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**Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis in Mozambique, Madagascar and Mauritius (4 to 10 September 2019) – Vigil with young people in the diocesan field of Soamandrakizay in Antananarivo**

## Vigil with young people in the diocesan field of Soamandrakizay

This afternoon, at 17.40 (16.40 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis arrived in the diocesan field of Soamandrakizay for the prayer vigil with young people.

After touring among the faithful in the popemobile, at 18.00 (17.00 in Rome), the Pope presided at the vigil which began with the address from Bishop Fulgence Razakarivony, M.S., of Ihosy and president of the Episcopal Commission for young people.

A dance performance was followed by testimonies from young people, alternated with hymns. The Holy Father then addressed those present.

At the end of the vigil, after a final dance and after the recitation of the Pater Noster, the prayer of entrustment to Our Lady and the final blessing, Pope Francis returned by car to the apostolic nunciature of Antananarivo.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the prayer vigil with young people:

## Address of the Holy Father

I thank you, Monsignor, for your words of welcome. Thank you too, dear young people who have come from every corner of this beautiful island, despite the efforts and difficulty this has entailed for many of you. And yet, here you are! That makes me all the more happy to join you for this prayer vigil to which the Lord Jesus has invited us. Thank you for the songs and traditional dances you performed with such enthusiasm. People told me beforehand of your remarkable joy and enthusiasm, and they were not wrong!

Thank you, Rova Sitraka and Vavy Elyssa, for sharing with each of us the process of seeking, with its hopes and challenges, that brought you here today. How good it is to meet two young people with a living faith, a faith on the move! Jesus always leaves our hearts restless; he shows us the way and gets us moving. Jesus' disciples, if they wish to grow in friendship, must not keep still, complaining or looking inward. They need to be on the move, acting, committed, certain that the Lord is supporting and accompanying them.

That is why I like to think of every young person as a seeker. Do you remember the first question Jesus put to his disciples on the banks of the river Jordan? The first question was: "What do you seek?" (*Jn* 1:38). The Lord knows that we are looking for the "happiness for which we were created" and which "the world will not be able to take from us" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 1; 177). Each person shows it differently, but deep down all of you are looking for the happiness that no one will be able to take from us (cf. *ibid.*, 177).

You told us, Rova, that in your heart you had long wanted to visit prisoners. You began by helping a priest in his ministry, and little by little you became more and more involved, to the point where this became your personal mission. You realized that your life is a mission. This search, born of faith, helps make the world in which we live a better place, more in accord with the Gospel. What you did for others also transformed you; it changed your way of seeing and judging people. It made you a fairer and more sensitive person. You understood and discovered that the Lord is part of your life: he gives you a happiness that the world cannot take away from you.

Rova, in your mission, you learned to stop labelling people and instead to call them by name, as the Lord does with us. He does not call us by our sins, our errors, our faults, our limits, but by our name; each of us is precious in his eyes. The devil also knows our names, but he would rather call us by constantly reminding us of our sins and errors; in this way, he makes us feel that however much we do, nothing can ever change, everything will remain the same. The Lord will have none of that. The Lord always reminds us how precious we are in his eyes, and he entrusts us with a mission.

Rova, you learned to see the distinctiveness of each person, but also the history hidden behind each face. You abandoned the quick and easy criticism that always paralyzes us, and you learned something that, for many people, takes years to discover. You realized that a good number of those in prison were there not because they were bad, but because they had made bad choices. They took the wrong path and they realize it, but now they long to make a fresh start.

This reminds us of one of the most beautiful gifts that our friendship with Jesus can offer us: "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" (*Christus Vivit*, 2), and he entrusts you with a mission. Today he asks all of us to discover and to celebrate that gift.

We all know, also from personal experience, that people can "go astray" and run after enticing illusions that promise what seems to be quick, easy and instantaneous joy, but that end up leaving our hearts, our dreams and our soul stranded along the way. Be careful about those who promise easy roads and who then abandon you halfway. When we are young, these illusions seduce us with promises that ultimately deaden us; they take away our vitality and joy; they leave us dependent and bitter, trapped in a dead end.

About becoming bitter... Perhaps it is not the case, but there is a risk that you can start thinking: "That's the way things are... nothing will change and no one can alter a single thing". Especially when you lack the bare necessities to make it from day to day or to pursue your studies, or when you realize that without a job, stability and social injustice, your future is blocked... and are then tempted to give up. Be careful when faced with this bitterness! Be careful!

The Lord is the first to tell you no! This is not the way to go. He is alive and he also wants you to be alive. He wants you to share all your gifts and charisms, all your dreams and your talents (cf. *ibid.*, 1). The Lord calls each of us by name and says: Follow me! He does not call us to run after mirages, but to become missionary disciples here and now. He is the first to reject all those voices that would lull you to sleep, make you passive, numb and apathetic, and thus prevent you from seeking new horizons. With Jesus, there are always new horizons to be

sought. He wants to change us and to make our lives a mission. But he tells us one thing: he tells us not to be afraid to get our hands dirty.

Through you, the future is coming to Madagascar and to the Church. The Lord is the first to trust in you, but he also asks you to trust in yourselves, to trust in your own skills and abilities, which are many. He asks you to encourage one another and join him in writing the most beautiful page of your lives, rejecting apathy and, like Rova, offering a Christian answer to the many problems that you face. The Lord calls us to be builders of the future (cf. *ibid.*, 174). You will be the builders of the future! He invites you to contribute as only you can, by the joy and freshness of your faith. To each one of you – you, you, and you... – I ask and invite you to ask yourself: Can the Lord count on you? Can your fellow Madagascans count on you? Can Madagascar, your fatherland, count on you?

The Lord is not looking for lone adventurers. He gives us a mission, yes, but he does not send us out alone to the front lines.

Vavy Elyssa made this point very well. It is impossible to be a missionary disciple all by ourselves. We need others in order to experience and share the love and the trust that the Lord has shown us. A personal encounter with Jesus is essential, not simply as individuals but also in community. Certainly, we can accomplish great things on our own, but together we can dream of and undertake things undreamt of! Vavy put it nicely: we are invited to find the face of Jesus in the face of others. By celebrating the faith in our families, by creating fraternal bonds, by sharing in the life of a group or movement and by encouraging one another to blaze a trail together in solidarity. In this way, we can learn to discern the paths the Lord is inviting us to take, the horizons he is preparing for you! Never withdraw from others, or want to go it alone! This is one of the worst possible temptations.

In community, that is, together, we can learn how to recognize little everyday miracles, like all those things that give us a glimpse of how beautiful it is to follow and love Jesus. Often, in an unassuming way, as in the case your parents, Vavy. Although they are from different ethnic groups, each with its own customs and traditions, their mutual love has enabled them to overcome trials and disagreements. They show you a beautiful path to take. A path confirmed each time they give the fruits of the earth to be offered at the altar. How badly we need these witnesses! Or like your aunt or the catechists and priests who accompanied and supported them as they grew in faith. All of this helped and encouraged you, and led up to your “yes”. We are all important – all of us – we are all necessary, and no one can say, “I don’t need you”. No one can say: “I don’t need you”, or “You are not part of this loving plan that was the Father’s dream when he created us”.

Now, I would like to throw a challenge to all of you: I would want all of you to say: *No one can say: “I don’t need you”*. Three times... [*repeated three times*]. You’re all great!

I’m about to finish, so be quiet because it’s cold [they laugh] – we are one great family, and so we can learn that we have a Mother: the patroness of Madagascar, the Blessed Virgin Mary. I have always been struck by the determination with which the young Mary said “yes” – she was young like you. The determination with which she said to the angel: “Let it be done to me”. She was far from saying: “Yes, well, let’s see how things turn out”. No. Mary could not imagine saying: “Let’s see how things turn out”. She simply said “yes”. It is the “yes” of all those willing to commit themselves and take risks, ready to stake everything, with no guarantee except the sure conviction of knowing they are bearers of a promise. That young woman of Nazareth is now the Mother who watches over her children as they walk in life, often weary and in need, but always anxious that the light of hope not be extinguished. This is what we desire for Madagascar, for each of you and your friends: that the light of hope not be extinguished. Our Mother looks at this great assembly of young people who love her and seek her in the silence of their hearts, despite the noise of the world and the chatter and distractions of the journey. They pray to her that their hope will never be extinguished (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 44-48).

To Mary I entrust the lives of each of you, and those of your families and your friends. May you never lack the light of hope, and may Madagascar be increasingly the land the Lord has dreamt of. May Our Lady accompany you and protect you always.

And, please, do not forget to pray for me.

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