

# World Youth Day, Kraków 2016

## Pope Francis' words to the young people of the world

*Highlights to reflect on, and to pray with*



### Welcome Ceremony, Jordan Park, Błonia, Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> July

In my years as a Bishop, I have learned one thing. Well, I have learned many, but I want to share one with you now: **nothing is more beautiful than seeing the enthusiasm, dedication, zeal and energy with which so many young people live their lives. This is beautiful!** And where does this beauty come from? When Jesus touches a young person's heart, he or she becomes capable of truly great things. It is exciting to listen to you share your dreams, your questions ... For me, it is a gift of God to see so many of you, with all your questions, trying to make a difference. It is beautiful and heart-warming to see all that restlessness! Today the Church looks to you, and I would add, the world looks to you, and wants to learn from you, to be reassured that **the Father's Mercy has an ever-youthful face**, and constantly invites us to be part of his Kingdom, it is a Kingdom of joy, a Kingdom always joyful, always driving us forward, a Kingdom able to give us the strength to change things.

Knowing your enthusiasm for mission, I repeat: mercy always has a youthful face! Because a merciful heart is motivated to move beyond its comfort zone. A merciful heart can go out and meet others; it is ready to embrace everyone. **A merciful heart is able to be a place of refuge for those who are without a home or have lost their home; it is able to build a home and a family for those forced to emigrate; it knows the meaning of tenderness and compassion. A merciful heart can share its bread with the hungry and welcome refugees and migrants. To say the word "mercy" along with you is to speak of opportunity, future, commitment, trust, openness, hospitality, compassion and dreams.**

Let me tell you another thing I have learned over these years. I do not want to offend anyone, but **it pains me to meet young people who seem to have opted for "early retirement"**. This pains me. Young people who seem to retire at 23, 24, 25 years of age. I worry when I see young people who have "thrown in the towel" before the game has even begun, who are defeated even before they

begin to play. ... it is also hard, and troubling, to see young people who waste their lives looking for thrills or a feeling of being alive by taking dark paths and in the end having to pay for it... and pay dearly. Think of so many young people you know, who have chosen this path. It is disturbing to see young people squandering some of the best years of their lives, wasting their energies running after peddlers of false illusions, who rob you of what is best in you.

We are gathered here to help one another, because we do not want to be robbed of the best of ourselves. We don't want to be robbed of our energy, our joy, or our dreams by false hopes.

**Jesus can give you true passion for life. Jesus can inspire us not to settle for less, but to give the very best of ourselves. Jesus challenges us, spurs us on and helps us keep trying whenever we are tempted to give up. Jesus pushes us to keep our sights high and to dream of great things.** You might say to me, "but Father, it is so difficult to dream of great things, it is so difficult to rise up, to be always moving forwards and upwards. Father, I am weak, I fall, and I try but so many times I fall down". Mountaineers, as they climb mountains, sing a very beautiful song whose words go like this: **"in the art of climbing, it is not important that you do not fall down, but that you do not stay down"**. If you are weak, if you fall, look up a little for there is Jesus' hand extended to you as he says: "Rise up, come with me". "And what if I fall again?" Rise again. "And what if I fall yet again?" Rise yet again. Peter once asked the Lord: "Lord, how many times?" And the reply came: "seventy times seven". The hand of Jesus is always extended, ready to lift us up again when we fall.

All together, let us ask the Lord, each repeating in the silence of his or her heart: **"Lord, launch us on the adventure of mercy!" Launch us on the adventure of building bridges and tearing down walls, be they barriers or barbed wire. Launch us on the adventure of helping the poor, those who feel lonely and abandoned, or no longer find meaning in their lives. Launch us on the journey of accompanying those who do not know you, and telling them carefully and respectfully your Name, the reason for our faith.**

**Make us attentive to our elders, to our grandparents,** as Mary of Nazareth was to Elizabeth, in order to learn from their wisdom. I ask you: do you speak to your grandparents? [Yes!] That is good! **Seek your grandparents, they have the wisdom of life and can tell you things that will stir your hearts.**

Here we are, Lord! Send us to share your merciful love.

## The Way of the Cross, Jordan Park, Błonia, Friday 29<sup>th</sup> July

*I was hungry and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,  
I was naked and you gave me clothing,  
I was sick and you took care of me,  
I was in prison and you visited me (Mt 25:35-36).*

These words of Jesus answer the question that arises so often in our minds and hearts: **“Where is God?”** Where is God, if evil is present in our world, if there are men and women who are hungry and thirsty, homeless, exiles and refugees? Where is God, when innocent persons die as a result of violence, terrorism and war? Where is God, when cruel diseases break the bonds of life and affection? Or when children are exploited and demeaned, and they too suffer from grave illness? Where is God, amid the anguish of those who doubt and are troubled in spirit? These are questions that humanly speaking have no answer. We can only look to Jesus and ask him. And **Jesus’ answer is this: “God is in them”. Jesus is in them; he suffers in them and deeply identifies with each of them. He is so closely united to them as to form with them, as it were, “one body”.**

Jesus himself chose to identify with these our brothers and sisters enduring pain and anguish by agreeing to tread the “way of sorrows” that led to Calvary. By dying on the cross, he surrendered himself into to the hands of the Father, taking upon himself and in himself, with self-sacrificing love, the physical, moral and spiritual wounds of all humanity. **By embracing the wood of the cross, Jesus embraced the nakedness, the hunger and thirst, the loneliness, pain and death of men and women of all times.** Tonight Jesus, and we with him, embrace with particular love our brothers and sisters from Syria who have fled from the war. We greet them and we welcome them with fraternal affection and friendship.

**We are called to serve the crucified Jesus in all those who are marginalized, to touch his sacred flesh in those who are disadvantaged, in those who hunger and thirst, in the naked and imprisoned, the sick and unemployed, in those who are persecuted, refugees and migrants. There we find our God; there we touch the Lord.**

Humanity today needs men and women, and especially young people like yourselves, who do not wish to live their lives “halfway”, young people ready to spend their lives freely in service to those of their brothers and sisters who are poorest and most vulnerable, in imitation of Christ who gave himself completely for our salvation. In the face of evil, suffering and sin, the only response possible for a disciple of Jesus is the gift of self, even of one’s own life, in imitation of Christ; it is the attitude of service.

Dear young people, on that Good Friday many disciples went back crestfallen to their homes. Others chose to go out to the country to forget the cross. I ask you: but I want each of you to answer in silence in the depths of your heart. **How do you want to go back this evening to your own homes**, to the places where you are staying, to your tents? How do you want to go back this evening to be alone with your thoughts? The world is watching us. **Each of you has to answer the challenge that this question sets before you.**

**Vigil of Prayer and Adoration, Campus Misericordiae**  
**(“Field of Mercy”), Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> July**

We have come here from different parts of the world, from different continents, countries, languages, cultures and peoples. Some of us are sons and daughters of nations that may be at odds and engaged in various conflicts or even open war. Others of us come from countries that may be at “peace”, free of war and conflict, where most of the terrible things occurring in our world are simply a story on the evening news. But think about it. **For us, here, today, coming from different parts of the world, the suffering and the wars that many young people experience are no longer anonymous, something we read about in the papers. They have a name, they have a face, they have a story, they are close at hand.**

**We have no desire to conquer hatred with more hatred, violence with more violence, terror with more terror.** We are here today because the Lord has called us together. **Our response to a world at war has a name: its name is fraternity, its name is brotherhood, its name is communion, its name is family.** We celebrate the fact that coming from different cultures, we have come together to pray. **Let our best word, our best argument, be our unity in prayer.** Let us take a moment of silence and pray. Let us place before the Lord these testimonies of our friends, and let us identify with those for whom “the

family is a meaningless concept, the home only a place to sleep and eat”, and with those who live with the fear that their mistakes and sins have made them outcasts. Let us also place before the Lord your own “battles”, our “battles”, the interior struggles that each carries in his or her heart. And so, to live as a family, in fraternity, I invite all of you together to stand, to take each other’s hand and to pray in silence. All of us.

In life there is a dangerous kind of paralysis. It is not easy to put our finger on it. I like to describe it as **the paralysis that comes from confusing happiness with a sofa. In other words, to think that in order to be happy all we need is a good sofa.** A sofa that makes us feel comfortable, calm, safe. A sofa like one of those we have nowadays with a built-in massage unit to put us to sleep. **A sofa that promises us hours of comfort so we can escape to the world of videogames and spend all kinds of time in front of a computer screen.** A sofa that keeps us safe from any kind of pain and fear. A sofa that allows us to stay home without needing to work at, or worry about, anything. **“Sofa-happiness”! That is probably the most harmful and insidious form of paralysis, which can cause the greatest harm to young people. And why does this happen Father? Because, little by little, without even realizing it, we start to nod off, to grow drowsy and dull.** The other day, I spoke about young people who go into retirement at the age of 20; today I speak about young persons who nod off, grow drowsy and dull, while others – perhaps more alert than we are, but not necessarily better – decide our future for us. For many people in fact, it is much easier and better to have drowsy and dull kids who confuse happiness with a sofa. For many people, that is more convenient than having young people who are alert and searching, trying to respond to God’s dream and to all the restlessness present in the human heart.

**Dear young people, we didn’t come into this work to “vegetate”, to take it easy, to make our lives a comfortable sofa to fall asleep on. No, we came for another reason: to leave a mark.** It is very sad to pass through life without leaving a mark. But when we opt for ease and convenience, for confusing happiness with consumption, then we end up paying a high price indeed: we lose our freedom. We are not free to leave a mark. We lose our freedom. This is the high price we pay. There are so many people who do not want the young to be free; there are so many people who do not wish you well, who want you to be drowsy and dull, and never free! No, this must not be so! We must defend our freedom!

**My friends, Jesus is the Lord of risk, he is the Lord of the eternal “more”.** Jesus is not the Lord of comfort, security and ease. Following Jesus demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes and to set out on new and uncharted paths. To **blaze trails that open up new horizons capable of spreading joy, the joy that is born of God’s love and wells up in your hearts with every act of mercy. To take the path of the “craziness” of our God, who teaches us to encounter him in the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the friend in trouble, the prisoner, the refugee and the migrant, and our neighbours who feel abandoned.** To take the path of our God, who encourages us to be politicians, thinkers, social activists. The God who encourages us to devise an economy marked by greater solidarity than our own. In all the settings in which you find yourselves, God’s love invites you bring the Good News, making of your own lives a gift to him and to others. This means being courageous, this means being free!

That is the secret, dear friends, and all of us are called to share in it. God expects something from you. Have you understood this? **God expects something from you, God wants something from you. God hopes in you. God comes to break down all our fences. He comes to open the doors of our lives, our dreams, our ways of seeing things. God comes to break open everything that keeps you closed in. He is encouraging you to dream. He wants to make you see that, with you, the world can be different.** For the fact is, unless you offer the best of yourselves, the world will never be different. This is the challenge.

**You might say to me: Father, but I have my limits, I am a sinner, what can I do? When the Lord calls us, he doesn’t worry about what we are, what we have been, or what we have done or not done. Quite the opposite. When he calls us, he is thinking about everything we have to give, all the love we are capable of spreading. His bets are on the future, on tomorrow. Jesus is pointing you to the future, and never to the museum.**

Today Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life, is calling you, you, and you to leave your mark on history. May the Lord bless your dreams.

**Mass for World Youth Day, Campus Misericordiae**  
**("Field of Mercy"), Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2016**

**No one is insignificant. God loves all of us with a special love; for him all of us are important: *you* are important!** God counts on you for what you are, not for what you possess. In his eyes the clothes you wear or the kind of cell phone you use are of absolutely no concern. He doesn't care whether you are stylish or not; he cares about you, just as you are! In his eyes, you are precious, and your value is inestimable.

At times in our lives, we aim lower rather than higher. At those times, it is good to realize that **God remains faithful, even obstinate, in his love for us.** The fact is he loves us even more than we love ourselves. He believes in us even more than we believe in ourselves. He is always "cheering us on"; he is our biggest fan. He is there for us, waiting with patience and hope, even when we turn in on ourselves and brood over our troubles and past injuries. But such brooding is unworthy of our spiritual stature! It is a kind of *virus* infecting and blocking everything; it closes doors and prevents us from getting up and starting over. **God, on the other hand, is hopelessly hopeful!** He believes that we can always get up, and he hates to see us glum and gloomy. It is sad to see young people who are glum. Because **we are always his beloved sons and daughters.** Let us be mindful of this at the dawn of each new day. It will do us good to pray every morning: "Lord, I thank you for loving me; I am sure that you love me; help me to be in love with my own life!" Not with my faults, that need to be corrected, but with life itself, which is a great gift, for it is a time to love and to be loved.

Dear young friends, don't be ashamed to bring everything to the Lord in confession, especially your weaknesses, your struggles and your sins. **He will surprise you with his forgiveness and his peace.** Don't be afraid to say "yes" to him with all your heart, to respond generously and to follow him! **Don't let your soul grow numb, but aim for the goal of a beautiful love which also demands sacrifice.**

**People will try to block you, to make you think that God is distant, rigid and insensitive, good to the good and bad to the bad.** Instead, our heavenly Father "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" (*Mt 5:45*). He demands of us real courage: the courage to be *more powerful than evil* by loving everyone, even our enemies. **People may laugh at you because you believe in the gentle**

and unassuming power of mercy. But do not be afraid. Think of the motto of these days: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Mt 5:7). People may judge you to be dreamers, because you believe in a new humanity, one that rejects hatred between peoples, one that refuses to see borders as barriers and can cherish its own traditions without being self-centred or small-minded. **Don’t be discouraged: with a smile and open arms, you proclaim hope and you are a blessing for our one human family, which here you represent so beautifully!**

Finally let us listen to the words that Jesus spoke to Zacchaeus, which to be seem meant for us today, for each one of us: “Come down, for I must stay at your house today.” “Come down, for I must stay with you today. Open to me the door of your heart”. Jesus extends the same invitation to you: “I must stay at your house today”. We can say that World Youth Day *begins today and continues tomorrow, in your homes*, since that is where Jesus wants to meet you from now on. **The Lord doesn’t want to remain in this beautiful city, or in cherished memories alone. He wants to enter your homes, to dwell in your daily lives: in your studies, your first years of work, your friendships and affections, your hopes and dreams. How greatly he desires that you bring all this to him in prayer!** How much he hopes that, in all the “contacts” and “chats” of each day, **pride of place be given to the golden thread of prayer!** How much he wants his word to be able to speak to you day after day, so that you can make his Gospel your own, so that it can serve as a compass for you on the highways of life!

In asking to come to your house, Jesus *calls you*, as he did Zacchaeus, *by name*.



**To read more from Pope Francis – the full texts from Kraków, and all his homilies, messages and speeches – go to [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)**

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