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Vigil with Young People
Parque Tejo

Address of the Holy Father

Official translation

Dear brothers and sisters, good evening!

How good it is to look out and see all of you! Thank you for having made the pilgrimage to be here! The Virgin Mary herself travelled, in order to visit her cousin Elizabeth. As the Gospel of this World Youth Day tells us: “Mary *set out and went with haste*” (Lk 1:39). We might ask, “Why did she arise and go with haste to her cousin?” Certainly, Mary had just learned that Elizabeth was pregnant, but so was she. So why go, if neither the angel nor Elizabeth has asked her to? Mary does something that was not asked of her, something that she really did not have to do. Why? Simply because she loved, and “whoever loves flies, runs and rejoices” (*The Imitation of Christ*, III, 5). Mary does not hesitate; she takes the initiative and sets out to help her cousin. Above all, she hastens to give her the most precious gift of all, which is joy. Mary is *a missionary of joy*. That is why she set out in haste. You yourselves have surely experienced things that are so beautiful that you cannot keep them to yourselves. Well, that is the reason why Mary went in haste; it was a healthy haste, one that impelled her to share with others the goodness she herself had experienced.

Mary sets out and goes. She goes quickly, energized by the words that the angel had spoken to her: “Rejoice... the Lord is with you... Do not be afraid” (Lk 1:28.30). The same words that she now brings to Elizabeth. How beautiful it is when someone tells us: “I am here with you, don’t be afraid”. Mary does exactly that: in order to share the beauty of God’s closeness, she makes herself close to others. Dear friends, if we are here this evening, it is because someone introduced us to God’s closeness, knocked on our door, not to ask for something, but out of an overwhelming need to share the joy of the Lord. Let us think of those people who made the sun of God’s love rise in our lives. All of us know people who were *rays of light*: our parents and grandparents, priests, religious women, catechists, group leaders, teachers. They are the roots of our joy.

Roots of joy. Close your eyes for a moment and imagine a tree, a magnificent, towering tree... How does that tree withstand the storms and winds that shake it? How does it stand firm? Because of its roots. The same thing is true for us: our roots give us the solidity and stability that we need in life. They are the secret springs that water our soul. Young friends, let us always be worthy of those roots, of those who gave us life, faith and love! And let us remember that we too are called to be roots of joy for other people.

How do we become roots of joy? Mary shows us: she increases her joy by journeying. She tells us that in order to expand and preserve our joy we need to learn *the art of journeying*. Of course, journeying demands a steady, regular pace, whereas today everyone lives by fleeting emotions, momentary feelings, sudden instincts. That is not how joy is born. Mary teaches us that it comes from keeping a steady pace on the journey, which is what you have already done in the way you came here. Step by step, we can travel great distances. Athletes, musicians and scientists show us that great goals are not attained instantly: how much training is needed in order to score a goal, how much effort lies behind writing the song that touches our hearts, how much research is required for a scientist to make an important discovery!

If that is true for sports, music and research, it is all the more true for the things that count most: love and faith. In those things, however, it is easy to run the risk of leaving everything to improvisation: I'll pray if I feel like it, I'll go to Mass when I want, I'll be charitable if it makes me feel good... No, the secret to success is *in the journey*, in the daily process of following, step by step, in the footsteps of those who have gone before us, and to do so *together*. This is essential: we have to do it together. When it comes to the really important things, the "do-it-yourself" approach doesn't work. So I would encourage you, please, not to withdraw from others, but to seek them out, to experience together God's presence and to participate actively in a group with a goal. You may say to me: "But all around me everybody is doing their own thing, on the cell phone, watching TV shows, caught up in social media and video games". As for you, however, don't be afraid to swim against the current. Take your life into your own hands, get involved, turn off the TV and open the Gospel. Put aside the cell phone and go to meet other people!

I think I can already hear you objecting: "But that is not easy, it is hard to go against the flow!" Let us look to Mary. The Gospels tell us that she walked everywhere; in this she was second only to Jesus. Yet what was the one constant in all that walking? It was practically all uphill: from Nazareth to the hill country where Elizabeth lived, then up to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, up to Calvary and finally to the Upper Room. Mary walks uphill because only by walking uphill do we reach the heights. Sure, going uphill is demanding; it requires a steady pace. But it is worth the effort. That is always the case when we go countercurrent: our steady effort has its reward. You have probably all arrived at a mountaintop after a long and tiring trek, but then, before your eyes, you saw a fabulous vista that repaid all your hard work, and gave you a sense of inner freedom and peace.

That is what happens when we walk behind Jesus. It is not always easy or downhill, because he is the God of adventure and exodus, not of pleasant walks in the park. Jesus is not someone who gives you a pat on the back and then walks off, but the true Friend who accompanies you along the way, helps you overcome your fears and brings you to the mountaintop, to those heights for which you were made. He knows you, he knows your worth, he knows what you are capable of doing. Even so, you may be tempted to say: "But I am not up to it; I feel frail, weak, and I keep falling down!" Whenever you feel that way, please "refocus": don't view yourself through your own eyes, but see yourself the way God sees you. When you make a mistake and fall, what does he do? He stands there, next to you and, smiling gently, he takes you by the hand and helps you up. That is what Father Antonio told us, but if you need further proof, just open the Gospels and see what Jesus did with Peter, with Mary Magdalene, with Zacchaeus and so many others: he worked wonders with their weakness. God does not keep a running score of all our mistakes; his love is not dependent on what we do or fail to do. God – Jesus tells us – is a Father, and when we fall along the way, he sees a son or daughter to be helped up, never a wrongdoer to be punished. God is faithful, and he counts on us. So, let us put all our trust in him!

Dear friends, there is one more important thing that I would like to say to you about the journey. Here we have experienced wonderful and exciting days together, but once we go home, how should we continue our journey? How should we begin each day? Once again, Mary can help us, for she *sets out and goes*. These are the two steps to take at the beginning of each day: *to set out* and *to go*.

First: *to set out*. To set out by getting out of bed and standing on our own two feet, since we were made for heaven, not earth. To approach life standing up, not sprawling on a couch. To set out by leaving our troubles behind and to lift our gaze on high. To set out by responding to the uniquely beautiful reality that we are. In a word, to set out and *accept the fact that each of us is a gift*. To realize that, as beloved and precious sons and daughters, we are first and foremost a gift. This is not selfishness or pride, but reality: and it should be our starting point each day. It is the first thing you should do each morning when you wake up: get out of bed and accept that you are a gift. How? By giving thanks, by saying, "Thank you" to God. Take a moment before you dive into all the things you have to do. Take a moment just to say: "Lord, thank you for my life. Lord, make me love my life. Lord, you are my life". Then pray the Our Father, where the first word is the key to joy: when you say the word "Father", think about the fact that that you are a beloved son or daughter. Remember that for God you are not a "profile" but a child, that you have a heavenly Father, which means that you are a *child of heaven*. That is our strength; it makes get up whenever we fall and it sets us on our feet amid trials, as Marta told us. So let us lift our gaze on high! Let us lift up our hearts!

To set out, and then, this is the second step, *to go*. If life is a gift, I cannot fail to *make* it a gift. So if the first step was to *accept that you are a gift*, the second is to *make yourself a gift to others*. Dear friends, even if nowadays nothing seems solid and sure, the uncertainty all around us cannot be an excuse for standing still. We are not in the world just to be comfortable, but also to be “discomforted” by getting up and going out to encounter others who need our help. That is how we find ourselves. Do you know why we often go astray on the journey? Because we keep orbiting around ourselves. On the other hand, when we are willing to stray from our own orbit, we find ourselves. Those who spend their lives for others earn their lives, for life becomes truly our own only when we give it away. Like Mary, who received a gift from God and then immediately chose to become a gift for Elizabeth. But if we constantly circle around ourselves and our own needs, around the things we don’t have, we will always find ourselves back at the starting point, moaning and groaning, putting on a long face, perhaps even thinking that everyone is against us. How many times do we fall prey to feelings of self-pity that burn up our better energies! No, let us refuse to be taken hostage by loneliness or paralyzed by melancholy, but instead set out and go to others. Let us leave behind the “Why?” and instead ask “Who?” Who is out there that I can help? Who is out there that needs my time and my energy?

Think about this: God our Father created the entire world for us. Yet do *we* create something beautiful for anyone else? We live immersed in man-made products that make us lose our sense of wonder at the natural beauty all around us. Yet that beauty invites us to create more beauty, to create something that was not there before. By its very nature, life begs to be bestowed, not “organized”; it beckons us to abandon our dependency on virtual reality, on the mesmerizing world of social media, which deadens the soul. Dear young friends, do not be experts in obsessive texting, but creators of something new! A heartfelt prayer, a page of writing, a dream that you make come true, a gesture of love for someone who cannot repay you: all these things are ways of creating, imitating the “flair” with which God created the world. That flair is the expression of *gratuitousness*, the selfless generosity that liberates us from the nihilistic mindset that thinks: “I act in order to have” and “I work in order to make money”. Be creative and generous! Make your life a *symphony of gratuity* in a world that is obsessed with wealth and profit! Then you will be true revolutionaries. Go out and give freely, without fear!

Dear young friends, you are no doubt tired after travelling so far to come here, but at the same time happy, because you can already feel a sense of freedom that material things cannot give you. So *set out!* Open your heart to God, thank him, embrace the beauty that you are, fall in love with your life, and discover anew each day that you are loved. And then, *go!* Go forth, walk beside others, seek out those who are alone, colour your world with every step and brighten the paths of life with the Gospel. Get up and go! Listen to Jesus who is calling you. He says the same thing to you that he said to all those people whom he helped and healed: “Get up and go!” (cf. *Lk* 17:19). We need to keep listening to those words. That is what we are doing now, in Eucharistic adoration: we are looking at Jesus and he is looking at us. Now, in silence, let us allow his warm and gentle words to speak to our hearts, to comfort and encourage us, to bring us healing, but also to send us forth. Adoration is a deeply personal encounter, but also a source of strength to then get up and go. The author of *The Lord of the Rings*, surely one of the greatest stories of a journey of adventure ever written, once wrote to his son: “I put before you the one great thing to love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament. There you will find romance, glory, honour, fidelity, and the true way of all your loves on earth” (J.R.R. TOLKEIN, Letter 43, March 1941). In the presence of the Eucharist, we find our way, because Jesus himself is *the way* (cf. *Jn* 14:6). This evening, let us renew our encounter with Jesus. Let us turn to him and say: “Lord Jesus, I thank you and I follow you. I love you and I want to walk ever at your side”.
