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Apostolic Trip of Pope Francis to Panama for the 34th World Youth Day (23-28 January 2019) – Meeting with WYD volunteers in the Rommel Fernández Juan Díaz Stadium

Meeting with WYD volunteers in the Rommel Fernández Juan Díaz Stadium

In the afternoon, after taking leave of the staff of the apostolic nunciature in Panama, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to Rommel Fernández Juan Díaz Stadium to meet with the WYD volunteers. Upon arrival, the Pope was received by the archbishop of Panama, who accompanied him into the stadium on a mini-vehicle for a tour among the faithful.

At 16.10 local time (22.10 in Rome), the meeting with World Youth Day volunteers took place. After welcome greetings from the general coordinator of the WYD, testimonies were given by three young volunteers, from Poland, Panama and Portugal, the country that will host the next WYD.

After the words of thanks from the archbishop of Panama, the Holy Father gave his address. At the end, after the prayer and final blessing, Pope Francis transferred by car to Tocumen International Airport for his official farewell to Panama.

The following is the address the Pope pronounced during his meeting with the volunteers:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Volunteers,

Before we conclude the celebration of World Youth Day, I wanted to meet you to thank every one of you for the service you rendered during these days and in the months preceding WYD.

Thanks to Bartosz, Stella Maris del Carmen and Maria Margarida for sharing their personal experiences. For me

it was very important to listen to them and to appreciate the fellowship that comes about when we join together to serve others. We experience how faith takes on a completely new flavour and force: faith becomes more alive, more dynamic and more real. We experience a kind of joy – the one being lived here – a different kind of joy that comes from the opportunity of working side by side with others to achieve a shared dream. I know that all of you have experienced this.

Now you know how our hearts beat faster when we have a mission, not because someone told you this, but because you experienced it for yourselves. You experienced in your own life that “no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (*Jn 15:13*).

You also experienced some difficult moments that called for additional sacrifice. As you told us, Bartosz, *we also became aware of our own weaknesses*. The good thing is that you did not let those weaknesses get in the way of your service, or bother you too much. You experienced them in serving others, yes; in trying to understand and help other volunteers and pilgrims, yes; but you were determined not to let this stop you or paralyze you, you went ahead. May our limits and weaknesses not paralyze us, let us go on ahead with our defects, we will correct them, so as to keep moving forwards. This is the beauty of knowing that we are sent, the joy of knowing that, in spite of every difficulty, we have a mission to carry out. Let our limitations, our weaknesses and even our sins not hold us back and stop us from living the mission, because God invites us to do what we can and ask for what we cannot, in the knowledge that his love is taking hold of us and transforming us progressively (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 49-50). Do not be alarmed by your weaknesses, and do not fear when you see your sins. Get up and move forwards, always forwards. Don’t remain fallen down, don’t close yourselves in, but go on ahead as you are, move forwards, because God knows how to forgive all things. Let us learn from so many, like Bartosz, who put service and mission first, and you will see that everything else will follow.

I thank you all, because in these days you have been attentive to even the smallest details, the most ordinary and apparently insignificant details, like offering someone a glass of water. Yet you have also been concerned with the larger things that called for careful planning. You prepared every detail with joy, creativity and commitment, and with much prayer. The things we pray over, we feel them and live them more profoundly. Prayer gives substance and vitality to everything we do. In praying, we discover that we are part of a family larger than what we can see or imagine. In praying, we open everything we do to the Church that supports and accompanies us from heaven, to the saints who have shown us the way, but above all, in praying, we open it all to God so that he may act, enter and claim victory.

You have dedicated your time, and your energy and resources, to dreaming and putting together this meeting. You could have easily chosen to do other things, but you wanted to be involved. A phrase that others want to erase: “to be involved”. This makes you grow, makes you greater, as you are, but... involved. To give your best to making possible the miracle of the multiplication not only of loaves but also of hope. And when you give the best of yourselves, getting involved with dedication, you see the miracle of the multiplication of hope. We need to multiply hope. Thank you for all this! In this, you show us, once again, that it is possible to set aside your own interests in order to help others. As you did, Stella Maris. I had read the testimonies earlier, which is why I was able to write these words, and yet when I read yours I felt a desire to cry. You put aside your own interests, you saved up to attend the World Youth Day in Krakow, but decided not to go, so that you could care for your three grandparents. You gave up something in order to honour your roots and this makes you a woman, it makes you adult, it makes you brave. You gave up something you wanted to do and had dreamed about, in order to help and accompany your family, to honour your roots, to be there with them; but the Lord, without you imagining it or desiring it, was preparing a gift for you; the celebration of WYD in your own country. The Lord likes to joke in this way, he likes to repay generosity in this way, for in generosity he always wins: you give the Lord a little and he gives you a massive amount, just like this. The Lord is like that, what can we do about it; that’s the way he loves us. Like Stella Maris, many of you also made all sorts of sacrifices. Many of you made sacrifices... Think now, what did I set aside to be here as a volunteer? Think a minute. You who have thought about this, have had to defer your dreams to care for your land, your roots. The Lord always blesses that, and he can never be outdone in generosity. Every time we forego something that we like for the good of others and especially for those most in need, or for the good of our roots as in the case of our grandparents and our elderly, the Lord pays it back a hundredfold. He always wins in generosity, for no one can beat him in this; no one can outdo him in love. Friends, give and it will be given to you, and you will experience how the Lord “puts into your lap good measure,

pressed down, shaken together, and running over” (*Lk 6:38*), as the Gospel says.

Dear friends, you have had a more lively and real experience of faith; you have experienced the strength born of prayer and a new and different kind of joy, the fruit of working side by side even with people you did not know. Now is the moment when you are sent forth: go out and tell, go out and bear witness, go out and spread the word about everything you have seen and heard. And don't do this with lots of words but rather, as you did here, with simple and ordinary gestures, those that transform and renew all things. Gestures capable of creating a mess, a constructive mess, a loving mess. Let me tell you something. On my first day here I saw a woman with a bonnet, an elderly lady, a grandmother, at the barrier where we were driving by, and she had a sign saying: “We grandmothers also know how to make a mess” with the words added below, “with wisdom”. Join the grandparents to make a mess, it will be a real mess, a really clever mess, don't be frightened of it, go out and speak. I thought the lady was quite elderly and so I asked her age: she was 14 years younger than me, what an embarrassment!

Let us ask the Lord for his blessing. May he bless your families and your communities, and all those whom you will meet and encounter in the days to come. Let us also place our hearts, and what we feel in our hearts, under the mantle of the Blessed Virgin. May Our Lady accompany you. And, as I told you in Krakow, I do not know if I will be there for the next World Youth Day, but I assure you that Peter will be there to confirm you in faith. Press on, with courage and strength, and please, I am a sinner in my soul, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

[Prayer]

And now I will give you the blessing. Let us place in our hearts all that we are, all that we desire, the persons with whom we have worked in this time, the other volunteers, the people we have seen. We place in our hearts our friends so that they may receive the blessing; and we also place in our hearts those who do not like us, our enemies, and each of us has some, so that Jesus may also bless them, and so that all together we may move forwards.

[Blessing]
