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Pastoral Visit of the Holy Father Francis to Venice – Meeting with Young People

At 9.35, the Holy Father Francis met with the young people of Venice and the dioceses of the Veneto region in the square in front of the Basilica of *Santa Maria della Salute*.

After touring in an electric car among the approximately 1500 young people present, and after listening to the words of greeting addressed to him by some of them, the Pope delivered his address. Then, accompanied by a delegation of young people, he crossed the pontoon bridge connecting the Basilica of *Santa Maria della Salute* with Saint Mark's Square, where the Eucharistic Celebration took place.

The following is the address delivered by the Holy Father during the course of the meeting with young people:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning! Even the sun is smiling!

It's wonderful to see you! Being together allows us to share the wonder that we are, even if just through a prayer, a look, and a smile. Indeed, we have all received a great gift, that of being God's beloved children, and we are called to fulfill the Lord's dream: to bear witness and live His joy. There is nothing more beautiful. Have you ever had an experience so beautiful that you couldn't keep it to yourself but felt compelled to share it with others? We all have this experience, an experience so beautiful that one feels the need to share it. That's why we are here today: to rediscover in the Lord the beauty that we are and to rejoice in the name of Jesus, a youthful God who loves young people and always surprises us. Our God always surprises us. Have you understood this? It is very important to be prepared for God's surprises!

Friends, here in Venice, a beautiful city, we live together a beautiful moment of encounter. Tonight, when each of us will be at home, and then tomorrow and in the days to come, where do we start to welcome the beauty that we are and to embrace, where do we start to grasp this beauty? I suggest two verbs, to start again, two verbs that are both practical and maternal: two verbs indicating movement that animated the young heart of Mary, the

Mother of God and our Mother. To spread the joy of the Lord and to help those in need, she "arose and went" (Lk 1:39). *Arise and go*. Do not forget these two verbs that Our Lady experienced before us.

First of all, arise. Get up from the ground, because we are made for Heaven. Rise from sadness to lift our gaze upward. Rise to stand in front of life, not to sit on the couch. Have you thought, imagined, what is a young person who spends his or her life sitting on the couch? Have you imagined this? Imagine this; and there are several "couches" that take hold of us and do not let us get up again. Arise to say "here I am!" to the Lord, who believes in us. Stand up to welcome the gift that we are, to recognize, before anything else, that we are precious and irreplaceable. "But father, Pope, or Mr. Pope, no, it's not true, I am ugly...". No, no, no-one is ugly, every one of us is beautiful and has a treasure within, a beautiful treasure to share and give to others. Do you agree about this or not? And this, listen carefully, is not self-esteem, no, it is reality! Recognizing this is the first step we should take in the morning when we wake up: get out of bed and accept yourself as a gift. You arise, and before diving into things to do, recognize who you are by thanking the Lord. You can say, "My God, thank you for life. My God, make me fall in love with my life". Acknowledge who you are and thank the Lord. You can say to Him, "My God, thank you for life. My God, make me fall in love with life, with my life. My God, You are my life. My God, help me today for this, for that... You know, my God, I am in love, I am in love, help me, help me to make this love grow and then end up as a beautiful couple". One can say so many beautiful things to the Lord. Then, pray the Our Father, where the first word is the key to joy. We say "Father" and recognize ourselves as a beloved son or beloved daughter. Remember that for God, you are not a digital profile, but a child, that you have a Father in heaven and therefore you are a *child of heaven*. "But, Father, this is too romantic!". No, it is reality, dear friend, but we must discover it in our life, not in books, in life, in our life.

Yet, often we find ourselves fighting against a negative gravitational force that pulls down, an oppressive inertia that wants us to see everything in a shade of gray. At times this happens. What should we do? In order to arise – let's not forget – first we must let ourselves be picked up. May we allow the Lord to take us by the hand, since He never disappoints those who trust in Him, but always lifts up and forgives. You might say, "But I am not up to it: I feel fragile, weak, a sinner, I often fall!" But when you feel this way, please, change your "mindset": do not look at yourself with your eyes, but think of how God looks upon you. When you make a mistake and fall, what does He do? He stands there, right next to you and smiles, ready to take your hand and lift you up. This is something beautiful: He is always there to lift you up.

I will tell you something that this suggests to me. Is it nice to look down at someone from above? Is it good or not good? No, it is not good. But when can one look down at a person from above, when? In order to help them up. The only time we can look down at a person from above, with beauty, is when we help them to get up. And this is what Jesus does with us, when we fall. He looks down on us from above. This is beautiful. Do you not believe it? Open the Gospel and see what He did with Peter, with Mary Magdalene, with Zacchaeus, and with many others: He worked miracles with their fragilities. The Lord works miracles with our fragilities.

And, somewhat in passing: do you read the Gospel? I will give you a piece of advice. Do you have a pocket copy of the Gospel? Always carry it with you and, at any time, open it and read a small passage. Always carry the little pocket Gospel with you. Agreed? [They answer: "Yes!"]. Onwards and upwards!

God knows that, besides being beautiful, we are fragile, and the two things go together. It is a bit like Venice, which is splendid and delicate at the same time. It is beautiful and delicate; it has some fragilities that need to be cared for. God does not hold our mistakes against us: "You have done this, you have done that...". He does not hold this against us, but extends His hand. "But, Father, I have many, many things I am ashamed of". But do not look at yourself, look at the hand that God extends to lift you up! Do not forget this: if you feel the weight of your conscience, look at the Lord and let yourself be taken by His hand. When we are down, He sees children to lift up, not evildoers to punish. Please, trust in the Lord! This is becoming a bit long, are you getting bored? [They answer: "No!"]. You are polite, good!

Once we have arisen, it is up to us to stay on our feet. First, we get up, then we stay on our feet, "remain" when we feel like sitting down, letting go, or giving up. It is not easy, but this is the secret. Yes, the secret to great achievements is *perseverance*. It is true that at times there is this fragility that pulls you down, but perseverance

is what carries you forward, it is the secret. Today we live on quick emotions, momentary sensations, instincts that last for mere moments. Yet, we do not advance far this way. Sporting champions, as well as artists and scientists, show that great achievements are not reached in an instant or all at once. If this is true for sports, art, and culture, it is even truer for what matters most in life. What matters most in life? Love, faith. And to grow in faith and in love, we must persevere and keep going forward. Instead, here the risk is to leave everything to improvisation: I pray if I feel like it; I go to Mass when I feel like it; I do good if I feel up to it. This does not yield results: we need to persevere, day after day. We must do it *together*, because togetherness always helps us go forward. Together: "do-it-yourself" does not work in big things. That's why I tell you: don't isolate yourself, but seek others, experience God together, find a group to walk with so you don't grow tired. You might say, "But around me, everyone is on their own with their cellphone, glued to social media and video games". Yet, you must fearlessly go against the current: take life into your hands, get involved; turn off the TV and open the Gospel – is this too much? Put the cellphone down, and meet people! The cell phone is very useful, to communicate, it is useful, but be careful when the cellphone prevents you from meeting people. You can use the cellphone, that's fine; but meet people. You know what an embrace, a kiss, a handshake is: people. Do not forget this: use the cellphone, but meet people.

I seem to hear your objection: "It's not easy, Father; it's like swimming against the current!". But you can't say this here in Venice, because Venice itself tells us that only by rowing consistently can we go far. If you are Venetian citizens, you learn to row consistently in order to go far! Of course, rowing requires regularity; but perseverance brings rewards, even if the path is difficult. So, boys and girls, this is what it means to arise: letting yourself be taken by the hand by God to walk together!

And after getting up, *go*. To go means *making oneself a gift*, giving oneself to others, the capacity to fall in love; and this is a beautiful thing: a young woman, a young man who does not feel the capacity to fall in love or to be loving towards others, is missing something. Go towards people, walk, go forward.

Dear brothers, dear sisters, I am coming to an end, don't worry!

Think of our Father, who created everything for us, God, who gave us everything: and we, who are His children, for whom do we create something beautiful? We live immersed in man-made products, which make us lose our awe for the beauty that surrounds us. Yet, creation invites us to be creators of beauty ourselves. Please, do not forget this: being creators of beauty, to create something that did not exist before. This is beautiful! And when you are married and have a son, a daughter, you will have made something that did not exist previously! And this is the beauty of youth, when it becomes maternity or paternity: making something that did not exist before. This is beautiful. Think within yourselves of the children you will have, and this must drive us forward. Do not be professionals of compulsive typing, but creators of new things! A prayer made with the heart, a page you write yourself, a dream you realize, a gesture of love for someone who cannot reciprocate. This is creating, imitating the style of God, who creates. It is the style of *gratuitousness*, which brings us out of the nihilistic logic of "I do to have" and "I work to earn". This must be done – doing to have and working to earn – but it must not be the centre of your life. The centre is gratuitousness: bring to life a *symphony of gratuitousness* in a world that seeks profit! Then you will be revolutionaries. Go, give yourself without fear!

Young person who wants to take your life in your hands, arise! Open your heart to God, thank Him, and embrace the beauty that you are; fall in love with your life. Then go! Arise, fall in love, and go! Go out, and walk together with others; look for those who are alone, color the world with your creativity, and paint the streets of life with the Gospel. Please, paint the streets of life with the Gospel! Arise and go. Let us say it all together, for each other! [They repeat: "Arise and go!"]. I can't hear you... [They repeat loudly: "Arise and go!"]. I like that! Jesus extends this invitation to you. He, to many people He helped and healed, said: "Arise and go" (cf. Lk 17:19). Listen to His call, repeat it inside you, and keep it in your heart. Arise and go! And what was it? ["Arise and go!"]. Thank you!

After the address, some young people bring the Pope a gift.

Priest:

Holy Father, I think my voice is small compared to the emotion of these young people...

Pope Francis

Thank you! And, I have forgotten, what did we say?

Young people:

Arise and go!

Pope Francis

Good!

Priest

You always ask us to pray for you, Holy Father. These young people have asked to do so for you again today, and so we ask for that time to ask God the Father to bless your life, your ministry as a father, and to allow us to be docile sheep under your guidance. Through the intercession of the Virgin who guards this diocese of ours and to whom You teach us to pray, this minute of silence.

[*Hail Mary*]

[*Blessing*]
