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Audience with participants in the Syro-Malabar Youth Leaders Conference

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the *Syro-Malabar Youth Leaders Conference*.

The following are the words he addressed to them during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Beatitude, Your Excellencies, Dear young friends, hello and welcome!

I thank Bishop Bosco Puthur for his kind words of greeting and introduction. As youth leaders of the various Syro-Malabar Eparchies of the diaspora and the Apostolic Visitation in Europe, you have come to Rome together with your pastors. The first goal of every pilgrimage is the Lord Jesus, who is himself the way, the truth and the life. Our wish is to follow him and walk along his path of love, the sole path that leads to eternal life. The path is not easy but it is exciting, and the Lord never abandons us; he is always at our side. If we make room for him in our lives, and share with him our joys and sorrows, we will experience the peace that God alone can give.

Jesus did not hesitate to ask his disciples if they really wanted to follow him or preferred to go a different way (cf. *Jn* 6:67). Simon Peter then had the courage to say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (v. 68). I too would like to tell you, dear young people, that, in today's "fluid", even "frothy" culture, our lives find substance and meaning whenever we say "yes" to Jesus. You can ask, "Am I sure that life becomes full of meaning and fruitful when we say 'yes' to Jesus? Am I sure of this? Have I known what it is to be freely loved, not for any merit of my own, but as a pure gift? Am I sure that my life is a gift?" It is the experience of love freely given that gives meaning to our lives. It gives us the strength to say "yes" to a life of service and responsibility, and "no" to one of superficiality and dissipation.

You are the young people of the Syro-Malabar diaspora. The Apostle Thomas came to the west coast of India to sow the seeds of the Gospel and the first Christian communities grew up there. According to tradition, this year

marks the 1,950th anniversary of Thomas's martyrdom, which sealed his friendship with Jesus, whom he had called: "My Lord and my God!" (*Jn* 20:29). The Church is *apostolic* because she is founded on the *testimony* of the Apostles, and continues to grow not by proselytism, but by witness. Every baptized person shares in building up the Church to the extent that he or she is a *witness*. You too are called to bear witness, primarily among your peers in the Syro-Malabar diaspora, but also among those who do not belong to your communities, and even those who do not know the Lord Jesus.

There is a common ground on which all young people can meet, and that is the desire for an authentic, beautiful and profound *love*. Please, do not be afraid of that kind of love! It is the love that Jesus reveals to us and that Saint Paul describes as "patient and kind", that does not insist on its own way but rejoices in the truth (cf. *1 Cor* 13:4-6). I encourage you to discover for yourselves the witness to that love given by the saints in every age, even in our own day. It shows – more than any words – that Christianity consists not in a series of prohibitions that stifle the desire for happiness, but in a life project capable of bringing fulfilment to every human heart. Don't be afraid to rebel against the growing tendency to reduce love to something banal, without beauty or genuine sharing, lacking in fidelity and responsibility. Whenever we use others as objects for our own selfish purposes, hearts end up being broken and leave only sadness and emptiness in their wake.

The next World Youth Day in Lisbon will have this theme: "Mary arose and went with haste" (*Lk* 1:39). After receiving the message of the angel and saying "yes" to her vocation to become the mother of the Saviour, Mary immediately went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was in her sixth month of pregnancy (cf. *Lk* 1:36-39). Mary did not stay home and think about the great privilege she had received or the many problems it would bring. No! Mary did not allow herself to be paralyzed by pride or fear. She was not one of those people for whom all it takes to be comfortable and secure is a good sofa: "couch potatoes". If her elderly relative needed a helping hand, she was ready to set out immediately to be there for her (cf. *Address at the Prayer Vigil, Kraków, 30 July 2016*).

Once Mary arrives at Elizabeth's house, in that encounter overflowing with the joy of the Holy Spirit, the *Magnificat* rises up from Mary's heart. Here we can reflect on the importance and fruitfulness of the encounter between young and old. Let me ask you, do you still have your grandparents? At least one of them? What is your relationship with them? When you are spreading your wings to the wind, it is also important to explore your roots and listen to the experiences of those who have gone before you. Young people have strength, while the elderly have memory and wisdom. I urge you to do what Mary did with Elizabeth: go and visit your elderly relatives and receive their wisdom.

The young mother of Jesus was very familiar with the prayers of her people, which she had learned from her parents and grandparents. There is a hidden treasure in the prayers of our elders. In the *Magnificat*, Mary takes up the legacy of faith passed down by her people and makes it a song of her own; at the same time, the whole Church sings that song with her. If you, young people, want to make your own lives a canticle of praise, a gift for all humanity, it is essential to be grounded in the tradition and prayer of past generations. This is particularly true for you; it means discovering that treasure ever anew, with the help of your bishops and priests, in the history of your Church and in its spiritual and liturgical riches. Above all, I encourage you to be familiar with the word of God, to read it each day and to apply it to your life. Jesus, the risen Lord, will warm your hearts and shed light on your journey, even in life's most difficult and dark moments (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35).

One final thing: Mary teaches us also to live *eucharistically*, in other words *to give thanks*, to cultivate *praise*, and not to be fixated only on problems and difficulties. In the course of life, today's fervent petitions become tomorrow's prayers of thanksgiving. Your participation in the Holy Qurbana [Sacrifice] and the Sacrament of Reconciliation will thus be both an end and a beginning: your lives will be renewed each day and will become a perennial song of praise to Almighty God (cf. *Message for the 2017 World Youth Day*).

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you so much for your visit. From the heart I bless each of you, your families and your communities. And I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me. Thank you and enjoy the journey ahead of you!

