

On the Hill of Encounter, Pope Francis Urges Young People to Be Courageous

The Holy Father reaffirms that in the Church there is a place for everyone, without exception.

Pope Francis today told young people: “do not be afraid, have courage”. In a speech in which he often interacted with pilgrims, he called on the young people to repeat with him: “God loves us.”

“Louder! I cannot hear you,” said the Pontiff, who had earlier invited pilgrims to repeat, each in their own language, “Everyone! Everyone!”, saying that there is room for everyone in the Church.

The Holy Father was speaking to the young people at the Welcoming Ceremony on the Hill of Encounter (Parque Eduardo VII, Lisbon), in what was the first official contact with the pilgrims participating in World Youth Day (WYD), under the motto “joy, encounter and pilgrim”.

As he had done on Wednesday at Vespers, the Pope repeatedly departed from the written text, shortening it and adding improvisations in a conversational tone with the young people.

After greeting the young people with a “boa tarde” in Portuguese, he thanked them for their joy and enthusiasm: “I am happy to see you! I am happy to hear the nice commotion you are making”.

He underlined that each person is called by name by God, not in an automatic way, but really by the name of each person and as each person is, with his or her problems, difficulties and limitations.

“You are not here by chance. The Lord has called you, not only now, but since the beginning of your lives. He has called us all since the beginning of our lives. He called us by our names. We hear the word of God calling us by name. Try to imagine these words written in large letters; and then think of them written inside each one of you, in your hearts, as if it was the title of your life, the meaning of who you are: you have been called by name,” he emphasised.

“And that's why we, his Church, are the community of those who are called; we are not the community of the best – no, absolutely not – but of the called, of those who accept, together with others, the gift of being called. We are the community of brothers and sisters of Jesus, sons and daughters of the same Father,” he said.

After renewing his call for young people not to be deceived by the “illusions of the virtual world”, Pope Francis emphasised that things are different with Jesus: “He trusts you, each one of you matters to Him”.

“we must be careful not to let ourselves be deceived, because many realities that are attractive to us nowadays promise happiness to us, only for them to show themselves for what they are afterwards: vain things, floating bubbles, superfluous things, things that are useless and that leave us empty inside. I tell you one thing: Jesus is not like that.”, he added.

“We are called as we are”, he insisted, pointing out once again that there is room for everyone in the Church.

He advised young people never to tire of asking questions, because “asking questions is good. Indeed, it is often better than giving answers, because those who ask questions remain ‘restless’ and restlessness is the best remedy for routine”.

God loves by surprise, “his love is by surprise, it is not programmed”, he emphasised.

“The Lord does not point his finger, but opens his arms: this is what Jesus showed us on the cross. He never closes the door, never, but invites you in; he does not keep us at a distance, but welcomes us. In these days, let us pass on his message of love, which frees the heart and leaves a joy that does not fade away,” he said.

The Holy Father said that all this is not easy and that it is therefore necessary to ask for the help of the Mother of God: “she is our Mother!”

“Be courageous,” he asked.

For the first time on this trip to Portugal, the Holy Father used the Popemobile, the special vehicle usually used on his journeys, both in Rome and abroad, to travel between the Apostolic Nunciature and the Hill of Encounter. He greeted the people gathered in the streets, as well as the pilgrims present on the spot.

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