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Audience with participants in the International Youth Ministry Congress organized by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the International Youth Ministry Congress organized by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life on the theme: “Synodal youth ministry: new leadership styles and strategies”, taking place in Rome from 23 to 25 May 2024.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminence, brothers and sisters, good morning!

Before all else, I want to express my *gratitude* to all those who *contributed to the success of World Youth Day in Lisbon*. It was a great deal of work, but it was well worth the effort. Following the pandemic, and amid so many international tensions, young people needed an injection of hope. Those days in Lisbon were a true celebration of the joy of being alive and being Christian. They were a celebration of the hope that continues to dwell in the hearts of young people, because God himself fosters and strengthens it, despite all adversities.

Dear friends, encouraged by that experience, you are now called to work in preparing for the forthcoming international events, but also, and above all, to continue accompanying youth ministry in “ordinary times”.

As I think about the *Jubilee for Youth* next year and *WYD in Seoul* three years from now, my “dream” is that these events will help many of the young, including those who are not ordinarily churchgoers, to encounter Jesus, and to hear the Gospel’s message of hope. I think of those young people who are downcast, who no longer lift their eyes to the horizon, who have put aside their great dreams and are now trapped in

disillusionment and overwhelmed by the problems of life. Asia is a young continent, full of life, yet many young people, especially in the large cities, are suffering from a loss of hope and withdrawing into themselves, with few relationships, few interests. The same thing is happening all over the world. The events in Rome and Seoul are God-given opportunities for us to say to young people throughout the world that Jesus is hope, for you, for us, and for everyone!

As you prepare for these two great events, you must not neglect the *ordinary paths*, that is, the journey of young people in their *everyday lives*. I mean the kind of pastoral care made up of small steps, small numbers, simple words and actions, everyday decisions and moments of celebration and prayer in community. These may be less spectacular experiences, but they are the ones that touch hearts and bear lasting fruit over time. This is the holiness in daily life that I spoke about in *Gaudete et exsultate*. Not to advertise my own writings, but read *Gaudete et exsultate*, it is a hymn to joy. Joy should be the Christian's sustenance, the true expression of a Christian, and if you don't know what joy is, go in front of the mirror and you'll start laughing after a little bit!

In this regard, I would like to mention several things that should never be lacking in the day-to-day work of youth ministry. First, young people need to be helped to arrive at *certain basic certainties* in life, truths of the heart: "God is love," "Christ saves you", "He lives", and "the Spirit gives life." These are the certainties but there is also another: Our Lady loves you because she is a mother. We must never tire of proclaiming these four or five simple truths (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 112-133). Young people may be concerned about the bad news that bombards us daily, yet that should not obscure their certainty that the risen Christ is with them and is more powerful than any evil. I'm not saying the news, or publicizing the wars, but we think about them because young people are sensitive to this. Christ is alive! Everything that lives is in his hands. He alone knows the future of our world and of our individual lives. It is important to offer young people opportunities to experience the living Christ through prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, community gatherings, service to the poor and the testimony of the lives of the saints. Young people who have had this experience become convincing witnesses of the message of the Gospel.

Another essential element is *spiritual discernment* (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 278-298). Discernment is an art that pastoral ministers must be the first to learn: priests and religious, catechists and adult guides, and young people who accompany other young people. It is a skill that cannot be improvised, but has to be cultivated, experienced and lived. For a young person, to find someone capable of discernment is to find a treasure. In the journey of faith and the discovery of one's vocation, a wise guide helps avoid many mistakes, much naiveté, many moments of bewilderment and "paralysis". A guide does not take away freedom but accompanies. I devoted a series of Wednesday Audience talks to discernment; you can go and look them up because they explain how discernment is conducted. Here I would like to highlight only three aspects of discernment: it is synodal, it is personal and it is directed to the truth.

Synodal. In these days of rampant individualism, everyone goes their own way, everyone determines what is meaningful in life, everyone establishes their own values, their own truths. We can see this in the categorization of "like" and "dislike". It is an ugly individualism. On the other hand, in the practice of discernment, the Church sets our brothers and sisters in the faith alongside us, to journey together, not alone, and thus our interior growth is greatly enriched. In this sense, discernment is synodal.

At the same time, discernment is *personal*. In our world, everything has become mass-produced and standardized. Young people, instead, need to be accompanied personally, as individuals. Each one of them is unique, and each deserves to be listened to, understood and given advice suited to his or her age as well as human and spiritual maturity. Discernment must necessarily be personal. The other day, I had a meeting in a parish with about sixty teenagers, I was pleased with the questions they were asking, seeking questions of opening up to the Lord and of doubt. It is about listening and helping to move forward.

Finally, discernment is also *truth-oriented*. We live in a society that is poisoned by fake news, where personal profiles are often tailored or falsified, where people create alternative identities, discernment represents for young people a path to authenticity: a way of emerging from artificial identities and discovering their true identity. Discernment is about being "real": before oneself, before others, and before God. We sometimes laugh

when we see that women wear make-up, they have to look good, that's why they wear makeup. But how often do we all apply make-up on the soul to appear what we are not. Be careful about this. Stay true before others, before God, and before ourselves.

Let me conclude on the importance of continuing *to listen to young people*. A real listening, not one that is "half-hearted" or merely "window dressing". Young people should not be pushed into promoting ideas and activities already decided by others, or that do not really meet their needs. Young people should be empowered, involved in dialogue, in planning activities, in decisions. They should be made to feel that they are an active and full part of the life of the Church; and above all that they are called to be the first to bring the Gospel message to their peers.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you once more for your commitment with young people and for young people! Carry on with courage, bringing to everyone the good news that Jesus is alive and that He is Lord. This is the message of joy, consolation and hope that so many people in our world are waiting for. I bless all of you from the heart, and I ask you to pray for me. Thank you.
