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Homily of the Holy Father on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

At 10.00 this morning, in the Vatican Basilica, the Holy Father Francis presided at Holy Mass on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, on the occasion of the 36th World Youth Day, celebrated at diocesan level on the theme: “Stand up! I appoint you as a witness of what you have seen” (cf. Acts 26: 16).

The following is the text of the homily delivered by the Pope during the Eucharistic celebration:

Homily of the Holy Father

Two images drawn from the word of God that we have heard, can help us approach Jesus as King of the Universe. The first, taken from the Book of Revelation and foreshadowed by the prophet Daniel in the first reading, is described in the words, “He is coming with the clouds” (*Rev* 1:7; *Dan* 7:13). The reference is to the glorious coming of Jesus as Lord at the end of history. The second image is from the Gospel: Christ who stands before Pilate and tells him: “I am a king” (*Jn* 18:37). Dear young friends, it is good to stop and think about these two images of Jesus, as we begin our journey towards the 2023 World Youth Day in Lisbon.

Let us reflect, then, on the first image: Jesus who *comes with the clouds*. The imagery evokes Christ’s coming in glory at the end of time; it makes us realize that the final word on our life will belong to Jesus, not to us. He is – so the Scriptures tell us – the one who “rides upon the clouds” (*Ps* 68:5), whose power is in the heavens (cf. *ibid.*, v. 34). He is the Lord, the sun that dawns from on high and never sets, the One who endures while everything else passes away, our sure and eternal hope. He is the Lord. This prophecy of hope illumines our nights. It tells us that God is indeed coming, that he is present and at work, guiding our history towards himself, towards all goodness. He comes “with the clouds” to reassure us. As if to say: “I will not leave you alone when storms gather over your life. I am always with you. I come to bring back the bright sky”.

The prophet Daniel, on the other hand, tells us that he saw the Lord coming with the clouds as he “watched in the night visions” (*Dan* 7:13). Night visions: God also comes in the night, amid the often dark clouds that gather over our life. We all know such moments. We need to be able to recognize him, to *look beyond the night*, to lift

our gaze in order to see him amid the gloom.

Dear young people, may you too “watch in the night visions”! What does this mean? It means letting your eyes remain bright even amid the darkness. Never stop seeking the light amid whatever darkness we may often bear in our hearts or see all around us. Lift your gaze from earth to heaven, not in order to flee but to resist the temptation to remain imprisoned by our fears, for there is always the danger that our fears will rule us. Do not remain closed in on ourselves and our complaints. *Lift up your eyes! Get up!* This is the word of encouragement that the Lord speaks to us, the invitation to lift up our eyes, to get up, and I wanted to repeat it in my Message to you for this year of journeying together. You have been entrusted with an exciting but also challenging task: to stand tall while everything around us seems to be collapsing; to be sentinels prepared to see the light in night visions; to be builders amid the many ruins of today’s world; to be capable of dreaming. This is crucial: a young person unable to dream, has sadly become old before his time! To be capable of dreaming, because this is what people who dream do: they do not remain in the darkness, but light a candle, a flame of hope that announces the coming of the dawn. Dream, make haste, and look to the future with courage.

I would like to tell you something: we, all of us, *are grateful to you when you dream*. “But really? When young people dream, sometimes they make a din...”. Make a noise, because your noise is the fruit of your dreams. When you make Jesus your life’s dream, and you embrace him with joy and a contagious enthusiasm, it means you do not wish to live in the night. This does us good! Thank you for all those times when you work courageously to make your dreams come true, when you keep believing in the light even in dark moments, when you commit yourselves passionately to making our world more beautiful and humane. Thank you for all those times when you cultivate the dream of fraternity, work to heal the wounds of God’s creation, fight to ensure respect for the dignity of the vulnerable and spread the spirit of solidarity and sharing. Thank you above all, because in a world that thinks only of present gain, that tends to stifle grand ideals, you have not lost the ability to dream in this world! Do not live your lives numbly or asleep. Instead, dream and live. This helps us adults, and the Church as well. Yes, as a Church too, we need to dream, we need youthful enthusiasm in order to be witnesses of the God who is always young!

Let me tell you another thing: many of your dreams are the same as those of the Gospel. Fraternity, solidarity, justice, peace: these are Jesus’ own dreams for humanity. Don’t be afraid to encounter Jesus: he loves your dreams and helps you to make them come true. Cardinal Martini used to say that the Church and society need “dreamers who remain ever open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit” (*Conversazioni notturne a Gerusalemme, Sul rischio della fede*, p. 61). Dreamers who keep us open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit. This is beautiful! I hope and pray that you will be one of these dreamers!

Now we come to the second image, to *Jesus who says to Pilate: “I am a king”*. We are struck by Jesus’ determination, his courage, his supreme freedom. Jesus was arrested, led to the praetorium, interrogated by those who had the power to condemn him to death. In such a situation, he had every right to defend himself, and even “make an arrangement” by coming to a compromise. Instead, Jesus did not hide his identity, he did not mask his intentions, or take advantage of the opening that even Pilate had left for him. With the courage born of truth, he answered: “I am a king”. He took responsibility for his own life: I have a mission and I will carry it to fulfilment in order to bear witness to my Father’s Kingdom. “For this”, he says, “I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth” (*Jn 18:37*). This is Jesus, who came without duplicity, in order to proclaim by his life that his Kingdom is different from the kingdoms of the world; that God does not reign in order to increase his power and to crush others; he does not reign by force of arms. His is the Kingdom of love: “I am a king”, but of this Kingdom of love; “I am a king” of the Kingdom of those who give their lives for the salvation of others.

Dear young people, Jesus’ freedom draws us in. Let us allow it to resonate within us, to challenge us, to awaken in us the courage born of truth. Let us ask ourselves this: Were I in Pilate’s place, looking Jesus in the eye, what would I be ashamed of? Faced with the truth of Jesus, the truth that is Jesus, what are the ways I am deceitful or duplicitous, the ways I displease him? Each of us will find such ways. Look for them, seek them out. We all have these duplicities, these compromises, this “arranging things” so that the cross will go away. It is good to stand before Jesus, who is truth, in order to be set free from our illusions. It is good to worship Jesus, and as a result, to be inwardly free, to see life as it really is, and not be deceived by the fashions of the moment and the displays of consumerism that dazzle but also deaden. Friends, we are not here to be enchanted by the sirens of the

world, but to take our lives in hand, to “take a bite out of life”, in order to live it to the full!

In this way, with the freedom of Jesus, we find the courage we need to *swim against the current*. I would like to emphasize this: swimming against the current, having the courage to swim against the current. Not the daily temptation to swim against other people, like those perpetual victims and conspiracy theorists who are always casting blame on others; but rather against the unhealthy current of our own selfishness, closed-mindedness and rigidity, that often seeks like-minded groups to survive. Not this, but swimming against the tide so as to become more like Jesus. For he teaches us to meet evil only with the mild and lowly force of good. Without shortcuts, without deceit, without duplicity. Our world, beset by so many evils, does not need any more ambiguous compromises, people who move back and forth like the tide – wherever the wind blows them, wherever their own interests take them – or swing to the right or left, depending on what is most convenient, those who “sit on the fence”. A Christian like that seems more of an “equilibrist” than a Christian. Those who are always performing a balancing act are looking for ways to avoid getting their hands dirty, so as not to compromise their lives, not to take life seriously. Please, be afraid of being young people like that. Instead, be free and authentic, be the critical conscience of society. Don’t be afraid to criticize! We need your criticism. Many of you, for example, are critical of environmental pollution. We need this! Be free in criticism. Be passionate about truth, so that, with your dreams, you can say: “My life is not captive to the mindset of the world: I am free, because I reign with Jesus for justice, love and peace!” Dear young people, it is my hope and prayer that each of you can joyfully say: “With Jesus, I too am a king”. I too reign: as a living sign of the love of God, of his compassion and his tenderness. I am a dreamer, dazzled by the light of the Gospel, and I watch with hope in the night visions. And whenever I fall, I discover anew in Jesus the courage to continue fighting and hoping, the courage to keep dreaming. At every stage in life.
