



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 240525g

Saturday 25.05.2024

First World Children's Day (WCD 2024) – Meeting of the Holy Father Francis with Children in the Olympic Stadium, Rome

This afternoon, after leaving Santa Marta, the Holy Father Francis transferred to the Olympic Stadium in Rome for the meeting with children on the occasion of the first "World Children's Day (WCD 2024), under the patronage of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, taking place in Rome on 25 and 26 May 2024.

The meeting opened with a parade of over 100 delegations in traditional dress, followed by a moment of musical entertainment.

Upon arrival, Pope Francis was welcomed by the organizers of the Day, who accompanied five children, representing the five continents, to greet him in their languages.

The Holy Father delivered his words of greeting, after which some questions were addressed to him by some children. These were followed by several testimonies and contributions to the reflection.

The following are the words of greeting that Pope Francis addressed to the approximately fifty thousand people present at the Olympic Stadium during the meeting:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear children and young people!

Here we are! The adventure of World Children's Day has begun. We are gathered here at the Olympic Stadium, to "kick-off" the movement of girls and boys who want to build a world of peace, where we are all brothers and sisters, a world that has a future because we want to take care of the environment around us. Your song, "Beautiful World," says it all. Thank you for that!

In you, children, everything speaks of life and of the future. The Church, as a mother, welcomes you and accompanies you with tenderness and hope. Last November 7, I had the joy of welcoming thousands of children from many parts of the world to the Vatican. You brought a wave of joy with you that day; and you shared with me your questions about the future. That meeting left a lasting impression in my heart. I realized that our conversation had to continue and expand to reach more children and young people. That is why we are here today: to keep the dialogue going, as well as to ask and answer questions.

I know wars make you sad, but I want to ask: are all of you truly saddened about the wars? [Children respond] "Yes!" – I don't hear you – [children respond again] "Yes!". Today I welcomed children who fled from Ukraine and they were in a lot of pain due to the conflict. Some of them were even wounded. Is war a good thing? [Children respond] "No!" – I cannot hear you – [children respond again] "No!". Is peace a beautiful thing? [children respond] "Yes!". It makes me happy to hear children say this. You are hurting because many of your peers cannot go to school. There are so many girls and boys who cannot go to school. These are realities that I carry in my heart, and I pray for them. We need to pray for children who cannot go to school, for children who suffer because of wars, for children who have no food, and for children who are sick but have no one to take care of them.

I have another question. Listen well. Do you know the motto of this World Children's Day? Does anyone know what the motto is? The motto is a phrase taken from the Bible, "Behold I make all things new". Have you heard of it? [Children respond] "Yes!". Behold I make all things new. Let's say it together. [All together] "Behold I make all things new". One more time, "Behold I make all things new". This is the motto and it is beautiful. Imagine that God wants this, everything that is not new passes away, but God is eternally new. The Lord always gives us newness.

Dear children, let us go ahead with joy. Joy is good for the soul. Dear children, Jesus said in the Gospel that He loves you, do you know how much Jesus loves you? I can't you hear! [Children respond] "Yes!". And the devil, does he love you? [Children respond] "No!". Well done! Courage and keep going forward.

Now, all together, let's say a prayer to Mother, to the Mother of Heaven.

Recitation of Hail Mary

May God bless all of you!
