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Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 39th World Youth Day 2024

The following is the text of the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to young people all over the world for the 39th World Youth Day, to be celebrated in the particular Churches this coming 24 November 2024, on the theme: *“Those who hope in the Lord walk without tiring (cf. Is 40:31)”*.

Message of the Holy Father

Those who hope in the Lord will run and not be weary (cf. Is 40:31)

Dear young people!

Last year we set out on the path of hope towards the Great Jubilee by reflecting on Saint Paul’s words, “Rejoice in hope” (*Rom12:12*). In order to prepare ourselves for the Jubilee *pilgrimage* of 2025, this year we can take inspiration from the prophet Isaiah, who says: “Those who hope in the Lord... will run and not be weary” (*Is 40:31*). These words are taken from the so-called Book of Consolation (*Is 40-55*), which heralds the end of Israel’s exile in Babylon and the beginning of a new age of hope and rebirth for God’s people, who can return to their homeland thanks to a new “highway” that the Lord is presently opening up for his children (cf. *Is 40:3*).

Today, we too live in times marked by dramatic situations that generate despair and prevent us from looking to the future with serenity: the tragedy of war, social injustices, inequalities, hunger and the exploitation of human beings and the natural environment. Often the ones who pay the highest price are precisely young people. You sense the uncertainty of the future and are not sure about where your dreams will lead. In this way, you can be tempted to live without hope, as prisoners of boredom, depression and even be drawn to risk-taking and destructive behaviours (cf. *Spes Non Confundit*, 12). For this reason, dear young people, I would like the message of hope to come to you, as was the case with Israel in Babylon. Today too, the Lord is opening a highway before you, and he invites you to set out on it with joy and hope.

1. The pilgrimage of life and its challenges

The prophet Isaiah speaks of “walking without tiring”. Let us reflect then on these two realities: walking and tiredness.

Our life is a pilgrimage, a journey that pushes us beyond ourselves, a journey in search of happiness. The Christian life in particular is a pilgrimage towards God, our salvation and the fullness of every good thing. Our goals, achievements and successes along the way, if they remain only material, will, after an initial moment of satisfaction, still leave us hungry, longing for something greater. They cannot completely satisfy our soul, because we were created by One who is infinite; as a result, we have an innate desire for transcendence, a constant restless drive towards the fulfilment of higher aspirations, towards “even more”. That is why, as I have often said to you, “looking at life from a balcony” is not enough for you young people.

Still, it is normal that, while we set out on our journeys with enthusiasm, sooner or later we will begin to feel *tired*. In some cases, anxiety and inner fatigue are brought on by social pressures, the need to attain certain levels of success in our studies, our work and our personal life. This produces a certain despondency, as we live running from one thing to another in an empty “activism” that makes us fill our days with a thousand things and, in spite of this, feel that we never manage to do enough and never quite measure up. This tiredness is often accompanied by a certain *ennui*, the apathy and dissatisfaction that affects those who never set out, choose, decide, take risks, preferring to remain in their own comfort zone, closed in on themselves, seeing and judging the world from a distance, without ever “dirtying their hands” with problems, with other people, with life itself. This kind of tiredness is a kind of wet cement in which we stand; eventually it hardens, weighs us down, paralyzes us and prevents us from moving forward. I prefer the *tiredness* of those who are moving forward, not the ennui of those who stand still with no desire to move!

The solution to tiredness, oddly enough, is not to stand still and rest. It is to *set out* and become pilgrims of hope. This is my invitation to you: walk in hope! Hope overcomes all weariness, every crisis and every worry. It gives us a powerful incentive to press forward, for it is a gift received from God himself. The Lord fills our life with meaning, sheds light on our path and shows us its ultimate direction and goal. The Apostle Paul uses the image of an athlete in the stadium racing to receive the prize of victory (cf. 1 Cor 9:24). Those of you who have taken part in a sports competition – not just as spectators but as athletes – know how much inner strength it takes to reach the finish line. Hope is precisely a new kind of strength that God instils in us, enabling us to persevere in the race, to see beyond present difficulties and to press forward to the goal of communion with him and the fullness of eternal life. If a beautiful goal exists, if life has an ultimate meaning, if nothing of what I dream, plan and accomplish will ever be lost, then it is worth the effort to keep walking, exerting ourselves, overcoming obstacles and fatigue, because the ultimate prize is magnificent beyond measure!

2. Pilgrims in the desert

In the pilgrimage of life, there will inevitably be challenges to face. In earlier times, long pilgrimages involved coping with changing seasons and climates, crossing pleasant meadows and cool forests, but also snow-capped mountains and parched deserts. Even for those who are believers, the pilgrimage of life and the journey to our ultimate goal can prove tiring, as the journey through the desert to the Promised Land was for the people of Israel.

And for all of you! Those who have received the gift of faith know happy moments when we can feel God’s presence and closeness, but other moments too, when we experience the desert. It can happen that our initial enthusiasm for school or work, or for following Christ – whether in marriage, the priesthood or consecrated life – can be followed by moments of crisis, that make life seem like a difficult trek in the desert. Those times of crisis, however, are not wasted or useless: they can become important times of growth. They are moments when hope is purified! In crises, many false “hopes”, hopes too small for our heart, fade into significance; they are revealed for what they are and we find ourselves alone in facing the fundamental questions of life, with no illusions. And in those times, each of us can ask: what are the hopes on which I have based my life? Are they real hopes or simply mirages?

At those times, the Lord does not abandon us. Like a father, he draws near to us and constantly gives us the

bread that renews our strength for the journey. Let us remember that to the people in the desert he gave manna (cf. *Ex* 16) and to the prophet Elijah, weary and discouraged, he twice offered bread and water, so that he could walk for “forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God” (cf. *1 Kings* 19:3-8). In those biblical stories, the faith of the Church has seen prefigured the precious gift of the Eucharist, the true manna, the true food for the journey, that God gives us to sustain us on our way. As Blessed Carlo Acutis said, *the Eucharist is the highway to heaven*. Carlo made the Eucharist his most important daily appointment! In this way, in union with the Lord, we can walk without tiring, for he is walking alongside us (cf. *Mt* 28:20). I encourage all of you to rediscover the great gift of the Eucharist!

In those inevitable moments of fatigue in our pilgrimage in this world, let us learn, then, to rest *like Jesus and in Jesus*. He told his disciples to rest after they returned from their mission (cf. *Mk* 6:31); he also recognizes your own need for bodily rest, time for recreation, for enjoying the company of friends, for sports and for sleep. Yet there is a deeper kind of rest, the repose of the soul, which many seek and few find, for it is to be found in Christ alone. Realize that all your inner weariness can find repose in the Lord, who says to you: “Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (*Mt* 11:28). When the weariness of the journey weighs you down, come back to Jesus, learn to rest in him and abide with him, for “those who hope in the Lord... will run and not be weary” (*Is* 40:31).

3. From tourists to pilgrims

Dear young people, I am inviting you to set out on a journey, to discover life along the path of love, and to seek the face of God. My advice to you is this: do not set out as mere tourists, but as true pilgrims. Do not be like superficial sightseers, blind to the beauty around you, never discovering the meaning of the roads you take, interested only in a few fleeting moments to capture in a selfie. Tourists do this. Pilgrims, on the other hand, immerse themselves fully in the places they encounter, listen to the message they communicate, and make them a part of their quest for happiness and fulfilment. The Jubilee pilgrimage is meant to be the outward sign of an inward journey that all of us are called to make towards our final destination.

With these attitudes, let us all prepare for the Jubilee Year. I trust that many of you will be able to come to Rome on pilgrimage to pass through the Holy Doors. In any case, everyone will be able to make this pilgrimage in his or her local Church, by visiting its churches and shrines that preserve the faith and devotion of God’s holy and faithful people. It is my hope that this Jubilee pilgrimage will become for each of us “a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the ‘Door’ of our salvation” (*Spes Non Confundit*, 1). I encourage you to approach this experience with three fundamental attitudes. First, *thanksgiving*, with hearts open to praise God for his many gifts, especially the gift of life. Then, a spirit of *seeking*, as an expression of our heart’s unquenchable thirst to encounter the Lord. And finally, *penance*, which helps us to look within, to acknowledge the wrong paths and decisions we have at times taken and, in this way, to be converted to the Lord and to the light of his Gospel.

4. Pilgrims of hope for the mission

Allow me to leave you with one more evocative image to guide your journey. Those who visit Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome cross the great square surrounded by the colonnade built by the celebrated architect and sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The entire colonnade appears as two open arms, an image of the Church, our mother, who embraces all her children. In this coming Holy Year of Hope, I invite all of you to experience the embrace of our merciful God, to experience his pardon and the forgiveness of all our “interior debts”, as in the biblical tradition of the jubilee years. In this way, embraced by God and born again in him, you too can become open arms to embrace your many friends and peers who need to feel, through your welcome, the love of God the Father. May each of you give even just “a smile, a warm gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good deed, in the knowledge that, in the Spirit of Jesus, these can become, for those who receive them, rich seeds of hope” (*ibid.*, 18), and thus become *tireless* missionaries of joy.

As we press forward, let us lift our gaze, in faith, to the saints who have gone before us on the journey, who have reached the goal and now encourage us by their testimony: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished

the race, I have kept the faith. From now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all those who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim 4:7-8). The example of so many saints, men and women, impels and sustains us.

Courage! All of you have a special place in my heart. I entrust your journey to the Virgin Mary, so that, following her example, you may be able to look forward with patience and confidence to the fulfilment of all your hopes, even now, as you persevere in your journey as pilgrims of hope and of love.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 29 August 2024, Memorial of the Martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist.

FRANCIS
