



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL MEETING OF YOUNG PEOPLE
AT THE SHRINE OF APARECIDA**

[29-30 July 2017]

Dear young people,

I greet you affectionately, young people of Brazil, who have gathered in Aparecida on the occasion of the closing of the “Rota 300” project, in this Marian Year in which we are commemorating the 300 years since the recovery of the figure of Our Lady from the waters of the Paraíba do Sul River.

On this occasion, I would like to emphasize one aspect of the Message that I wrote to you this year, during the Thirty-second World Youth Day: the Virgin Mary is a precious model for young people and a help on life’s path. For you to be able to perceive this truth, no deep reflection is necessary; it suffices to contemplate the figure of the Mother of Aparecida during the pilgrimage you will make to her National Shrine. I experienced this when I was there in 2007, on the occasion of the Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate and subsequently in 2003, during the wyd in Rio de Janeiro.

I was able to discover there, in the tender and maternal gaze of the *Vergine Morena* and in the eyes of the ordinary people contemplating her, the secret of the hope that enables the Brazilian people to face everyday challenges with faith and courage. I was also able to contemplate the revolutionary force of an affectionate Mother who moves the heart of her children to go out of themselves with great missionary impetus, as you have also done during the missionary week that has just concluded in the Paraíba Valley. Congratulations on this witness!

Dear friends, among the uncertainties and insecurities of every day, in the precariousness that the situations of injustice create around you, may you have one certainty: Mary is a sign of hope that will give you courage with a great missionary impulse. She knows the challenges you face in life. With her attention and her motherly accompaniment, she will make you perceive that you are not

alone. In this sense, it is worth remembering the story of those poor fishermen who, after fishing with no catch, in the Paraíba do Sul River, cast their nets once again and were surprised by the broken, muddy figure of Our Lady. They found the body first, then the head. As the Brazilian Bishops commented in 2013, the fact contains highly significant symbolism: what was divided returns to unity, as the heart of those fishermen, as colonial Brazil itself, divided by slavery, which found its unity in the faith inspired by that black figure of Our Lady (cf. *Address to the Bishops of Brazil*, 27 July 2013). For this reason, I invite you too to let your hearts be transformed by the encounter with Our Aparecida Mother. May She transform the “nets” of your life — friendship networks, social networks, physical and virtual networks — realities that so often are divided, into something more meaningful: that they may be converted into a community! “Outward bound” missionary communities! May your communities be light and leaven for a more just and fraternal society.

Thus integrated into your communities, may you not be afraid to take risks and to work hard at building a new society, permeating social, political, economic and university environments with the power of the Gospel! Do not be afraid to fight corruption and do not let yourselves be seduced by it! Trusting in the Lord, whose presence is the source of abundant life, and under the mantle of Mary, you can rediscover creativity and strength to be protagonists of a culture of alliance and thus generate new paradigms to guide the life of Brazil (cf. *Message to celam Assembly*, 8 May 2017).

May the Lord, through the intercession of the Virgin of Aparecida, renew hope and the missionary spirit in each one of you. You are the hope of Brazil and of the world. And this novelty, of which you are bearers, has already begun to be built today. May Our Lady, who in her youth knew how to courageously embrace the call of God in her life and to go to meet the most needy, stand before you, guiding you in all your journeys! For this reason, I impart to each one of you, and I extend to your families and friends, an Apostolic Blessing, asking you, please, to pray for me too.

From the Vatican, 3 July 2017

Francis