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Audience with participants in the pilgrimage of young people from Belgium

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the pilgrimage of young people from Belgium, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear young people, good morning and welcome!

I am pleased to meet you. I greet you affectionately and, through you, I express my spiritual closeness to all young people engaged in their parishes and Christian communities in Belgium.

I admire the boldness of your faith, your commitment and your Christian witness in a society that is, as we know, ever more secularized. It is good to see young people of your age ready to dedicated themselves to evangelization projects and to live out Christ's message in the midst of their daily tasks. You are not only the future of the Church, no, not only that, but above all the present; she needs you, because the Church is young: the Church is young, she needs your generosity, your joy, your will to build a different world, imbued with the values of fraternity, peace and reconciliation.

You experience joy and enthusiasm, but at times also fear, difficulties, wounds, confrontations with your limits, crises. Do not be afraid of crises, because crises make us grow. They do this, this, this and this to you, and you have to go forward and resolve the problems. Do not confuse *crisis* with *conflict*: conflict closes you up, crisis makes you grow. For this reason, your relationship with Christ must be solid. He is the faithful friend who never lets you down. The encounter with Jesus enables you to have a fresh outlook on situations, to find answers to your questions, to discover that you are capable of taking on responsibilities, of going forward in life and of consolidating your faith through a dialogue on your convictions. Moreover, do not be afraid of accepting your fragilities, your weakness, and do this with humility. These are my limits, but let's go forward. "Father, I am neurotic, I am neurotic", but rejoice in being neurotic and go ahead, without fear. You do not need to be superheroes, but rather sincere, true and free people.

As ambassadors of Belgian youth for the preparation of World Youth Day 2023 in Portugal, I invite you to cultivate closeness to all young people, especially those who live in precarious situations, young migrants and refugees, young people on the street, without forgetting others, especially those who experience a life of loneliness and sadness. [*There is a child crying desperately:*] Mr. Ambassador has arrived! Welcome, Mr. Ambassador!

I know you thirst for a true and authentic Church, made up of men and women of living and contagious faith. And so, I invite each one of you to ask yourself this question, every one of you, right? What do I personally offer to bring us closer to that goal? What is my contribution to a joyful and Christian community? There must always be joy, because, you know, Christians who look like they are at a wake will not do, they are not Christians. If you are Christian, you will have joy.

Dear young people, one very important thing: let yourselves be enlightened by the advice and witness of the elderly. Indeed, "There is a future where young people speak with the elderly. If this dialogue does not take place between the elderly and the young, the future cannot be clearly seen" (*Catechesis*, 17 August 2022). Engage in dialogue with the roots, with the elderly, with your ancestors, and we will go forward. It is by growing in dialogue with the elderly that we can form a solid personality for the daily struggles, and they also pass on their faith and religious convictions to us. One of these struggles is the fight for peace. As you are well aware, we are going through difficult moments for humanity, which is in great danger. This is true; we are in grave danger. Therefore, I say to you: be artisans of peace, around you and within you; ambassadors of peace, so that the world can discover the beauty of love, of living together, of fraternity and solidarity. Your life is "a concrete and faith-based commitment to the building of a new society. It involves living in the midst of society and the world in order to bring the Gospel everywhere, to work for the growth of peace, harmony, justice, human rights and mercy, and thus for the extension of God's kingdom in this world" (Post-synodal Apostolic Constitution *Christus vivit*, 168).

Faced with all these challenges, you may feel discouraged, inadequate, unarmed and powerless: it is true. Do not be afraid! Be creative, be imaginative; lift your gaze to face the challenges of life! Filled with the graces of the Lord and the strength of the Holy Spirit, "don't wait until tomorrow to contribute your energy, your audacity and your creativity to changing the world" (*ibid.*, 178).

Dear boys and dear girls, please, never tire of being bearers of the Gospel wherever you go. I know you are generous; I know you are full of enthusiasm and ready to conquer the world. Do not be distracted by the trivial things in life, and there are many of them, aren't there? Concentrate on what is essential, that flows from friendship with Jesus Christ.

I encourage you and congratulate you on the work you are carrying out in your communities. I entrust you to the maternal care of the Virgin Mary – her Rosary is a school of prayer and of life – and to the intercession of the young saints. I accompany you all with my blessing, along with your families and all Belgian youth. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
