

Pope's Message to young people: In dark times, hope

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Pope Francis hugs young girl from Argentina. Image Vatican Media

In a letter ahead of the 38th diocesan World Youth Day which is celebrated on 26 November, Pope Francis describes youth as a time of "hopes and dreams", and asks how this optimism can be sustained in an increasingly crisis-ridden world.

In his letter released today, entitled 'Rejoicing in Hope', Pope Francis says that Christian hope is not "facile optimism" but rather certain knowledge of God's presence among us, and proposes strategies for maintaining and sharing this positivity in dark times.

'Rejoice in Hope' is a quotation from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans.

Reflecting on the saint's words, the Pope says that "youth is a time full of hopes and dreams, stirred by the many beautiful things that enrich our lives: the splendour of God's creation, our relationships with friends and loved ones... and so many other things."

However, he notes, we are living in a period of crisis, of war, when "for many people, including the young, hope seems absent." Many, he says, "feel as if they are in a dark prison, where the light of the sun cannot enter."

In such situations, Pope Francis asks, "How can we experience the joy and hope of which Saint Paul speaks? When we think of human tragedies, especially

the suffering of the innocent, we too can echo some of the Psalms and ask the Lord, 'Why?'"

In his letter, Pope Francis suggests two ways to maintain Christian hope in such difficult times.

The first of these, he says, is to recognise that hope is not "a product of our human efforts, plans or skills." It is, rather, "born of an encounter with Christ. Christian joy comes from God himself, from our knowledge of his love for us."

"Christian hope is no facile optimism, no placebo for the credulous: it is the certainty, rooted in love and faith, that God never abandons us and remains faithful to his promise: 'Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me'."

A second way we can maintain hope in the midst of suffering, he says, is to recognise that "we can also be part of God's answer to the problem."

"Created by Him in His image and likeness, we can be signs of His love, which gives rise to joy and hope even in situations that appear hopeless," he says.

Having received this joy and hope, Pope Francis says, we cannot keep it to ourselves.

"Nurture the spark that has been kindled in you," he urges, "but at the same time share it. You will come to realize that it grows by being given away!"

In particular, he asks, "Stay close to your friends who may be smiling on the outside but are weeping within, for lack of hope. Do not let yourselves be infected by indifference and individualism."

We cannot keep our Christian hope to ourselves, "like a warm feeling", Pope Francis urges. "It is meant for everyone."

Read the full letter here:

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/11/14/0794/01732.html#en>