

## **Charismatic Family of St Ann**

“Let us draw close to the young,  
for they are the joy and hope of the Church and  
of the world!”

*(Spes non confundit, 12)*



O dear St. Ann, obtain for us the grace to imitate you and  
your daughter, by dedicating our whole life to the Christian  
formation of young people.

**Holy Year of Hope**

**2025**

## **Introduction:**

On 21<sup>st</sup> April of this Holy Year we experienced the death of Pope Francis who gave himself to his flock, the Church, until the very end. We want to offer this month of prayer in honour of St. Ann and St. Joachim as a homage to our dear Pope, who taught us to love the young and appreciate the elderly. Each day, messages that he wrote to young people have been chosen to motivate us to intensify our prayer for the upcoming Jubilee of Youth, keeping in mind the Pope's desire, *"Let us draw close to the young, for they are the joy and hope of the Church and of the world!"* (*Spes non confundit*, 12)

## **Outline for daily prayer**

- **Reflection of Pope Francis**

- **Prayer for every day**

O dear St. Ann, the model of a mother and an educator, obtain for us the grace to imitate you and your daughter, by dedicating our whole life to the Christian formation of young people, so that the kingdom of God may be established and spread all over the world with the triumph of truth, justice and peace. Amen.

- **St. Ann and St. Joachim**, pray for us and... (you can add other intentions)
- **Hymn to St. Ann**

## **JULY 1**

### ◆ **Reflection:** *The revolutionary power of the Beatitudes*

“In proclaiming the Beatitudes, Jesus asks us to follow him and to travel with him along the path of love, the path that alone leads to eternal life. It is not an easy journey, yet the Lord promises us his grace and he never abandons us. We face so many challenges in life: poverty, distress, humiliation, the struggle for justice, persecutions, the difficulty of daily conversion, the effort to remain faithful to our call to holiness, and many others. But if we open the door to Jesus and allow him to be part of our lives, if we share our joys and sorrows with him, then we will experience the peace and joy that only God, who is infinite love, can give.

The Beatitudes of Jesus are new and revolutionary. They present a model of happiness contrary to what is usually communicated by the media and by the prevailing wisdom. A worldly way of thinking finds it scandalous that God became one of us and died on a cross! According to the logic of this world, those whom Jesus proclaimed blessed are regarded as useless, “losers”. What is glorified is success at any cost, affluence, the arrogance of power and self-affirmation at the expense of others.

Jesus challenges us, young friends, to take seriously his approach to life and to decide which path is right for us and leads to true joy. This is the great challenge of faith. Jesus was not afraid to ask his disciples if they truly wanted to follow him or if they preferred to take another path (cf. Jn. 6:67). Simon Peter had the courage to reply: «Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life» (Jn. 6:68). If you too are able to say “yes” to Jesus, your lives will become both meaningful and fruitful” (Pope Francis, *XXIX World Youth Day*, 2014, n. 1).

## **JULY 2**

### ◆ **Reflection:** *The courage to be happy*

“If you are really open to the deepest aspirations of your hearts, you will realize that you possess an unquenchable thirst for happiness, and this will allow you to expose and reject the “low cost” offers and approaches all around you. When we look only for success, pleasure and possessions, and we turn these into idols, we may well have moments of

exhilaration, an illusory sense of satisfaction, but ultimately we become enslaved, never satisfied, always looking for more. It is a tragic thing to see a young person who “has everything”, but is weary and weak.

Saint John, writing to young people, told them: «You are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one» (1 Jn 2:14). Young people who choose Christ are strong: they are fed by his word and they do not need to ‘stuff themselves’ with other things! Have the courage to swim against the tide. Have the courage to be truly happy! Say no to an ephemeral, superficial and throwaway culture, a culture that assumes that you are incapable of taking on responsibility and facing the great challenges of life!” (*idem* n. 2).

### **JULY 3**

#### **♦ Reflection: *Blessed are the poor in spirit...***

“First of all, try to be free with regard to material things. The Lord calls us to a Gospel lifestyle marked by sobriety, by a refusal to yield to the culture of consumerism. This means being concerned with the essentials and learning to do without all those unneeded extras which hem us in. Let us learn to be detached from possessiveness and from the idolatry of money and lavish spending. Let us put Jesus first. He can free us from the kinds of idol-worship which enslave us. Put your trust in God, dear young friends! He knows and loves us, and he never forgets us. Just as he provides for the lilies of the field (cf. Mt 6:28), so he will make sure that we lack nothing. If we are to come through the financial crisis, we must be also ready to change our lifestyle and avoid so much wastefulness. Just as we need the courage to be happy, we also need the courage to live simply.

Second, if we are to live by this Beatitude, all of us need to experience a conversion in the way we see the poor. We have to care for them and be sensitive to their spiritual and material needs. To you young people I especially entrust the task of restoring solidarity to the heart of human culture. Faced with old and new forms of poverty – unemployment, migration and addictions of various kinds – we have the duty to be alert and thoughtful, avoiding the temptation to remain indifferent. We have

to remember all those who feel unloved, who have no hope for the future and who have given up on life out of discouragement, disappointment or fear. We have to learn to be on the side of the poor, and not just indulge in rhetoric about the poor! Let us go out to meet them, look into their eyes and listen to them. The poor provide us with a concrete opportunity to encounter Christ himself, and to touch his suffering flesh.

Third, however the poor are not just people to whom we can give something. They have much to offer us and to teach us. How much we have to learn from the wisdom of the poor!... In a very real way, the poor are our teachers. They show us that people's value is not measured by their possessions or how much money they have in the bank. A poor person, a person lacking material possessions, always maintains his or her dignity. The poor can teach us much about humility and trust in God" (*idem* 3).

#### JULY 4

- **Reflection:** *...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*

"The central theme of the Gospel is the kingdom of God. Jesus is the kingdom of God in person; he is Immanuel, God-with-us. And it is in the human heart that the kingdom, God's sovereignty, takes root and grows. The kingdom is at once both gift and promise. It has already been given to us in Jesus, but it has yet to be realized in its fullness. That is why we pray to the Father each day: "Thy kingdom come"... The Beatitude of the poor in spirit shapes our relationship with God, with material goods and with the poor. With the example and words of Jesus before us, we realize how much we need to be converted, so that the logic of being more will prevail over that of having more! The saints can best help us to understand the profound meaning of the Beatitudes. So the canonization of John Paul II, to be celebrated on the Second Sunday of Easter, will be an event marked by immense joy. He will be the great patron of the World Youth Days which he inaugurated and always supported. In the communion of saints he will continue to be a father and friend to all of you...

Dear friends, the Magnificat, the Canticle of Mary, poor in spirit, is also the song of everyone who lives by the Beatitudes. The joy of the Gospel

arises from a heart which, in its poverty, rejoices and marvels at the works of God, like the heart of Our Lady, whom all generations call “blessed” (cf. Lk 1:48). May Mary, Mother of the poor and Star of the new evangelization help us to live the Gospel, to embody the Beatitudes in our lives, and to have the courage always to be happy” (*idem* n. 4).

## **JULY 5**

- **Reflection:** *The desire for happiness*

“The word ‘blessed’, or ‘happy’, occurs nine times in this, Jesus’ first great sermon (cf. Mt 5:1-12). It is like a refrain reminding us of the Lord’s call to advance together with him on a road which, for all its many challenges, leads to true happiness.

Dear young friends, this search for happiness is shared by people of all times and all ages. God has placed in the heart of every man and woman an irrepressible desire for happiness, for fulfillment. Have you not noticed that your hearts are restless, always searching for a treasure which can satisfy their thirst for the infinite? (...) Dear young men and women, in Christ you find fulfilled your every desire for goodness and happiness. He alone can satisfy your deepest longings, which are so often clouded by deceptive worldly promises. As Saint John Paul II said: «He is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is he who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives» (cf. *Discourse at the Prayer Vigil at Tor Vergata*, 19 August 2000: *Insegnamenti* XXIII/2, [2000], 212)” (Pope Francis, *Message for the XXX World Youth Day*, 2015 n. 1).

## **JULY 6**

- **Reflection:** *Blessed are the pure in heart...*

“Youth is a time of life when your desire for a love which is genuine, beautiful and expansive begins to blossom in your hearts. How powerful is this ability to love and to be loved! Do not let this precious treasure be

debased, destroyed or spoiled. That is what happens when we start to use our neighbours for our own selfish ends, even as objects of pleasure. Hearts are broken and sadness follows upon these negative experiences. I urge you: Do not be afraid of true love, the love that Jesus teaches us and which Saint Paul describes as “patient and kind”. Paul says: «Love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things» (1 Cor 13:4-8). In encouraging you to rediscover the beauty of the human vocation to love, I also urge you to rebel against the widespread tendency to reduce love to something banal, reducing it to its sexual aspect alone, deprived of its essential characteristics of beauty, communion, fidelity and responsibility. Dear young friends, «in a culture of relativism and the ephemeral, many preach the importance of ‘enjoying’ the moment. They say that it is not worth making a life-long commitment, making a definitive decision, ‘for ever’, because we do not know what tomorrow will bring. I ask you, instead, to be revolutionaries, I ask you to swim against the tide; yes, I am asking you to rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes you are incapable of responsibility, that believes you are incapable of true love. I have confidence in you and I pray for you. Have the courage to ‘swim against the tide’. And also have the courage to be happy» (Meeting with the Volunteers of the XXVIII World Youth Day, 28 July 2013).

You young people are brave adventurers! If you allow yourselves to discover the rich teachings of the Church on love, you will discover that Christianity does not consist of a series of prohibitions which stifle our desire for happiness, but rather a project for life capable of captivating our hearts” (*idem* n. 2).

## **JULY 7**

- **Reflection:** *...for they shall see God*

“Dear young people, the Lord wants to meet us, to let himself ‘be seen’ by us. ‘And how?’, you might ask me. Saint Teresa of Avila, born in Spain

five hundred years ago, even as a young girl, said to her parents, «I want to see God». She subsequently discovered the way of prayer as «an intimate friendship with the One who makes us feel loved» (Autobiography, 8,5). So my question to you is this: Are you praying? Do you know that you can speak with Jesus, with the Father, with the Holy Spirit, as you speak to a friend? And not just any friend, but the greatest and most trusted of your friends! You will discover what one of his parishioners told the Curé of Ars: When I pray before the tabernacle, «I look at him, and he looks at me» (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2715).

Once again I invite you to encounter the Lord by frequently reading sacred Scripture. If you are not already in the habit of doing so, begin with the Gospels. Read a line or two each day. Let God's word speak to your heart and enlighten your path (cf. Ps 119:105). You will discover that God can be 'seen' also in the face of your brothers and sisters, especially those who are most forgotten: the poor, the hungry, those who thirst, strangers, the sick, those imprisoned (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

Have you ever had this experience? Dear young people, in order to enter into the logic of the Kingdom of Heaven, we must recognize that we are poor with the poor. A pure heart is necessarily one which has been stripped bare, a heart that knows how to bend down and share its life with those most in need.

Encountering God in prayer, the reading of the Bible and in the fraternal life will help you better to know the Lord and yourselves. Like the disciples on the way to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35), the Lord's voice will make your hearts burn within you. He will open your eyes to recognize his presence and to discover the loving plan he has for your life" (*idem* n. 3).

## **JULY 8**

- **Reflection:** ...*God's Will is our happiness!*

"Some of you feel, or will soon feel, the Lord's call to married life, to forming a family. Many people today think that this vocation is 'outdated', but that is not true! For this very reason, the ecclesial community has been engaged in a special period of reflection on the vocation and the mission of the family in the Church and the



contemporary world. I also ask you to consider whether you are being called to the consecrated life or the priesthood. How beautiful it is to see young people who embrace the call to dedicate themselves fully to Christ and to the service of his Church! Challenge yourselves, and with a pure heart do not be afraid of what God is asking of you! From your “yes” to the Lord’s call, you will become new seeds of hope in the Church and in society. Never forget: God’s will is our happiness!” (*ibid*).

## **JULY 9**

- **Reflection:** *Merciful like the Father*

“God’s mercy is very real and we are all called to experience it firsthand. When I was seventeen years old, it happened one day that, as I was about to go out with friends, I decided to stop into a church first. I met a priest there who inspired great confidence, and I felt the desire to open my heart in Confession. That meeting changed my life! I discovered that when we open our hearts with humility and transparency, we can contemplate God’s mercy in a very concrete way. I felt certain that, in the person of that priest, God was already waiting for me even before I took the step of entering that church. We keep looking for God, but God is there before us, always looking for us, and he finds us first. Maybe one of you feels something weighing on your heart. You are thinking: I did this, I did that.... Do not be afraid! God is waiting for you! God is a Father and he is always waiting for us! It is so wonderful to feel the merciful embrace of the Father in the sacrament of Reconciliation, to discover that the confessional is a place of mercy, and to allow ourselves to be touched by the merciful love of the Lord who always forgives us!

You, dear young man, dear young woman, have you ever felt the gaze of everlasting love upon you, a gaze that looks beyond your sins, limitations and failings, and continues to have faith in you and to look upon your life with hope? Do you realize how precious you are to God, who has given you everything out of love? Saint Paul tells us that «God proves his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us» (Rom 5:8). Do we really understand the power of these words?” (Pope Francis, *Message for the XXXI World Youth Day*, 2016, n. 2)

## **JULY 10**

- **Reflection:** *The amazing joy of being instruments of God's mercy*

"After this very brief summary of how the Lord bestows his mercy upon us, I would like to give you some suggestions on how we can be instruments of this mercy for others.

I think of the example of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. He said, «Jesus pays me a visit every morning in Holy Communion, and I return the visit in the meagre way I know how, visiting the poor». Pier Giorgio was a young man who understood what it means to have a merciful heart that responds to those most in need. He gave them far more than material goods. He gave himself by giving his time, his words and his capacity to listen. He served the poor very quietly and unassumingly. He truly did what the Gospel tells us: «When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret» (Mt 6:3-4). Imagine that, on the day before his death when he was gravely ill, he was giving directions on how his friends in need should be helped. At his funeral, his family and friends were stunned by the presence of so many poor people unknown to them. They had been befriended and helped by the young Pier Giorgio.

I always like to link the Gospel Beatitudes with Matthew 25, where Jesus presents us with the works of mercy and tells us that we will be judged on them. I ask you, then, to rediscover the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, assist the sick, visit the imprisoned and bury the dead. Nor should we overlook the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, teach the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the sorrowful, forgive offences, patiently bear with troublesome people and pray to God for the living and the dead. As you can see, mercy does not just imply being a 'good person' nor is it mere sentimentality. It is the measure of our authenticity as disciples of Jesus, and of our credibility as Christians in today's world" (*idem* n. 3).

## **JULY 11**

- **Reflection:** *The only way to defeat evil is mercy*

"The Divine Mercy message is a very specific life plan because it involves action. One of the most obvious works of mercy, and perhaps the most

difficult to put into practice, is to forgive those who have offended us, who have done us wrong or whom we consider to be enemies. «At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully» (Misericordiae Vultus, 9).

I meet so many young people who say that they are tired of this world being so divided, with clashes between supporters of different factions and so many wars, in some of which religion is being used as justification for violence. We must ask the Lord to give us the grace to be merciful to those who do us wrong. Jesus on the cross prayed for those who had crucified him: «Father, forgive them, they know not what they do» (Lk 23:34). Mercy is the only way to overcome evil. Justice is necessary, very much so, but by itself it is not enough. Justice and mercy must go together. How I wish that we could join together in a chorus of prayer, from the depths of our hearts, to implore the Lord to have mercy on us and on the whole world!” (*ibidem*)

## **JULY 12**

- **Reflection:** *Our age does not need young people who are “couch-potatoes”*

“According to Luke’s Gospel, once Mary has received the message of the angel and said “yes” to the call to become the Mother of the Saviour, she sets out in haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was in the sixth month of her pregnancy (cf. 1:36, 39). Mary is very young; what she was told is a great gift, but it also entails great challenges. The Lord assured her of his presence and support, yet many things remain obscure in her mind and heart. Yet Mary does not shut herself up at home or let herself be paralyzed by fear or pride. Mary is not the type that, to be comfortable, needs a good sofa where she can feel safe and sound. She is no couch potato! (cf. *Address at the Vigil*, Kraków, 30 July 2016). If her elderly cousin needs a hand, she does not hesitate, but immediately sets off.

It was a long way to the house of Elizabeth, about 150 kilometres. But the young woman from Nazareth, led by the Holy Spirit, knows no obstacles. Surely, those days of journeying helped her to meditate on the marvellous event of which she was a part. So it is with us, whenever

we set out on pilgrimage. Along the way, the events of our own lives come to mind, we learn to appreciate their meaning and we discern our vocation, which then becomes clear in the encounter with God and in service to others” (Pope Francis, *Message for the XXXII World Youth Day*, 2017)

## **JULY 13**

- **Reflection:** *The Mighty One has done great things for me*

“When God touches the heart of a young man or woman, they become capable of doing tremendous things. The ‘great things’ that the Almighty accomplished in the life of Mary speak also to our own journey in life, which is not a meaningless meandering, but a pilgrimage that, for all its uncertainties and sufferings, can find its fulfilment in God (cf. *Angelus*, 15 August 2015). You may say to me: ‘But Father, I have my limits, I am a sinner, what can I do?’ When the Lord calls us, he doesn’t stop at what we are or what we have done. On the contrary, at the very moment that he calls us, he is looking ahead to everything we can do, all the love we are capable of giving. Like the young Mary, you can allow your life to become a means for making the world a better place. Jesus is calling you to leave your mark in life, your mark on history, both your own and that of so many others (cf. *Address at the Vigil, Kraków*, 30 July 2016)” (*idem*).

## **JULY 14**

- **Reflection:** *Being young does not mean being disconnected from the past*

“Being mindful of the past also helps us to be open to the unexpected ways that God acts in us and through us. It also helps us to be open to being chosen as a means by which God brings about his saving plan. As young people, you too can do great things and take on fuller responsibilities, if only you recognize God’s mercy and power at work in your lives.

I would like to ask you some questions. How do you “save” in your memory the events and experiences of your life? What do you do with the facts and the images present in your memory? Some of you, particularly those hurt by certain situations in life, might want to “reset” your own past, to claim the right to forget it all. But I would like to remind you that there is no saint without a past, or a sinner without a

future. The pearl is born of a wound in the oyster! Jesus, by his love, can heal our hearts and turn our lives into genuine pearls. As Saint Paul said, the Lord can show his power through our weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:9).

Yet our memories should not remain crammed together, as in the memory of a hard drive. Nor can we archive everything in some sort of virtual “cloud”. We need to learn how to make past events a dynamic reality on which to reflect and to draw lessons and meaning for the present and the future. This is no easy task, but one necessary for discovering the thread of God’s love running through the whole of our life” (*idem*).

## **JULY 15**

- **Reflection:** *Do not be afraid!*

“And you young people, what are your fears? What worries you most deeply? An ‘underlying’ fear that many of you have is that of not being loved, well-liked or accepted for who you are...

In moments when doubts and fears flood our hearts, discernment becomes necessary. It allows us to bring order to the confusion of our thoughts and feelings, to act in a just and prudent way. In this process, the first step in overcoming fears is to identify them clearly, so as not to find yourself wasting time and energy by being gripped by empty and faceless ghosts. And so, I invite all of you to look within yourselves and to “name” your fears. Ask yourselves: what upsets me, what do I fear most in this specific moment of my life today? What blocks me and prevents me from moving forward? Why do I lack the courage to make the important choices I need to make? Do not be afraid to face your fears honestly, to recognize them for what they are and to come to terms with them. The Bible does not ignore the human experience of fear nor its many causes. Abraham was afraid, Jacob was afraid, and so were Moses, Peter and the Apostles. Jesus himself, albeit in an incomparable way, experienced fear and anguish.

«Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?» (Mk 4:40). In admonishing his disciples Jesus helps us to understand how the obstacle to faith is often not scepticism but fear. Thus understood, the work of discernment

identifies our fears and can then help us to overcome them, opening us to life and helping us to calmly face the challenges that come our way. For us Christians in particular, fear must never have the last word but rather should be an occasion to make an act of faith in God... and in life! This means believing in the fundamental goodness of the existence that God has given us and trusting that he will lead us to a good end, even through circumstances and vicissitudes which often bewilder us. Yet if we harbour fears, we will become inward-looking and closed off to defend ourselves from everything and everyone, and we will remain paralyzed. We have to act! Never close yourself in! In the Sacred Scriptures the expression “do not be afraid” is repeated 365 times with different variations, as if to tell us that the Lord wants us to be free from fear, every day of the year” (Pope Francis, *Message for the XXXIII World Youth Day*, 2018).

## **JULY 16**

- **Reflection: Mary!**

“«I have called you by name» (Is 43:1). The first reason not to fear is the fact that God has called us by name. The angel, God’s messenger, called Mary by name. To God belongs the power to give names. In the work of creation, he calls into existence every creature by name. There is an identity behind a name, that which is unique in every single thing, in every single person; that intimate essence that only God truly knows. This divine prerogative was shared with man when God invited him to name the animals, the birds and also his own offspring (Gen 2:19-21; 4:1). Many cultures share this profound biblical vision; they recognize in a name the revelation of the profound mystery of life and the meaning of existence.

When God calls someone by name, he also reveals to the person his vocation, his plan of holiness and fulfilment, through which the person becomes a gift to others and is made unique. And when God wants to expand the horizons of life, he gives a new name to the person he is calling, as he did with Simon, whom he called “Peter”. From here comes the custom of taking a new name when entering a religious

congregation, to indicate a new identity and mission. Since the divine call is unique and personal, we need the courage to disentangle ourselves from the pressure of being shaped by conforming patterns, so that our life can truly become an authentic and irreplaceable gift to God, to the Church and to all.

Dear young people, to be called by name is therefore a sign of our great dignity in the eyes of God and a sign of his love for us. God calls each one of you by name. All of you are the “you” of God, precious in his eyes, worthy of respect and loved (cf. Is 43:4). Welcome with joy this dialogue that God offers you, this appeal he makes to you, calling you by name” (*idem* n. 2).

## **JULY 17**

- **Reflection:** *You have found favour with God*

“The main reason why Mary need not be afraid is that she has found favour with God. The word “grace” speaks of love freely given, not owed. How much we are encouraged to know that we do not have to earn the closeness and help of God, by presenting a “Curriculum Vitae of excellence”, full of merits and successes! The angel says to Mary that she has already found favour with God, not that she will obtain it in the future. And the same formulation of the angel’s words helps us understand that divine grace is continuous, not something passing or fleeting; for this reason, it will never fail. Even in the future, the grace of God will always be there to sustain us, especially in moments of trial and darkness.

The continuous presence of divine grace encourages us to embrace our vocation with confidence; our vocation demands a commitment of faithfulness that needs to be renewed each day. Our vocational path is not without its crosses: not only our initial doubts, but also the frequent temptations that crop up along the way. The feeling of inadequacy accompanies Christ’s disciple to the end. Yet he or she knows the help of God’s grace.

The Angel’s words descend upon our human fears, dissolving them with the power of the Good News of which we are heralds: our life is not

pure chance or a mere struggle for survival, rather each of us is a cherished story loved by God. That we have ‘found grace in his eyes’ means that the Creator sees a unique beauty in our being and that he has a magnificent plan for our lives. The awareness of this certainty, of course, does not resolve all our problems nor does it take away life’s uncertainties. But it does have the power to transform our life deeply. The unknown that tomorrow holds for us is not a dark threat we need to overcome, but a favourable time given to us for living out the uniqueness of our personal vocation, and for sharing it with our brothers and sisters in the Church and in the world” (*idem* n. 3).

## **JULY 18**

- **Reflection:** *Courage in the present moment*

“From the certainty that God’s grace is with us comes the strength to take courage in the present moment: the courage to carry forward what God asks of us here and now, in every area of our lives; courage to embrace the vocation which God reveals to us; courage to live out our faith without hiding or diminishing it.

Yes, when we open ourselves to God’s grace, the impossible becomes a reality. «If God is for us, who can be against us?» (Rom 8:31). God’s grace touches the “now” of your lives, “takes hold” of you as you are, with all your fears and limits, but it also reveals his marvellous plans! You young people need to know that someone truly believes in you: please know that the Pope has confidence in you, that the Church has confidence in you! For your part, have confidence in the Church!.

To the young Mary was entrusted an important task, precisely because she was young. You young people have strength as you go through a phase of your lives where energy is not lacking. Make use of this strength and this energy to improve the world, beginning with the realities closest to you. I want important responsibilities to be given to you within the Church; that there may be the courage to make space for you; and that you may be prepared to take on these responsibilities.

I invite you once again to contemplate Mary’s love: a caring, dynamic and concrete love. A love full of boldness and focused completely on the



gift of self. A Church permeated by these Marian qualities will always be a Church going forth, one that goes beyond her own limits and boundaries to let the grace she has received overflow. If we allow ourselves to be truly touched by Mary's example, we will live out authentically that charity which urges us to love God above all else and above ourselves, to love those with whom we share our daily life. And we will also love those who may seem hardly lovable in themselves. It is a love that is service and dedication, above all towards the weakest and poorest, love that transforms our faces and fills us with joy" (*idem* n. 4).

## **JULY 19**

- **Reflection:** *The ability to see pain and death*

"All around us, but at times also within us, we can see realities of death: physical, spiritual, emotional, social. Do we really notice them, or simply let them happen to us? Is there anything we can do in order to restore life?

I think too of all those negative situations that people of your age are experiencing. Some stake everything on the present moment and risk their own lives in extreme experiences. Others are "dead" because they feel hopeless. One young woman told me: «Among my friends I see less desire to get involved, less courage to get up». Sadly, depression is spreading among young people too, and in some cases even leads to the temptation to take one's own life. How many situations are there where apathy reigns, where people plunge into an abyss of anguish and remorse! How many young people cry out with no one to hear their plea! Instead, they meet with looks of distraction and indifference on the part of people who want to enjoy their own "happy hour", without being bothered about anyone or anything else.

Others waste their lives with superficial things, thinking they are alive while in fact they are dead within (cf. Rev 3:1). At the age of twenty, they can already be dragging their lives down, instead of raising them up to the level of their true dignity. Everything is reduced to "living it up" and seeking a morsel of gratification: a minute of entertainment, a fleeting moment of attention and affection from others... And what about the widespread growing digital narcissism that affects young people and

adults alike. All too many people are living this way! Some of them have perhaps bought into the materialism of those all around them who are concerned only with making money and taking it easy, as if these were the sole purpose of life. In the long run, this will inevitably lead to unhappiness, apathy and boredom with life, a growing sense of emptiness and frustration.

There are many other situations of physical or moral death that a young person may encounter. I think of addiction, crime, poverty or grave illness. I leave it to you to think about these things and to realize what has proved “deadly” for yourselves or for someone close to you, now or in the past. At the same time, I ask you to remember that the young man in the Gospel was truly dead, but he was able to come back to life because he was seen by Someone who wanted him to live. The same thing can also happen to us, today and every day” (Pope Francis, *Message for the 35<sup>th</sup> World Day of Youth*, 2020).

## **JULY 20**

- **Reflection:** *To have compassion*

“The Scriptures often speak of the feelings experienced by those who let themselves be touched “viscerally” by the pain of others. Jesus’ own feelings make him share in other people’s lives. He makes their pain his own. That mother’s grief became his own. The death of that young son became his own.

As young people, you have shown over and over again that you are capable of com-passion. I think of all those of you who have generously offered help whenever situations demanded it. No disaster, earthquake or flood takes place without young volunteers stepping up to offer a helping hand. The great mobilization of young people concerned about defending the environment is also a witness to your ability to hear the cry of the earth.

Dear young people, do not let yourselves be robbed of this sensitivity! May you always be attentive to the plea of those who are suffering, and be moved by those who weep and die in today’s world. “Some realities of life are only seen with eyes cleansed by tears” (*Christus Vivit*, 76). If you can learn to weep with those who are weeping, you will find true

happiness. So many of your contemporaries are disadvantaged and victims of violence and persecution. Let their wounds become your own, and you will be bearers of hope in this world. You will be able to say to your brother or sister: «Arise, you are not alone», and you will help them realize that God the Father loves us, that Jesus is the hand he stretches out to us in order to raise us up” (*idem*).

## **JULY 21**

- **Reflection:** *To come forward and “touch”*

“Jesus went to a city called Na’in, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, «Do not weep». And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, «Young man, I say to you, arise» (Lk. 7, 11-14). Jesus stops the funeral procession. He draws near, he demonstrates his closeness. Closeness thus turns into a courageous act of restoring life to another. A prophetic gesture. The touch of Jesus, the living One, communicates life. It is a touch that pours the Holy Spirit into the dead body of that young man and brings him back to life.

That touch penetrates all hurt and despair. It is the touch of God himself, a touch also felt in authentic human love; it is a touch opening up unimaginable vistas of freedom and fullness of new life. The effectiveness of this gesture of Jesus is incalculable. It reminds us that even one sign of closeness, simple yet concrete, can awaken forces of resurrection.

You too, as young people, are able to draw near to the realities of pain and death that you encounter. You too can touch them and, like Jesus, bring new life, thanks to the Holy Spirit. But only if you are first touched by his love, if your heart is melted by the experience of his goodness towards you. If you can feel God’s immense love for every living creature – especially our brothers and sisters who experience hunger and thirst, or are sick or naked or imprisoned – then you will be able to draw near to them as he does. You will be able to touch them as he

does, and to bring his life to those of your friends who are inwardly dead, who suffer or have lost faith and hope” (*idem*).

## **JULY 22**

- **Reflection:** *“Young man, I say to you, arise!”*

“The Gospel (Lk 7, 13-14) does not tell us the name of the young man whom Jesus restored to life in Nain. This invites each reader to identify with him. To you, to me, to each one of us, Jesus says: “Arise”. We are very aware that, as Christians, we constantly fall and have to get up again. People who are not on a journey never fall; then again, neither do they move forward. That is why we need to accept the help that Jesus gives us and put our faith in God. The first step is to let ourselves get up and to realize that the new life Jesus offers us is good and worth living. It is sustained by one who is ever at our side along our journey to the future. Jesus helps us to live this life in a dignified and meaningful way. This life is really a new creation, a new birth, not just a form of psychological conditioning. Perhaps, in times of difficulty, many of you have heard people repeat those “magic” formulas so fashionable nowadays, formulas that are supposed to take care of everything: “You have to believe in yourself”, “You have to discover your inner resources”, “You have to become conscious of your positive energy”... But these are mere words; they do not work for someone who is truly “dead inside”. Jesus’ word has a deeper resonance; it goes infinitely deeper. It is a divine and creative word, which alone can bring the dead to life” (*idem*).

## **JULY 23**

- **Reflection:** *Living the new life as “risen ones”*

“The Gospel tells us that the young man «began to speak» (Lk 7:15). Those touched and restored to life by Jesus immediately speak up and express without hesitation or fear what has happened deep within them: their personality, desires, needs and dreams. Perhaps they were never able to do this before, for they thought no one would be able to understand.

To speak also means to enter into a relationship with others. When we are “dead”, we remain closed in on ourselves. Our relationships break

up, or become superficial, false and hypocritical. When Jesus restores us to life, he “gives” us to others (cf. v 15).

Today, we are often “connected” but not communicating. The indiscriminate use of electronic devices can keep us constantly glued to the screen. With this Message, I would like to join you, young people, in calling for a cultural change, based on Jesus’ command to “arise”. In a culture that makes young people isolated and withdrawn into virtual worlds, let us spread Jesus’ invitation: “Arise!” He calls us to embrace a reality that is so much more than virtual. This does not involve rejecting technology, but rather using it as a means and not as an end. “Arise!” is also an invitation to “dream”, to “take a risk”, to be “committed to changing the world”, to rekindle your hopes and aspirations, and to contemplate the heavens, the stars and the world around you. “Arise and become what you are!” If this is our message, many young people will stop looking bored and weary, and let their faces come alive and be more beautiful than any virtual reality.

If you give life, someone will be there to receive it. As a young woman once said: “Get off your couch when you see something beautiful, and try and do something similar”. Beauty awakes passion. And if a young person is passionate about something, or even better, about someone, he or she will arise and start to do great things. Young people will rise from the dead, become witnesses to Jesus and devote their lives to him. Dear young people, what are your passions and dreams? Give them free rein and, through them, offer the world, the Church and other young people something beautiful, whether in the realm of the spirit, the arts or society. I repeat what I once told you in my mother tongue: Hagan llo! Make your voices heard! I remember another young person who said: «If Jesus was someone who was only concerned about himself, the son of the widow would not have been raised» (*idem*).

## **JULY 24**

- **Reflection:** “*Arise and bear witness!*”

“When we embrace the new life bestowed on us in baptism, the Lord gives us an important and life-changing mission: “You are to be my witness!” Today Christ speaks to you the same words that he spoke to Paul: Arise! Do not remain downcast or caught up in yourself: a mission

awaits you! You too can testify to what Jesus has begun to accomplish in your lives. In Jesus' name, I ask you:

- Arise! Testify to the love and respect it is possible to instil in human relationships, in the lives of our families, in the dialogue between parents and children, between the young and the elderly.

- Arise! Uphold social justice, truth and integrity, human rights. Protect the persecuted, the poor and the vulnerable, those who have no voice in society, immigrants.

- Arise! Testify to the new way of looking at things that enables you to view creation with eyes brimming with wonder, that makes you see the Earth as our common home, and gives you the courage to promote an integral ecology.

- Arise! Testify that lives of failure can be rebuilt, that persons spiritually dead can rise anew, that those in bondage can once more be free, that hearts overwhelmed by sorrow can rediscover hope.

- Arise! Testify joyfully that Christ is alive! Spread his message of love and salvation among your contemporaries, at school and in the university, at work, in the digital world, everywhere" (Pope Francis, *Message for the XXXVI World Youth Day*, 2021).

## **JULY 25**

- **Reflection:** *Mary arose and went with haste*

"Mary's haste is thus a sign of her desire to serve, to proclaim her joy, to respond without hesitation to the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Mary was motivated by the needs of her elderly cousin. She did not hold back, or remain indifferent. She thought more of others than of herself. And this gave enthusiasm and direction to her life. Each of you can ask: How do I react to the needs that I see all around me? Do I think immediately of some reason not to get involved? Or do I show interest and willingness to help? To be sure, you cannot resolve all the problems of the world. Yet you can begin with the problems of those closest to you, with the needs of your own community. Someone once told Mother Teresa: «What you are doing is a mere drop in the ocean». And she replied: «But if I didn't do it, that ocean would have one drop less». When faced with concrete and urgent needs, we need to act quickly. How many people in our world look forward to a visit from someone

who is concerned about them! How many of the elderly, the sick, the imprisoned and refugees have need of a look of sympathy, a visit from a brother or sister who scales the walls of indifference!

What kinds of “haste” do you have, dear young people? What leads you to feel a need to get up and go, lest you end up standing still? Many people – in the wake of realities like the pandemic, war, forced migration, poverty, violence and climate disasters – are asking themselves: Why is this happening to me? Why me? And why now? But the real question in life is instead: for whom am I living? (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 286).

The haste of the young woman of Nazareth is the haste of those who have received extraordinary gifts from the Lord and feel compelled to share them, to let the immense grace that they have experienced be poured out upon others. It is the haste of those capable of putting other people’s needs above their own. Mary is an example of a young person who wastes no time on seeking attention or the approval of others – as often happens when we depend on our “likes” on social media. She sets out to find the most genuine of all “connections”: the one that comes from encounter, sharing, love and service” (Pope Francis, *Message for the XXXVII World Youth Day, 2022-2023*).

## **JULY 26**

- **Reflection:** *“I am with you always, to the end of time”*

“The Lord is aware of all that we have been through in this time. He is close to those who felt isolated and alone, feelings that became more acute during the pandemic. Tradition has it that Saint Joachim, the grandfather of Jesus, felt estranged from those around him because he had no children; his life, like that of his wife Anne, was considered useless. So the Lord sent an angel to console him. While he mused sadly outside the city gates, a messenger from the Lord appeared to him and said, “Joachim, Joachim! The Lord has heard your insistent prayer”. Giotto, in one of his celebrated frescoes, seems to set the scene at night, one of those many sleepless nights, filled with memories, worries and longings to which many of us have come to be accustomed.

Even at the darkest moments, as in these months of pandemic, the Lord continues to send angels to console our loneliness and to remind us: «I

am with you always». He says this to you, and he says it to me. That is the meaning of this Day, which I wanted to celebrate for the first time in this particular year, as a long period of isolation ends and social life slowly resumes. May every grandfather, every grandmother, every older person, especially those among us who are most alone, receive the visit of an angel!

At times those angels will have the face of our grandchildren, at others, the face of family members, lifelong friends or those we have come to know during these trying times, when we have learned how important hugs and visits are for each of us. How sad it makes me that in some places these are still not possible!” (Pope Francis, *Message for the 1<sup>st</sup> World Day of Grandparents and Elderly*, 2021)

## **JULY 27**

- **Reflection:** *"In old age they will still bear fruit" (Psalm 92:15)*

“Our world is passing through a time of trial and testing, beginning with the sudden, violent outbreak of the pandemic, and then by a war that is harming peace and development on a global scale. Nor is it a coincidence that war is returning to Europe at a time when the generation that experienced it in the last century is dying out. These great crises risk anaesthetizing us to the reality of other “epidemics” and other widespread forms of violence that menace the human family and our common home.

All this points to the need for a profound change, a conversion, that disarms hearts and leads us to see others as our brothers or sisters. We grandparents and elderly people have a great responsibility: to teach the women and men of our time to regard others with the same understanding and loving gaze with which we regard our own grandchildren.

We ourselves have grown in humanity by caring for others, and now we can be teachers of a way of life that is peaceful and attentive to those in greatest need. This attitude may be mistaken for weakness or resignation, yet it will be the meek, not the aggressive and the abusive, who will inherit the earth (cf. Mt 5:5).



One fruit that we are called to bring forth is protecting the world. «Our grandparents held us in their arms and carried us on their knees»; now is the time for us to carry on our own knees – with practical assistance or with prayer alone – not only our own grandchildren but also the many frightened grandchildren whom we have not yet met and who may be fleeing from war or suffering its effects. Let us hold in our hearts – like Saint Joseph, who was a loving and attentive father – the little ones of Ukraine, of Afghanistan, of South Sudan...” (Pope Francis, *Message for the 2<sup>nd</sup> World day of Grandparents and Elderly*, 2022).

## **JULY 28**

- **Reflection:** *His mercy is from age to age (Lk 1:50)*

“The World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly is meant to be a small but precious sign of hope for them and for the whole Church. I renew my invitation to everyone – dioceses, parishes, associations and communities – to celebrate this Day and to make it the occasion of a joyful and renewed encounter between young and old. To you, the young who are preparing to meet in Lisbon or to celebrate World Youth Day in your own countries, I would ask: before you set out on your journey, visit your grandparents or an elderly person who lives alone! Their prayers will protect you and you will carry in your heart the blessing of that encounter. I ask you, the elderly among us, to accompany by your prayers the young people about to celebrate World Youth Day. Those young people are God’s answer to your prayers, the fruits of all that you have sown, the sign that God does not abandon his people, but always rejuvenates them with the creativity of the Holy Spirit” (Pope Francis, *Message for the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Day of Grandparents and Elderly*, 2023).

## **JULY 29**

- **Reflection:** *“Do not cast me off in my old age” (cf. Ps 71:9)*

“There are many reasons for this loneliness: in many places, above all in the poorer countries, the elderly find themselves alone because their children are forced to emigrate. I think too of the many situations of

conflict. How many of the elderly are left alone because men – youths and adults – have been called to battle, and women, above all women with small children, have left the country in order to ensure safety for their children. In cities and villages devastated by war, many elderly people are left alone; they are the only signs of life in areas where abandonment and death seem to reign supreme. In other parts of the world, we encounter a false belief, deeply rooted in certain local cultures, that causes hostility towards the elderly, who are suspected of using witchcraft to sap the vital energies of the young; when premature death or sickness, or any other misfortune strike the young, the guilt is laid at the door of some elderly person. This mentality must be combatted and eliminated. It is one of those groundless prejudices from which the Christian faith has set us free, yet which continues to fuel generational conflict between the young and the elderly. (...) Intergenerational conflict is a fallacy and the poisoned fruit of a culture of conflict. To set the young against the old is an unacceptable form of manipulation: «What is important is the unity of the different ages of life, which is the real point of reference for understanding and valuing human life in its entirety» (Catechesis, 23 February 2022)". (Pope Francis, *Message for the 4<sup>th</sup> World Day of Grandparents and Elderly*, 2024).

## **JULY 30**

- **Reflection:** *"Rejoicing in Hope"* (Rom 12:12)

"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” (Pope Francis, *Message for the 38<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day, 2023*)

## **JULY 31**

- **Reflection:** *Pilgrims of hope for the mission*

“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...

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” (Pope Francis, *Message of for the 39<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day, 2024*)