



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Paul VI Audience Hall

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## Apostolic Journey to Panama

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today I will reflect with you on my recent [Apostolic Journey to Panama](#). I invite you to give thanks with me to the Lord for this grace that he wished to give to the Church and to the people of that dear country. I thank the President of Panama and the other Authorities, the Bishops and I thank all the volunteers — there were so many — for their warm and informal welcome, the same as we witnessed in the people who hastened to greet me everywhere, with great faith and enthusiasm. One thing that struck me greatly: the people lifted the children up in their arms. As the popemobile passed, all those with children held them up as if to say: “Here is my pride, here is my future!”. And they showed off their children. But they were many! And the fathers and mothers were proud of those children. I thought: there is so much dignity in this gesture and how eloquent it is compared with the demographic winter we are experiencing in Europe! Children are the pride of that family. Children are the security for the future. The demographic winter, without children, is harsh!

The reason for this Journey was World Youth Day, although the encounters with young people were intertwined with others that were part of the country’s situation: [authorities](#), [bishops](#), [young detainees](#), [consecrated people](#) and a [care home](#). Everything seemed ‘contagious’ and combined with the joyful presence of young people: a celebration for them and a celebration for Panama, as well as for all of Central America, marked by many tragedies and in need of hope, peace and justice too.

This World Youth Day was preceded by an encounter with Indigenous and African American peoples. A beautiful gesture: the young Indigenous people and the youth of African descent shared five days of encounters. There are many of them in that region. They opened the doors of World Day. And this is an important initiative which demonstrated even better the diversified face of the Church in Latin America: Latin America is of mixed race. Then, with the arrival of groups from all over the world, a great symphony of faces and languages was formed, as is typical of this

event. Seeing all the flags displayed together, waving in the hands of young people who were happy to meet each other, is a prophetic sign, a sign that runs counter to today's sad tendency toward hostile nationalism that builds walls and is closed to universality, to the encounter of peoples. It is a sign that young Christians are the leaven of peace in the world.

This wyd had a weighty *Marian imprint* because its theme was expressed in the Virgin's words to the Angel: "*I am the servant of the Lord: May it be done to me according to your word*" (Lk 1:38). It was great to hear these words uttered by representatives of young people from all five different continents, and above all, to see them shine on their faces. As long as there are new generations capable of saying, "here I am" to God, the world will have a future.

Among the wyd events there is always the Via Crucis. Walking with Mary behind Jesus who carries the cross is the Christian school of life: there we learn patient, silent, tangible love. Allow me to share something with you. I truly enjoy undertaking the *Via Crucis* because it is like walking with Mary behind Jesus. And I always carry with me a pocket *Via Crucis* that was given to me by a very apostolic person in Buenos Aires, in order to observe it at any time. And when I have time, I go and follow the *Via Crucis*. You too should practice the *Via Crucis* because it is like following Jesus with Mary on the way of the Cross where he gave his life for us, for our redemption. In the *Via Crucis*, we learn patient, silent and concrete love. In Panama the young people, along with Jesus and Mary, bore the burden of the condition of many suffering brothers and sisters in Central America and in the entire world. Among them there are many young victims of various forms of slavery and poverty. In this sense there were highly significant moments: the Penitential Liturgy that I celebrated in a *rehabilitation centre for minors* and the visit to the 'Good Samaritan' care home, which accommodates people suffering from hiv/aids.

The culmination of wyd and of the journey were the Vigil and the Mass with young people. At the Vigil — in that field filled with young people who participated in the Vigil; they slept there and at 8:00 am they participated in Mass — at the Vigil, the lively dialogue was renewed with all the young men and young women, enthusiastic and also capable of silence and of listening. They went from enthusiastic listening to prayer, in silence. I proposed Mary to them as the one who, in her smallness, more than anyone else had 'influenced' the history of the world: we called her the '*influencer* of God'. The beautiful and strong testimonies of several young people were reflected in her '*fiat*'. On Sunday morning, in the great final Eucharistic celebration, the Risen Christ, with the power of the Holy Spirit, spoke anew to the young people of the world, calling them to live the Gospel *today*, because young people are not the 'tomorrow'; no they are the 'today' for 'tomorrow'. They are not the 'meantime', but are the 'today' of the Church and of the world. And I made an appeal to adults to ensure that the new generations may not lack instruction, work, community and family. And this is key at this time in the world, because these things are lacking. Instruction, that is, education. Work: how many young people are without it. Community: may they feel welcomed in the family and in society.

The meeting with all the Bishops of Central America was a special moment of solace for me. Together, we allowed ourselves to be taught by the witness of Saint Bishop Oscar Romero, in order to learn ever better how to ‘listen with the Church’ — it was his episcopal motto — in proximity to young people, to the poor, to priests, to the holy, faithful People of God.

And the consecration of the altar of the restored Cathedral of Santa Maria La Antigua in Panama held a strong symbolic value. It was closed for seven years for restoration work. A sign of rediscovered beauty, to the glory of God and for the faith and celebration of his people. The Chrism that consecrated the altar is the same that anoints the baptized, confirmands, priests and bishops. May the family of the Church, in Panama and in the entire world, draw from the Holy Spirit ever new fruitfulness, in order that the pilgrimage of young missionary disciples of Jesus Christ may continue and may spread on earth.

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord’s blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

I address a particular thought to *young people*, to *the elderly*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*.

Tomorrow we will celebrate the memorial of Saint John Bosco, father and teacher of young people: he was a good priest! Don Bosco knew how to make God’s embrace felt by all the young people he met, offering them hope, a home, a future. May his witness help all of us to consider how important it is to educate the new generations in authentic human and spiritual values.