

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

"Parque Eduardo VII" (Lisbon) Wednesday, 3 August 2023 **[Multimedia]**

Dear young people, good evening!

Welcome and thank you for being here. I am pleased to see all of you, and also to hear the delightful noise you are making! This makes me share your infectious joy. It is good to be together in Lisbon. You were invited here by me, and by the Patriarch of Lisbon, whom I thank for his words of greeting. You were invited also by your Bishops, priests, catechists and youth leaders. Let us thank all those who invited you and all those who worked to make this meeting possible. Let's give them a fine round of applause! Yet, above all, it is Jesus who called you here: let us thank Jesus with another round of applause!

You are not here by accident. The Lord has called you, not only in these days, but from the very beginning of your days. He called you by name. Let us listen to the word of God that called us by name. Try to imagine these three words written in large letters. Then consider that they were written within you, on your hearts, as if setting the direction of your lives, the meaning of who you are: you have been *called by name*. Each of us is *called by name*. You, you and you, all of us here, myself included: all of us have been called by name. Not impersonally, but by name. Think of this: Jesus called me by name. His words are inscribed in our hearts, and we come to realize that they are written in the hearts of every one of us, as a kind of title that tells people who we are, who you are. *You have been called by name*. None of us is a Christian by chance; all of us were called by name. At the beginning of the story of our lives, before any talents we may have, before any shadows or wounds we may be carrying in our hearts, we were called. Why? Because we are loved. This is something beautiful. In God's eyes, we are precious children, and He calls us each day in order to embrace and encourage us, to make of us a unique and original masterpiece. Each of us is an "original", whose beauty we can only begin to glimpse.

Dear young people: at this World Youth Day, let us help each other to recognize this reality: may these days be *vibrant echoes of God's call of love*, for we are precious in God's eyes, despite the fact that sometimes our own eyes are dimmed by negativity and dazzled by distractions. Let these be days when my name, and your names, spoken with friendship by brothers and sisters of many languages and nations, resonate as unique news in history, for God's heart beats uniquely for you. Let these be days when we fully realize in our hearts that we are loved just as we are. Not as we want to be, but as we are now. This is the starting point of World Youth Day, but above all it is the starting point of our lives. Young men and women, we are loved the way we are, without makeup. Do you understand that? And each of us is called by name.

That is no mere figure of speech; indeed, it is the Word of God (cf. *Is* 43:1, *2 Tim* 1:9). Dear friends, if God calls you by name, it means that for God none of us is a number, but a face and a heart. I would like each of you to remember that many people know your name, yet they do not call you by name. Certainly your name is known, it appears on social networks and is processed by algorithms that associate it with likes and preferences, all of which is useful for market research, yet it does not begin to approach you in your uniqueness. How many wolves hide behind smiles of false goodness, saying that they know you, though they do not love you. They insist that they believe in you and promise that you will become someone, but then

abandon you when you no longer matter. These are the illusions of the virtual world and we must be careful not to let ourselves be deceived, for many realities that attract us and promise happiness are later shown to be what they really are: soap bubbles, superfluous things that we don't need and that leave us empty inside. Let me tell you: Jesus is not like that. He trusts you, each of you, each of us, because each of us matters to Him, each one of you matters to Him. That is how Jesus is.

That is why we, His Church, are *the community of those who are called*: not of people who are better than others – no, absolutely not – but of sinners, called as such. Let us think seriously for a moment about that: we are called as we are, with our problems and limitations, our overflowing joy, our desire to be better and to get ahead in this world. We are called as we are. Think of this: Jesus calls me as I am, not as I would like to be. We are the community of brothers and sisters of Jesus, sons and daughters of the same Father.

Friends, I want to be clear with you, for you are allergic to falsity and empty words: in the Church, there is room for everyone. Everyone. In the Church, no one is left out or left over. There is room for everyone. Just the way we are. Everyone. Jesus says this clearly. When He sends the apostles to invite people to the banquet which a man had prepared, He tells them: "Go out and bring in everyone", young and old, healthy and infirm, righteous and sinners. Everyone, everyone, everyone! In the Church there is room for everyone. "Father, but I am a wretch, is there room for me? There is room for everyone! All together now, everyone, repeat with me in your own language: Everyone, everyone, everyone. I can't hear you: again! Everyone. Everyone. Everyone. That is the Church, the Mother of all. There is room for everyone. The Lord does not point a finger, but opens His arms. It is odd: the Lord does not know how to do this (pointing), but that (opening wide). He embraces us all. He shows us Jesus on the Cross, who opened His arms wide in order to be crucified and die for us.

Jesus never closes the door, never, but invites you to enter: come and see. Jesus receives, Jesus welcomes. In these days, each of us transmits the love of Jesus. God loves you. God calls you. How lovely this is! God loves me. God calls me. He wants me to be close to Him.

You too, this evening, have asked me questions, a lot of questions. Don't ever stop asking questions, because that is good; it is better, often, than giving answers, because asking questions is a sign of restless, and *restlessness* is the best remedy for mere *routine*, for sometimes routine can dull the soul. Each of us has his or her own questions. Let us bring those questions with us and let us share them in dialogue among ourselves. Let us bring them with us when we pray in God's presence. As life goes on, those questions get answered; we just have to wait for them. Here is something interesting: God loves surprises. He is not a robot; His love is always surprising. He loves to surprise. He always keeps us alert and He keeps us surprised.

Dear young friends, I encourage you to reflect on the beautiful fact that God loves us. God loves us as we are, not how we want to be or how society wants us to be. As we are! He calls us with our faults and failings, our limitations and our hopes in life. That is how God calls us. Trust, because God is a Father and a Father who loves us. This is not very easy. And for this reason we need a great help, the Mother of the Lord. She is our Mother too. She is our Mother.

That is all I wanted to tell you. Don't be afraid, take heart, move forward, knowing that all of us are "mortgaged" by the love God has for us. God loves us. Let us say it all together: God loves us. Louder, I can't hear you. Thank you. Good-bye.