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Meeting of the Holy Father with the participants in the 12th International Pilgrimage of Altar Servers

Homily of the Holy Father

Dialogue of the Holy Father with the Altar Servers

At 17.50 today, the Holy Father Francis entered Saint Peter's Square, where he met with the participants in the 12th International Pilgrimage of Altar Servers of the *Coetus internationalis ministrantium* (CIM) Association, taking place in Rome from 30 July to 3 August, with the motto inspired by Verse 14 of Psalm 34, "Seek peace and pursue it".

Upon arrival, after a tour of the square among the young people by popemobile, and greetings from the bishop of Zrenjanin, Serbia, H.E. Msgr. Ladislav Nemet, president of the CIM, the Holy Father responded to questions addressed to him by five altar servers from Luxembourg, Portugal, Antigua and Barbuda, Germany, and Serbia.

Immediately afterwards there was a moment of prayer presided over by the Holy Father, during which Pope Francis pronounced a brief homily.

Over 60,000 boys and girls were present, from 18 countries (Italy, Belgium, France, Croatia, Luxembourg, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Switzerland, Serbia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Hungary, the United States and Caribbean territories such as Antigua and Barbuda), accompanied by H.E. Msgr. Ladislav Nemet.

The largest group of altar servers – around 50,000 – came from Germany, accompanied by the president of the Commission for Young People of the German Episcopal Conference, Msgr. Stefan Oster, S.D.B., bishop of Passau, and by numerous other prelates, members of the Episcopal Conference.

The following is the text of the homily and the Holy Father's dialogue with the young people present in Saint Peter's Square:

Homily of the Holy Father

“Do everything for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). So Saint Paul told us in the reading we just heard. To give glory to God in everything we do: that is the ultimate criterion for all our words and actions. It sums up what it means to be a friend of Jesus. It shows us the way when we are unsure about the right thing to do. It helps us recognize God’s voice speaking in the depths of our conscience so that we can know his will. God’s glory is the needle of our moral compass.

Saint Paul also gives us another criterion: *“Try to please everyone in everything, so that they may be saved.* All of us are God’s children; we all have the same desires, hopes and aspirations. When some of us grow discouraged, the rest of us should try to brighten their day and cheer them up. This helps all of us to remain friends and to show the love of God and the joy of faith in our everyday lives. If we keep doing this, it will help our brothers and sisters to come to know Jesus, our one Saviour and the hope of the world.

Maybe you are wondering: “Can I do this? Isn’t it too much for me?” Certainly, it is a great mission, but it is not impossible. Once again, Saint Paul encourages us: *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”*. We can carry out this mission by imitating Jesus, like the apostle Paul and all the saints. Let us look to the saints. They are the living Gospel, because they translated the message of Christ in their own lives. Today is the feast of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. As a young soldier, he was concerned with his own glory yet, in good time, he was attracted by the glory of God, and there he discovered the heart and meaning of life itself. So let us imitate the saints. Let everything we do be for God’s glory and the salvation of our brothers and sisters. But be attentive and remember: follow the saints on this path. On this path of holiness there is no room for the lazy. Thank you!

Dialogue of the Holy Father with the Altar Servers

Dear Servers, Good evening!

I am happy to see you in such great numbers here in Saint Peter’s Square, adorned with your colourful banners. I’ve already also had the joy of seeing you at midday, and in this heat: you are brave! Well done! Thank you very much for giving me the emblems of your pilgrimage! I am a pilgrim with you. You have come from many countries throughout the world, yet all of us are united by our faith in Jesus Christ. We are journeying together with him who is our peace. I thank your President, Bishop Nemet, for his kind greeting on your behalf. He asked me to encourage you, he said: “Ermutigen Sie sie, Heiliger Vater!” I must encourage you. I therefore hand over to you, so that you can ask the questions.

1. From Luxembourg

Saint-Père, en tant que servants d’autel et aussi comme croyants, nous nous donnons la paix par le signe de la paix pendant la Sainte Messe. Comment pouvons-nous contribuer à faire sortir cette paix également hors des murs de nos églises et ainsi être des bâtisseurs de paix dans nos communautés, dans nos pays, dans nos familles et dans le monde?

[Holy Father, as altar servers and also as believers, we give each other peace with the sign of peace during the Holy Mass. How can we help take this peace out of the walls of our churches and be builders of peace in our communities, in our countries, in our families and in the world?]

Holy Father

Thank you! You put it very well: peace and Holy Mass go together. Just before the sign of peace, we ask the Lord to grant peace and unity to the Church community. Peace is his gift; it transforms us, so that, as members of Jesus’ body, we can share in his sentiments, think as he thinks – the same sentiments as Jesus, and think as

Jesus thinks! – love as he loves. And this brings peace. At the end of Mass, we are sent forth with the words: “Go in peace”, that is: take peace with you in order to give it to others, give it through your life, your smile, your works of charity. Concrete commitment to peace is proof of the fact that we are truly Christ’s disciples. Making peace begins with little things. For example, at home after a quarrel, do I go off by myself – let me ask you – and act hurt, or do I make an effort to go back and reach out? Do I know how to make peace with small gestures? Am I willing to ask myself in every situation: “What would Jesus do in my place?” If we can do this, if we really put it into practice, we will bring Christ’s peace to our everyday lives. Then we will be peacemakers and channels of God’s peace. Thank you.

2 From Portugal

Santo Padre, somos acólitos. Servimos o Senhor junto do altar e contemplamo-Lo na Eucaristia. Como poderemos viver a contemplação espiritual a exemplo de Maria e o serviço prático a exemplo de Marta, procurando reconhecer concretamente, na nossa vida, aquilo que Jesus quer de nós?

[Holy Father, we are acolytes. We serve the Lord at the altar and contemplate Him in the Eucharist. How can we live spiritual contemplation like Mary and practical service like Martha, seeking to recognize concretely in our lives what Jesus wants from us?]

Holy Father

In a real way, as altar servers, you share in the experience of Martha and Mary. It would be wonderful if, alongside your service to the liturgy, you could become more involved in the life of your parish and also spend some time in silence in the Lord’s presence: both of these. In this interplay of action and contemplation, we come to realize God’s plan for us. We see the talents and interests God has given us and how best to develop them. Even more importantly, we place ourselves humbly before God, just as we are: as we are, without masks, just as we are, before God, with our good qualities and our limitations, and ask him how we can best serve him and our neighbour. Don’t be afraid to ask for a word of helpful advice when you are wondering how to serve God and all those people throughout the world who need our help. Remember: the more you give yourself to others, the more you will get back in personal fulfilment and true happiness! Thank you.

3 From Antigua and Barbuda

Holy Father, as altar servers it makes us sad to see how few of our own age group come to Mass or take part in the life of our parishes. In some countries, for a variety of reasons, the Church is rapidly losing many young people. How can we, and our communities, reach out to these people and bring them back to Christ and to the family of the Church?

Holy Father

Even now, as young people, you can be apostles, capable of drawing others to Jesus. This will happen if you are full of enthusiasm for him, for Jesus, if you have encountered him, if you have come to know him personally, and been yourselves “won over” by him. So here is what I would say. Try to know and love the Lord Jesus more and more – I want to repeat this: try to know and love the Lord more and more, encountering him in prayer, at Mass, in the reading of the Gospel, in the faces of the lowly and the poor. Try also to be friends, with no strings attached, to all those around you, so that a ray of Jesus’ light can shine on them through your own heart in love with him. Dear young people, there is no need for lots of words; more important are your actions, your closeness, your desire to serve, your silent gaze before the Blessed Sacrament. Young people – and everyone else for that matter – need friends who can give a good example, who are ready to act without expecting anything in return. In this way, you will also help others to see how beautiful is the community of believers, because the Lord dwells in its midst. And to see how beautiful it is to be part of the family of the Church. Thank you.

4 From Germany

Heiliger Vater, viele Menschen sagen, sie brauchen Gott, Religion und Kirche nicht in ihrem Leben. Warum sollte man sich gerade für den katholischen Glauben entscheiden, was ist das wichtigste dabei? Und warum ist der Glaube für Sie so wichtig?

[Holy Father, many people say they do not need God, religion and church in their lives. Why choose the Catholic faith, what is the most important thing? And why is belief so important to you?]

Holy Father

Faith is essential; faith gives me life. I would say that faith is like the air we breathe. We don't think, with every breath we take, how necessary air is, but when it isn't there, or it isn't clean, we realize right away how important it is! Faith helps us to grasp the meaning of life: that there is Someone who loves us infinitely and that that Someone is God. He infinitely loves me. We can recognize God as our Creator and our Saviour; we can love God and accept that our life is his gift. God wants to enter into a living relationship with us. He wants to build relationships, and we are called to do the same. A person cannot believe in God and then think that he or she is an only child! The only Child God has is Jesus. An only child, because he is God. But among men, there is no such thing as an only child of God. Reflect on this! All of us are children of God. We are called to make up God's family, the Church, the community of brothers and sisters in Christ. As Saint Paul says (*Eph 2:19*), we are "members of the household of God". And in this family of the Church, the Lord nourishes his sons and daughters with his word and with his sacraments. Thank you.

5 From Serbia

Szentatya, a mi ministránsi szolgálatunk szép, nagyon szeretjük. Szolgálni akarjuk az Urat és felebarátunkat. De jól tenni nem mindig könnyű, nem vagyunk még szentek. Hogyan fordíthatnánk át szolgálatunkat a mindennapi életben a szeretet konkrét tetteire az életszentség felé vezető úton?

[Holy Father, our work as altar servers is beautiful, and we really love it. We want to serve the Lord and our neighbour. But doing good is not always easy, and we are still not holy. How can we turn our service in everyday life into concrete actions of love on the path of holiness?]

Holy Father

Yes, it does take effort to keep doing good and to become saints... You know, the path to holiness is not for the lazy: it requires effort. I see that you servers are committed to taking this path. The Lord Jesus gave us a simple plan for advancing in the way of holiness: the commandment of love of God and of neighbour. Let us make an effort to deepen our friendship with God, to be grateful for his love and to want to serve him in all things. In this way, we cannot help but share the gift of his love with others. To make the commandment of love all the more concrete, Jesus gave us the works of mercy. I would like to ask who among you knows the works of mercy. I am sure that your bishops have taught them to you. But you, do you know them well, the works of mercy? If you don't know them, how can you practice them? This is important: the works of mercy. They are demanding, yet within the reach of all. To practice a work of mercy, it is not necessary to go to university and get a degree. All of us can practice the works of mercy. They are within everyone's reach. We have only to start asking ourselves: "What can I do today to meet the needs of my neighbour", of this neighbour: my brothers and sisters, my dad, my mum, my grandparents, my friends, the poor, the sick...; just one of them each day. What can I do to meet the needs of my neighbour? It makes no difference whether it is a friend or a stranger, a countryman or a foreigner: he or she is my neighbour. Believe me, by doing this, you can become real saints, men and woman who transform the world by living the love of Christ. It is true, it is not easy, it requires effort. Yet remember, I repeat it: the path to holiness is not for the lazy.

Thank you for this conversation!
