



MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER LEO XIV
FOR THE 40th WORLD YOUTH DAY

23 November 2025

"You also are my witnesses, because you have been with me" (Jn 15:27).

Dear young people,

As I begin my first message to you, I would like to say thank you! Thank you for the joy you brought when you came to Rome for your Jubilee, and thank you to all the young people who were united to us through their prayer from every part of the world. It was a precious moment for renewing our enthusiasm for the faith and sharing the hope that burns in our hearts! Rather than being an isolated event, I hope the Jubilee encounter marks for each of you a step forward in Christian life and a strong encouragement to persevere in witnessing to your faith.

That same dynamic is at the heart of the next World Youth Day, which we will celebrate on 23 November, Solemnity of Christ the King, with the theme: "You also are my witnesses, because you have been with me" (Jn 15:27). As pilgrims of hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we prepare ourselves to become courageous witnesses of Christ. Let us begin a journey that will lead us to the international World Youth Day in Seoul in 2027. With this in mind, I would like to focus on two aspects of witness: our friendship with Jesus, which we receive from God as a gift, and our commitment to be builders of peace in society.

Friends, therefore witnesses

Christian witness arises from friendship with the Lord, who was crucified and rose for the salvation of all. This witness is not to be confused with ideological propaganda, for it is an authentic principle of interior transformation and social awareness. Jesus chose to call his disciples "friends." He made known to them the Kingdom of God, asked them to remain with him, to become his community, and sent them to proclaim the Gospel (cf. Jn 15:15, 27). So when Jesus tells us, "Be witnesses," he is assuring us that he considers us as his friends. He alone fully knows who we are and why we are here; young people, he knows your heart, your indignation in the face of discrimination and injustice, your desire for truth and beauty, for joy and peace. Through his friendship, he listens to you, motivates you, and guides you, calling each of you to a new life.

The gaze of Jesus, who always wants nothing but our good, precedes us (cf. Mk 10:21). He does not want us to be servants, nor "activists" of a political party; he calls us to be with him as friends, so that our lives may be renewed. And witness arises spontaneously from the joyful newness of this friendship. It is a unique friendship that grants us communion with God, a faithful friendship that helps us discover our dignity and that of others, an eternal friendship that not even death can destroy, because the risen and crucified Lord is its source.

Let us consider the message the Apostle John gives us at the end of the fourth Gospel: "This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true" (Jn 21:24). The entire preceding account is summarized as a "testimony," full of gratitude and wonder, from a disciple who never reveals his name, but calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved." This title reflects a relationship: it is not the name of an individual, but the testimony of a personal bond with Christ. That is what really matters to John: being a disciple of the Lord and feeling loved by him. We understand, then, that Christian witness is the fruit of a relationship of faith and love with Jesus, in whom we find the salvation of our lives. What the Apostle John writes also refers to you, dear young people. You are invited by Christ to follow him and sit beside him, to listen to his heart and share closely in his life! Each one of you is a "beloved disciple" for him, and from this love comes the joy of witness.

Another courageous witness to the Gospel is the Precursor of Jesus, John the Baptist, who came "to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him" (Jn 1:7). Although he enjoyed great fame among the people, he knew well that he was only a "voice" pointing to the Savior when he exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:36). His example reminds us that true witnesses do not seek to occupy the center stage, nor to bind their followers to themselves. True witnesses are humble and inwardly free, above all from themselves, that is, from the pretense of being the center of attention. Therefore, they are free to listen, to understand, and also to speak the truth to everyone, even in the presence of those who are powerful. From John the Baptist, we learn that Christian witness is neither a proclamation of ourselves nor a celebration of our spiritual, intellectual or moral abilities. True witness is recognizing and pointing to Jesus when he appears, as he is the only one who saves us. John recognized him among sinners, immersed in common humanity. To that end, Pope Francis insisted so often that if we do not go beyond ourselves and our comfort zones, if we do not go to the poor and those who feel excluded from the Kingdom of God, we cannot encounter Christ and bear witness to him. We lose the sweet joy of being evangelized and of evangelizing.

Dear friends, I invite each of you to continue to individuate Jesus' friends and witnesses in the Bible. As you read the Gospel, you will find that they all discovered the true meaning of life through their living relationship with Christ. Indeed, our deepest questions are not heard or answered by endlessly scrolling on our cell phones, which captures our attention but leaves us with tired minds and empty hearts. This search will not take us far if we keep it closed within ourselves or in narrow confinements. The fulfillment of our authentic desires always comes through going beyond ourselves.

Witnesses, therefore missionaries

In this way, dear young people, with the help of the Holy Spirit, you can become missionaries of Christ in the world. Many of your peers are exposed to violence, forced to use weapons, separated from their loved ones, and compelled to migrate or flee. Many lack education and other essential goods. All share with you the search for meaning and the insecurity that accompanies it, the discomfort of growing social and work pressures, the difficulty of dealing with family crises, the painful feeling of a lack of opportunities, as well as the remorse for mistakes they have made. You can stand alongside other young people, walk with them and show that God, in Jesus, has drawn close to each person. As Pope Francis often said, "Christ shows that God is closeness, compassion and tender love" (Encyclical Letter Dilexit nos, 35).

Granted, it is not always easy to bear witness. In the Gospels, we often find tension between acceptance and rejection of Jesus: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1:5). Similarly, the disciple-witness experiences rejection firsthand and sometimes even violent opposition. The Lord does not hide this painful reality: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (Jn 15:20). However, it becomes an opportunity to put into practice the greatest commandment: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44). That is what the martyrs have done since the beginning of the Church.

Dear young people, this is not a story that belongs only to the past. To this day, in many places around the world, Christians and people of good will suffer persecution, deceit and violence. Perhaps this painful experience has marked you as well, and you may have been tempted to react instinctively by putting yourselves on the same level as those who have rejected you, adopting aggressive attitudes. But let us recall the wise advice of Saint Paul: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21).

So do not be discouraged: like the saints, you too are called to persevere with hope, especially in the face of difficulties and obstacles.

Fraternity as a bond of peace

From friendship with Christ, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit within us, there arises a way of life that bears the character of fraternity. Young people who have encountered Christ bring the "warmth" and "flavor" of fraternity wherever they go, and anyone who comes into contact with them is drawn into a new and profound dimension, made up of selfless closeness, sincere compassion and genuine tenderness. The Holy Spirit enables us to see our neighbor with new eyes: in the other person there is a brother, a sister!

The witness of fraternity and peace that friendship with Christ awakens in us casts off indifference and spiritual laziness, helping us to overcome closed-mindedness and suspicion. It also builds bonds between us, urging us to work together, from volunteerism to "political charity," to build new living conditions for all. Do not follow those who use the words of faith to divide; instead, make plans to remove inequalities and reconcile divided and oppressed communities. To that end, dear friends, let us listen to the voice of God within us and overcome our selfishness, becoming active artisans of peace. That peace, which is a gift of the risen Lord (cf. Jn 20:19), will become visible in the world through the common witness of those who carry his Spirit in their hearts.

Dear young people, in the face of the world's sufferings and hopes, let us fix our gaze on Jesus. As he was dying on the cross, he entrusted the Virgin Mary to John as his mother, and John to her as her son. That ultimate gift of love is for every disciple, for each of us. I invite you to welcome this holy bond with Mary, a mother full of affection and understanding, and to cultivate it in

particular by praying the Rosary. That way, in every situation of our life, we will experience that we are never alone, for as children we are always loved, forgiven and encouraged by God. Bear witness to this joyfully!

From the Vatican, 7 October 2025, Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Holy Rosary

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