about anyone or anything else.

Others waste their lives with superficial things, thinking they are alive while in fact they are dead within (cf. *Rev* 3:1). At the age of twenty, they can already be dragging their lives down, instead of raising them up to the level of their true dignity. Everything is reduced to “living it up” and seeking a morsel of gratification: a minute of entertainment, a fleeting moment of attention and affection from others... And what about the widespread growing digital narcissism that affects young people and adults alike. All too many people are living this way! Some of them have perhaps bought into the materialism of those all around them who are concerned only with making money and taking it easy, as if these were the sole purpose of life. In the long run, this will inevitably lead to unhappiness, apathy and boredom with life, a growing sense of emptiness and frustration.

Negative situations can also be the result of personal failure, whenever something we care about, something we were committed to, no longer seems to be working or giving the desired results. This can happen with school or with our ambitions in sports and in the arts... The end of the “dream” can make us feel dead. But failures are part of the life of every human being; sometimes they can also end up being a grace! Not infrequently,

something that we thought would bring us happiness proves to be an illusion, an idol. Idols demand everything from us; they enslave us yet they give us nothing in return. And in the end they collapse, leaving only a cloud of dust. Failure, if it makes our idols collapse, is a good thing, however much suffering it involves.

There are many other situations of physical or moral death that a young person may encounter. I think of addiction, crime, poverty or grave illness. I leave it to you to think about these things and to realize what has proved “deadly” for yourselves or for someone close to you, now or in the past. At the same time, I ask you to remember that the young man in the Gospel was truly dead, but he was able to come back to life because he was *seen* by Someone who wanted him to live. The same thing can also happen to us, today and every day.

To have compassion

The Scriptures often speak of the feelings experienced by those who let themselves be touched “viscerally” by the pain of others. Jesus’ own feelings make him share in other people’s lives. He makes their pain his own. That mother’s grief became his own. The death of that young son became his own.

As young people, you have shown over and over again that you are capable of *com-passion*. I think of all those of you who have generously offered help whenever situations demanded it. No disaster, earthquake or flood takes place without young volunteers stepping up to offer a helping hand. The great mobilization of young people concerned about defending the environment is also a witness to your ability to hear the cry of the earth.

Dear young people, do not let yourselves be robbed of this sensitivity! May you always be attentive to the plea of those who are suffering, and be moved by those who weep and die in today’s world. “Some realities of life are only seen with eyes cleansed by tears” (*Christus Vivit*, 76). If you can learn to weep with those who are weeping, you will find true happiness. So many of your contemporaries are disadvantaged and victims of violence and persecution. Let their wounds become your own, and you will be bearers of hope in this world. You will be able to say to your brother or sister: “Arise, you are not alone”, and you will help them realize that God the Father loves us, that Jesus is the hand he stretches out to us in order to raise us up.

To come forward and “touch”

Jesus stops the funeral procession. He draws near, he demonstrates his closeness. Closeness thus turns into a courageous act of restoring life to another. A prophetic gesture. The touch of Jesus, the living One, communicates life. It is a touch that pours the Holy Spirit into the dead body of that young man and brings him back to life.

That touch penetrates all hurt and despair. It is the touch of God himself, a touch also felt in authentic human love; it is a touch opening up unimaginable vistas of freedom and fullness of new life. The effectiveness of this gesture of Jesus is incalculable. It reminds us that even one sign of closeness, simple yet concrete, can awaken forces of resurrection.

You too, as young people, are able to draw near to the realities of pain and death that you encounter. You too can touch them and, like Jesus, bring new life, thanks to the Holy Spirit. But only if you are first touched by his love, if your heart is melted by the experience of his goodness towards you. If you can feel God’s immense love for every living creature – especially our brothers and sisters who experience hunger and thirst, or are sick or naked or imprisoned – then you will be able to draw near to them as he does. You will be able to touch them as he does, and to bring his life to those of your friends who are inwardly dead, who suffer or have lost faith and hope.

“Young man, I say to you, arise!”

The Gospel does not tell us the name of the young man whom Jesus restored to life in Nain. This invites each reader to identify with him. To you, to me, to each one of us, Jesus says: “Arise”. We are very aware that, as

Christians, we constantly fall and have to get up again. People who are not on a journey never fall; then again, neither do they move forward. That is why we need to accept the help that Jesus gives us and put our faith in God. The first step is to let ourselves get up and to realize that the new life Jesus offers us is good and worth living. It is sustained by one who is ever at our side along our journey to the future. Jesus helps us to live this life in a dignified and meaningful way.

This life is really a new creation, a new birth, not just a form of psychological conditioning. Perhaps, in times of difficulty, many of you have heard people repeat those “magic” formulas so fashionable nowadays, formulas that are supposed to take care of everything: “You have to believe in yourself”, “You have to discover your inner resources”, “You have to become conscious of your positive energy”... But these are mere words; they do not work for someone who is truly “dead inside”. Jesus’ word has a deeper resonance; it goes infinitely deeper. It is a divine and creative word, which alone can bring the dead to life.

Living the new life as “risen ones”

The Gospel tells us that the young man “began to speak” (Lk 7:15). Those touched and restored to life by Jesus immediately speak up and express without hesitation or fear what has happened deep within them: their personality, desires, needs and dreams. Perhaps they were never able to do this before, for they thought no one would be able to understand.

To speak also means to enter into a relationship with others. When we are “dead”, we remain closed in on ourselves. Our relationships break up, or become superficial, false and hypocritical. When Jesus restores us to life, he “gives” us to others (cf. v 15).

Today, we are often “connected” but not communicating. The indiscriminate use of electronic devices can keep us constantly glued to the screen. With this Message, I would like to join you, young people, in calling for a cultural change, based on Jesus’ command to “arise”. In a culture that makes young people isolated and withdrawn into virtual worlds, let us spread Jesus’ invitation: “Arise!” He calls us to embrace a reality that is so much more than virtual. This does not involve rejecting technology, but rather using it as a means and not as an end. “Arise!” is also an invitation to “dream”, to “take a risk”, to be “committed to changing the world”, to rekindle your hopes and aspirations, and to contemplate the heavens, the stars and the world around you. “Arise and become what you are!” If this is our message, many young people will stop looking bored and weary, and let their faces come alive and be more beautiful than any virtual reality.

If you give life, someone will be there to receive it. As a young woman once said: “Get off your couch when you see something beautiful, and try and do something similar”. Beauty awakes passion. And if a young person is passionate about something, or even better, about someone, he or she will arise and start to do great things. Young people will rise from the dead, become witnesses to Jesus and devote their lives to him.

Dear young people, what are your passions and dreams? Give them free rein and, through them, offer the world, the Church and other young people something beautiful, whether in the realm of the spirit, the arts or society. I repeat what I once told you in my mother tongue: *Hagan lío!* Make your voices heard! I remember another young person who said: “If Jesus was someone who was only concerned about himself, the son of the widow would not have been raised”.

The resurrection of that young man restored him to his mother. In that woman, we can see an image of Mary, our Mother, to whom we entrust all the young people of our world. In her, we can also recognize the Church, who wants to welcome with tender love each young person, without exception. So let us implore Mary’s intercession for the Church, that she may always be a mother for her dead children, weeping for them and asking that they be restored to life. In every one of her children who dies, the Church also dies, and in every one of her children who arises, the Church also arises.

I bless your journey. And I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me.

Rome, from Saint John Lateran, 11 February 2020,

Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes

FRANCIS
