



The Holy See

POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

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OF THE HOLY FATHER
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TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND TO THE ENTIRE PEOPLE OF GOD

1. Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world, and everything he touches becomes young, new, full of life. The very first words, then, that I would like to say to every young Christian are these: Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!

2. He is in you, he is with you and he never abandons you. However far you may wander, he is always there, the Risen One. He calls you and he waits for you to return to him and start over again. When you feel you are growing old out of sorrow, resentment or fear, doubt or failure, he will always be there to restore your strength and your hope.

3. With great affection, I address this Apostolic Exhortation to all Christian young people. It is meant to remind you of certain convictions born of our faith, and at the same time to encourage you to grow in holiness and in commitment to your personal vocation. But since it is also part of a synodal process, I am also addressing this message to the entire People of God, pastors and faithful alike, since all of us are challenged and urged to reflect both on the young and for the young. Consequently, I will speak to young people directly in some places, while in others I will propose some more general considerations for the Church's discernment.

4. I have let myself be inspired by the wealth of reflections and conversations that emerged from last year's Synod. I cannot include all those contributions here, but you can read them in the Final Document. In writing this letter, though, I have attempted to summarize those proposals I considered most significant. In this way, my words will echo the myriad voices of believers the

110. Yet let me also remind you that, “when we live apart from others, it is very difficult to fight against concupiscence, the snares and temptations of the devil, and the selfishness of the world. Bombarded as we are by so many enticements, we can grow too isolated, lose our sense of reality and inner clarity, and easily succumb”.^[62] This is especially the case with young people, for whenever you are united, you have marvellous strength. Whenever you are enthused about life in common, you are capable of great sacrifices for others and for the community. Isolation, on the other hand, saps our strength and exposes us to the worst evils of our time.

CHAPTER FOUR

A great message for all young people

111. Putting all else aside, I now wish to speak to young people about what is essential, the one thing we should never keep quiet about. It is a message containing three great truths that all of us need constantly to keep hearing.

A God who is love

112. The very first truth I would tell each of you is this: “God loves you”. It makes no difference whether you have already heard it or not. I want to remind you of it. God loves you. Never doubt this, whatever may happen to you in life. At every moment, you are infinitely loved.

113. Perhaps your experience of fatherhood has not been the best. Your earthly father may have been distant or absent, or harsh and domineering. Or maybe he was just not the father you needed. I don’t know. But what I can tell you, with absolute certainty, is that you can find security in the embrace of your heavenly Father, of the God who first gave you life and continues to give it to you at every moment. He will be your firm support, but you will also realize that he fully respects your freedom.

114. In God’s word, we find many expressions of his love. It is as if he tried to find different ways of showing that love, so that, with one of them at least, he could touch your heart. For example, there are times when God speaks of himself as an affectionate father who plays with his children: *“I led them with cords of compassion, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks”* (Hos 11:4).

At other times, he speaks of himself as filled with the love of a mother whose visceral love for her children makes it impossible for her to neglect or abandon them: *“Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you”* (Is 49:15).

He even compares himself to a lover who goes so far as to write his beloved on the palm of his hands, to keep her face always before him: *“See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands!”* (Is 49:6).

At other times, he emphasizes the strength and steadfastness of his invincible love: *“For the mountains may depart, and the hills be shaken, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be shaken”* (Is 54:10).

Or he tells us that we have been awaited from eternity, for it was not by chance that we came into this world: *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you”* (Jer 31:3).

Or he lets us know that he sees in us a beauty that no one else can see: *“For you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you”* (Is 43:4).

Or he makes us realize that his love is not cheerless, but pure joy, welling up whenever we allow ourselves to be loved by him: *“The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory. He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing”* (Zeph 3:17).

115. For him, you have worth; you are not insignificant. You are important to him, for you are the work of his hands. That is why he is concerned about you and looks to you with affection. “Trust the memory of God: his memory is not a ‘hard disk’ that ‘saves’ and ‘archives’ all our data. His memory is a heart filled with tender compassion, one that finds joy in ‘deleting’ from us every trace of evil”.^[63] He does not keep track of your failings and he always helps you learn something even from your mistakes. Because he loves you. Try to keep still for a moment and let yourself feel his love. Try to silence all the noise within, and rest for a second in his loving embrace.

116. His is “a love that does not overwhelm or oppress, cast aside or reduce to silence, humiliate or domineer. It is the love of the Lord, a daily, discreet and respectful love; a love that is free and freeing, a love that heals and raises up. The love of the Lord has to do more with raising up than knocking down, with reconciling than forbidding, with offering new changes than condemning, with the future than the past”.^[64]

117. When he asks something of you, or simply makes you face life’s challenges, he is hoping that you will make room for him to push you, to help you grow. He does not get upset if you share your questions with him. He is concerned when you *don’t* talk to him, when you are not open to dialogue with him. The Bible tells us that Jacob fought with God (cf. Gen 32:25-31), but that did not keep him from persevering in his journey. The Lord himself urges us: “Come, let us argue it out” (Is 1:18). His love is so real, so true, so concrete, that it invites us to a relationship of openness and fruitful dialogue. Seek the closeness of our heavenly Father in the loving face of his

courageous witnesses on earth!

Christ saves you

118. The second great truth is that Christ, out of love, sacrificed himself completely in order to save you. His outstretched arms on the cross are the most telling sign that he is a friend who is willing to stop at nothing: *“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end”* (Jn 13:1).

Saint Paul said that his life was one of complete trust in that self-sacrificing love: *“I now live by faith in the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Gal 2:20).

119. The same Christ who, by his cross, saved us from our sins, today continues to save and redeem us by the power of his total self-surrender. Look to his cross, cling to him, let him save you, for “those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness”.^[65] And if you sin and stray far from him, he will come to lift you up by the power of his cross. Never forget that “he forgives us seventy times seven. Time and time again, he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness that never disappoints but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew”.^[66]

120. “We are saved by Jesus because he loves us and cannot go against his nature. We can do any number of things against him, yet he loves us and he saves us. For only what is loved can be saved. Only what is embraced can be transformed. The Lord’s love is greater than all our problems, frailties and flaws. Yet it is precisely through our problems, frailties and flaws that he wants to write this love story. He embraced the prodigal son, he embraced Peter after his denials, and he always, always, always embraces us after every fall, helping us to rise and get back on our feet. Because the worst fall, and pay attention to this, *the worst fall, the one that can ruin our lives, is when we stay down and do not allow ourselves to be helped up*”.^[67]

121. His forgiveness and salvation are not something we can buy, or that we have to acquire by our own works or efforts. He forgives us and sets us free without cost. His self-sacrifice on the cross is so great that we can never repay it, but only receive it with immense gratitude and with the joy of being more greatly loved than we could ever imagine: “He loved us first” (1 Jn 4:19).

122. Young people, beloved of the Lord, how valuable must you be if you were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ! Dear young people, “you are priceless! You are not up for sale! Please, do not let yourselves be bought. Do not let yourselves be seduced. Do not let yourselves be enslaved by forms of ideological colonization that put ideas in your heads, with the result that you end up becoming slaves, addicts, failures in life. You are priceless. You must repeat this always: I am not up for sale; I do not have a price. I am free! Fall in love with this freedom, which is what

Jesus offers".[\[68\]](#)

123. Keep your eyes fixed on the outstretched arms of Christ crucified, let yourself be saved over and over again. And when you go to confess your sins, believe firmly in his mercy which frees you of your guilt. Contemplate his blood poured out with such great love, and let yourself be cleansed by it. In this way, you can be reborn ever anew.

He is alive!

124. Finally, there is a third truth, inseparable from the second: Christ is alive! We need to keep reminding ourselves of this, because we can risk seeing Jesus Christ simply as a fine model from the distant past, as a memory, as someone who saved us two thousand years ago. But that would be of no use to us: it would leave us unchanged, it would not set us free. The one who fills us with his grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals and consoles us is someone fully alive. He is the Christ, risen from the dead, filled with supernatural life and energy, and robed in boundless light. That is why Saint Paul could say: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (1 Cor 15:7).

125. Alive, he can be present in your life at every moment, to fill it with light and to take away all sorrow and solitude. Even if all others depart, he will remain, as he promised: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). He fills your life with his unseen presence; wherever you go, he will be waiting there for you. Because he did not only come in the past, but he comes to you today and every day, inviting you to set out towards ever new horizons.

126. See Jesus as happy, overflowing with joy. Rejoice with him as with a friend who has triumphed. They killed him, the holy one, the just one, the innocent one, but he triumphed in the end. Evil does not have the last word. Nor will it have the last word in your life, for you have a friend who loves you and wants to triumph in you. Your Saviour lives.

127. Because he lives, there can be no doubt that goodness will have the upper hand in your life and that all our struggles will prove worthwhile. If this is the case, we can stop complaining and look to the future, for with him this is always possible. That is the certainty we have. Jesus is eternally alive. If we hold fast to him, we will have life, and be protected from the threats of death and violence that may assail us in life.

128. Every other solution will prove inadequate and temporary. It may be helpful for a time, but once again we will find ourselves exposed and abandoned before the storms of life. With Jesus, on the other hand, our hearts experience a security that is firmly rooted and enduring. Saint Paul says that he wishes to be one with Christ in order "to know him and the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:10). That power will constantly be revealed in your lives too, for he came to give you life, "and life in abundance" (Jn 10:10).

129. If in your heart you can learn to appreciate the beauty of this message, if you are willing to encounter the Lord, if you are willing to let him love you and save you, if you can make friends with him and start to talk to him, the living Christ, about the realities of your life, then you will have a profound experience capable of sustaining your entire Christian life. You will also be able to share that experience with other young people. For “being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction”.^[69]

The Spirit gives life

130. In these three truths – God loves you; Christ is your Saviour; he is alive – we see God the Father and Jesus. Wherever the Father and the Son are, there too is the Holy Spirit. He is the one who quietly opens hearts to receive that message. He keeps alive our hope of salvation, and he will help you grow in joy if you are open to his working. The Holy Spirit fills the heart of the risen Christ and then flows over into your lives. When you receive the Spirit, he draws you ever more deeply into the heart of Christ, so that you can grow in his love, his life and his power.

131. Ask the Holy Spirit each day to help you experience anew the great message. Why not? You have nothing to lose, and he can change your life, fill it with light and lead it along a better path. He takes nothing away from you, but instead helps you to find all that you need, and in the best possible way. Do you need love? You will not find it in dissipation, using other people, or trying to be possessive or domineering. You will find it in a way that will make you genuinely happy. Are you seeking powerful emotions? You will not experience them by accumulating material objects, spending money, chasing desperately after the things of this world. They will come, and in a much more beautiful and meaningful way, if you let yourself be prompted by the Holy Spirit.

132. Are you looking for passion? As that beautiful poem says: “Fall in love!” (or “let yourself be loved!”), because “nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything”.^[70] This love for God, that can approach everything in life with passion, is possible thanks to the Spirit, for “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (*Rom 5:5*).

133. He is the source of youth at its best. For those who trust in the Lord are “like a tree planted by water sending out its roots by the stream; it shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green” (*Jer 17:8*). While “youths shall faint and be weary” (*Is 40:30*), those who wait for the Lord “shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (*Is 40:31*).