

“Rejoicing in Hope”

(Rom 12:12)

Dear Young People,

This past August I met hundreds of thousands of your contemporaries from all over the world who converged on Lisbon for World Youth Day. During the pandemic and all its uncertainties, we had hoped that this great moment of encounter with Christ and with other young people could take place. Our hopes were realized, and for many of us who were present – myself included – that event surpassed all our expectations. Our meeting in Lisbon was magnificent, a genuine experience of renewal, an explosion of light and joy!

At the end of the final Mass in the “Field of Grace”, I spoke of the next stage of our intercontinental pilgrimage: Seoul, Korea, in 2027. First, though, I invited you to Rome in 2025 for the Jubilee of Young People, where you too will be “Pilgrims of Hope”.

As young people, you are indeed the joyful hope of the Church and of a humanity always on the move. I would like to take you by the hand and walk with you on the path of hope. I would like to speak with you about our joys and hopes, but also of our sorrows and concerns, and those of all our brothers and sisters in the human family (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1). In these two years of preparation for the Jubilee, we will meditate first on Saint Paul’s words, “Rejoicing in hope” (*Rom* 12:12), and then those of the prophet Isaiah, “Those who hope in the Lord will run and not be weary” (*Is* 40:31).

What is the origin of this joy?

“Rejoice in hope” was Saint Paul’s encouragement to the community of Rome at a time when it was undergoing harsh persecution. The “joy in hope” proclaimed by the Apostle is the fruit of Christ’s paschal mystery and the power of his resurrection. It is not a product of our human efforts, plans or skills, but of the energy born of an encounter with Christ. Christian joy comes from God himself, from our knowledge of his love for us.

Pope Benedict XVI, reflecting on his experience of the 2011 World Youth Day in Madrid, asked:

“Where does joy come from? How is it to be explained? Certainly, there are many factors at work here. But the crucial one is this certainty based on faith: I am wanted. I have a task in history. I am accepted, I am loved”. He went on to say: “Ultimately we need a sense of being accepted unconditionally. Only if God accepts me and I become convinced of this, do I know definitively: it is good that I exist... It is good to be a human being, even in hard times. Faith makes one happy from deep within” (*Address to the Roman Curia*, 22 December 2011).

Where is my hope?

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, our encounter with art and culture, science and technology, our efforts to work for peace, justice and fraternity, and so many other things. We are living at a time, though, when for many people, including the young, hope seems absent. Sadly, many of your contemporaries who experience wars, violent conflict, bullying and other kinds of hardship, are gripped by despair, fear and depression. They feel as if they are in a dark prison, where the light of the sun cannot enter. A dramatic sign of this is the high rate of suicide among young people in different countries. In such situations, how can we experience the joy and hope of which Saint Paul speaks? There is a risk that instead we will fall prey to despair, thinking that it is useless to do good, since it would not be appreciated or acknowledged by anyone. We may say to ourselves, with Job: “Where then is my hope? Who will see my hope?” (*Job* 17:15).

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?” At the same time, however, 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. I think of the film “Life is Beautiful”, where a young father, with great sensitivity and creativity, manages to transform harsh realities into a kind of adventure and game. He enables his young son to see things with “eyes of hope”, protecting him from the horrors of the concentration camp, preserving his innocence and preventing human malice from robbing him of a future. Stories like these are not just fiction! We

see them played out in the lives of so many saints who were witnesses of hope even amid the most horrid examples of human evil. We can think of Saint Maximilian Mary Kolbe, Saint Josephine Bakhita, and Blessed Józef and Wiktoria Ulma and their seven children.

This capacity for instilling hope in human hearts was masterfully described by Saint Paul VI: “a Christian or a group of Christians who in the midst of their community... can radiate in a simple and unaffected way their faith in enduring values and their hope in something unseen and even unimaginable” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21).

Hope, the “little” virtue

The French writer Charles Péguy, at the beginning of his poem on hope, spoke of the three theological virtues – faith, hope and charity – as three sisters who walk together:

*“Hope, the little one, walks beside her two older sisters, practically unseen.
Yet she, the little one, drags everything along.
Because Faith only sees what exists.
And Charity only loves what exists.
But Hope loves what will be....
She is the one who makes the others keep walking;
She is the one who leads them on,
and makes them all walk together”*
(*The Portico of the Mystery of the Second Virtue*).

I, too, am convinced that hope is humble, little, yet essential. Think for a moment. How can we live without hope? What would our days be like? Hope is the salt of our daily lives.

Hope, a light shining in the night

In the Christian tradition of the Paschal Triduum, Holy Saturday is the day of hope. Situated between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, it is a kind of no man’s land between the despair of the disciples and their joy on Easter morn. It is the place where hope is born. On Holy Saturday, the Church commemorates in silence Christ’s descent into hell. We see this portrayed in the many icons that show us the Lord, radiant with light, who descends to the darkest depths and crosses over them. God does not simply look with compassion on our experiences of death, or call to us from afar; he enters into our moments of hell like a light that shines in the darkness and overcomes it (cf.

Jn 1:5). This is nicely expressed by a poem in the South African language Xhosa: “Even if hope is at an end, by this poetry I revive hope. My hope is revived because my hope is in the Lord. I hope that we will all be one! Remain steadfast in hope, for the good outcome is near”.

If we think about it, that was the hope of the Virgin Mary, who remained steadfast beneath the cross of Jesus, certain that the “good outcome” was near. Mary is the woman of hope, the Mother of hope. On Calvary, “hoping against hope” (cf. *Rom 4:18*), she never wavered in her certainty of the resurrection that her Son had proclaimed. Our Lady filled the silence of Holy Saturday with loving and hope-filled expectation, and inspired in the disciples the certainty that Jesus would conquer death and that evil would not be the last word.

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” (*Ps 23:4*). Christian hope is not a denial of sorrow and death; it is the celebration of the love of the risen Christ, who is always at our side, even when he seems far from us. “Christ himself is our great light of hope and our guide in the night, because he is ‘the bright morning star’” (*Christus Vivit*, 33).

Nurturing hope

After the flame of hope is kindled in us, there can be times when it risks being extinguished by the worries, fears and pressures of daily life. A flame needs oxygen to keep burning, in order to grow into a great bonfire of hope. The gentle breeze of the Holy Spirit nurtures our hope, and there are several ways that we cooperate in this.

Hope is nurtured by prayer. Prayer preserves and renews hope. It helps fan the spark of hope into flame. “Prayer is the first strength of hope. You pray, and hope grows and moves forward” (*Catechesis*, 20 May 2020). Praying is like climbing to a mountaintop: from the ground, the sun can be hidden by clouds, but once we climb beyond them, its light and warmth envelop us. We see once more that the sun is always there, even when everything around us seems dark and dreary.

Dear young friends, when you feel surrounded by the clouds of fear, doubt and anxiety and you no longer see the sun, take the path of prayer. For “when no one listens to me any more, God still listens to me” (BENEDICT XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 32). Let us take some time each day to rest in God, especially when we feel overwhelmed by our problems: “For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him” (*Psalms* 62:5).

Hope is nurtured by our daily decisions. Saint Paul’s invitation to rejoice in hope (cf. *Romans* 12:12) calls for concrete choices in our everyday lives. I urge all of you to choose a style of life grounded in hope. Let me give just one example. On social media, it always seems easier to share negative things than things that inspire hope. So my concrete suggestion is this: each day, try to share a word of hope with others. Try to sow seeds of hope in the lives of your friends and everyone around you. For “hope is humble, it is a virtue that is built up day by day... We need to remember each day that we possess the first fruits of the Spirit, who works in us through the little things” (*Morning Meditation*, 29 October 2019).

Lighting the torch of hope

Sometimes, when you go out at night with your friends, you bring your smart phone and use it as a light. At huge concerts, thousands of you move these modern candles to the rhythm of the music; it is an impressive sight. At night, light makes us see things in a new way, and in the darkness a certain beauty shines forth. So it is with the light of hope which is Christ. From Jesus, from his resurrection, our lives take on light. With him, we see everything in a new light.

We are told that when people would come to Saint John Paul II to speak with him about a problem, the first question he asked was: “How do you see this in the light of faith?” When we see things in the light of hope, they appear different. I encourage you, then, to start seeing things this way. Thanks to God’s gift of hope, Christians are filled with a new joy that comes from within. The challenges and difficulties will always be there, but if we possess a hope “full of faith”, we can confront them in the knowledge that they do not have the final word. And we ourselves can become a small beacon of hope for others.

Each of you can be such a beacon, to the extent that your faith becomes concrete, rooted in reality

and sensitive to the needs of our brothers and sisters. Let us think of those disciples of Jesus who one day, on a high mountain, saw him transfigured in glorious light. Had they stayed there, it would have remained a beautiful experience for them, but the others would not have shared it. They had to come down from the mountain. So it is with us. We must not flee from the world, but love the times in which God has placed us, and not without reason. We can only find happiness by sharing the grace we have received with the brothers and sisters that the Lord gives us each day.

Dear young people, do not be afraid to share with others the hope and joy of the risen Christ! Nurture the spark that has been kindled in you, but at the same time share it. You will come to realize that it grows by being given away! We cannot keep our Christian hope to ourselves, like a warm feeling, because it is meant for everyone. Stay close in particular 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. Remain open, like canals in which the hope of Jesus can flow and spread in all the areas where you live.

“Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world!” (*Christus Vivit*, 1). I addressed those words to you almost five years ago, after the Synod on Young People. I encourage all of you, especially all those engaged in youth ministry, to reread the Final Document of 2018 and the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*. The time is ripe to take stock of the situation and to work together with hope for the full implementation of that unforgettable Synod.

Let us entrust our lives entirely to Mary, Mother of Hope. She teaches us how to carry Jesus, our joy and hope, within our hearts and to share him with others. Dear friends, may you enjoy every step of the journey you are making! I bless you and I accompany you with my prayers. And I ask you, please, to pray for me.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 9 November 2023,
Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica.

FRANCIS