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Love is the Christian identity

Vatican City, 24 April 2016 – "Love is the identification card of the Christian"; "Only by courageous and firm decisions do we realise our greatest dreams"; These are some of the phrases from the homily Pope Francis addressed to more than seventy thousand young people who participated in Holy Mass in St. Peter's Square on the occasion of the Jubilee for Boys and Girls, which began yesterday and will concluded on Monday 25 April.

Starting from the phrase from the Gospel of St. John: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another", the Holy Father said; "What an enormous responsibility the Lord gives us today! He tells us that the world will recognise the disciples of Jesus by the way they love one another. Love, in other words, is the Christian's identity card, the only valid document identifying us as Christians. ... If this card expires and is not constantly renewed, we stop being witnesses of the Master. ... The true friends of Jesus are distinguished principally by their genuine love; not some 'pie in the sky' love; no, it is a genuine love that shines forth in their way of life. Love is always shown in real actions. ... This is a task which we must engage in every day: to learn how to love".

"Before all else, love is beautiful, it is the path to happiness", he emphasised. "But it is not an easy path. It is demanding and it requires effort. Think, for example, of when we receive a gift. It makes us happy, but receiving a gift means that someone generous has invested time and effort; by their gift they also give us a bit of themselves, a sacrifice they have made. ... To love means to give, not only something material, but also something of one's self: one's own time, one's friendship, one's own abilities".

"Look to the Lord, Who is never exceeded in generosity. We receive so many gifts from Him, and every day we should thank Him. ... Even if we forget, He never forgets, each day, to give us some special gift. It is not something material and tangible that we can use, but something even greater, a life-long gift. ... He offers us His faithful friendship, which He will never take back. The Lord is a friend forever. Even if you disappoint Him and walk away from Him, Jesus continues to want the best for you and to remain close to you; He believes in you even more than you believe in yourself. This is an example of the genuine love that Jesus teaches to us. ... Because the biggest threat to growing up well comes from thinking that no one cares about us - and that is always a sadness - from feeling that we are all alone. The Lord, on the other hand, is always with you and He is happy to be with you. ... As He did with His first disciples, He looks you in the eye and He calls you to follow Him, to 'put out into the deep' and to 'cast your nets wide' trusting in His words and using your talents in life, in

union with him, without fear. Jesus is waiting patiently for you. He awaits your response. He is waiting for you to say 'yes'.

"Dear young friends, at this stage in your lives you have a growing desire to demonstrate and receive affection", the Pope observed. "The Lord, if you let Him teach you, will show you how to make tenderness and affection even more beautiful. He will guide your hearts to 'love without being possessive', to love others without trying to own them but letting them be free. ... There is always a temptation to let our affections be tainted by an instinctive desire to 'have to have' what we find pleasing; this is selfishness. Our consumerist culture reinforces this tendency. Yet when we hold on too tightly to something, it fades, it dies, and then we feel confused, empty inside. The Lord, if you listen to His voice, will reveal to you the secret of love. It is caring for others, respecting them, protecting them and waiting for them. This is putting tenderness and love into action".

"At this point in life you feel also a great longing for freedom. Many people will say to you that freedom means doing whatever you want. But here you have to be able to say no. If you do not know how to say 'no', you are not free. The person who is free is he or she who is able to say 'yes' and who knows how to say 'no'. Freedom is not the ability simply to do what I want. This makes us self-centred and aloof, and it prevents us from being open and sincere friends; it is not true to say 'it is good enough if it serves me'. ... Instead, freedom is the gift of being able to choose good: this is true freedom. The free person is the one who chooses what is good, what is pleasing to God, even if it requires effort, even if it is not easy. Only by courageous and firm decisions do we realise our greatest dreams, the dreams which it is worth spending our entire lives to pursue. Courageous and noble choices. Do not be content with mediocrity, with 'simply going with the flow', with being comfortable and laid back. Don't believe those who would distract you from the real treasure, which you are, by telling you that life is beautiful only if you have many possessions. Be sceptical about people who want to make you believe that you are only important if you act tough like the heroes in films or if you wear the latest fashions. Your happiness has no price. It cannot be bought: it is not an app that you can download on your phones nor will the latest update bring you freedom and grandeur in love. True freedom is something else altogether".

"That is because love is a free gift which calls for an open heart; love is a responsibility, but a noble responsibility which is life-long; it is a daily task for those who can achieve great dreams! Woe to your people who do not know how to dream, who do not dare to dream!", exclaimed Francis. "If a person of your age is not able to dream, if they have already gone into retirement, this is not good. Love is nurtured by trust, respect and forgiveness. Love does not happen because we talk about it, but when we live it: it is not a sweet poem to study and memorise, but is a life choice to put into practice. How can we grow in love? The secret, once again, is the Lord: Jesus gives us Himself in the Mass, He offers us forgiveness and peace in Confession. There we learn to receive his love, to make it ours and to give it to the world".

"And when loving seems hard, when it is difficult to say no to something wrong, look up at Jesus on the cross, embrace the cross and don't ever let go of his hand. He will point you ever higher, and pick you up whenever you fall. Throughout life we will fall many times, because we are sinners, we are weak. But there is always the hand of God Who picks us up, Who raises us up. Jesus wants us to be up on our feet! Think of the beautiful word Jesus said to the paralytic: 'Arise!'. God has created us to be on our feet. There is a lovely song that mountain climbers sing as they climb. It goes like this: 'In climbing, the important thing is not to not fall, but to not remain fallen!'. To have the courage to pick oneself up, to allow oneself to be raised up by Jesus. And His hand is often given through the hand of a friend, through the hand of one's parents, through the hand of those who accompany us throughout life. Jesus himself is present in them. So arise! God wants us up on our feet, ever on our feet".

"I know that you are capable of acts of great friendship and goodness", reiterated the Pope at the end of his homily. "With these you are called to build the future, together with others and for others, but never against anyone. One never builds 'against'; this is called 'destruction'. You will do amazing things if you prepare well, starting now, by living your youth and all its gifts to the fullest and without fear of hard work. Be like sporting champions, who attain high goals by quiet daily effort and practice. Let your daily programme be the works of mercy. Enthusiastically practice them, so as to be champions in life, champions in love! In this way you will be recognised as disciples of Jesus. In this way, you will have the identification card of the Christian. And I promise you: your joy will be complete".

