



**Pope to youth in Venice: Get off your phones and pay attention to others**

As he visits the Italian city of Venice, Pope Francis urges young people to make themselves a gift for other people by focusing on how we can help someone else instead of complaining about being alone or misunderstood.

**By Devin Watkins**

Pope Francis met on Sunday morning with young people in Venice in the square in front of the Basilica of St. Mary of Good Health.

The encounter marked the third event of his one-day pastoral visit to the northern Italian city for the Venice Art Biennale.

Speaking to young people, the Pope recalled that we have all received the great gift of being God’s beloved children and are therefore called to share His joy with others.

“We are here today,” he said, “to rediscover in the Lord the beauty that we are and to rejoice in the name of Jesus, a youthful God who loves young people and always surprises us.”

He reflected on two verbs that characterize the Blessed Virgin Mary’s action as soon as she heard she would become the Mother of God: “She arose and went.”

God sees us as children to lift up

“Arise,” said Pope Francis to young people in Venice. “Get up from the ground, because we are made for Heaven. Rise from sadness to lift your gaze upward. Rise to stand in front of life, not to sit on the couch.”

The first thing each of us should do when we wake up each morning, he added, is to thank God for the gift of our lives by saying a little prayer: “My God, thank you for life. My God, make me fall in love with my life. My God, You are my life.”

The Pope recognized that young people must fight an “oppressive inertia” that turns our world into shades of grey.

“May we allow the Lord to take us by the hand, since He never disappoints those who trust in Him, but always lifts up and forgives,” said Pope Francis.

Even when we fall or make mistakes, he added, God is there to pick us up as a Father, since He only sees us as “children to lift up, not as evildoers to punish.”

Look at others, not at your smartphone

After we have arisen from our slumber or sin, said the Pope, we must “remain” in Jesus through the virtue of perseverance.

Rather than living on quick emotions and momentary satisfaction, Christians are called to persevere together in faith and love by praying in community at Mass.

“You might say, ‘But all around me, everyone is on their own with their cell phone, glued to social media and video games,’” said Pope Francis. “Yet, you must fearlessly go against the current: take life into your hands, get involved; turn off the TV and open the Gospel; get off your cell phone and encounter people!”

Like the gondolas that ply the canals of Venice, young people should row against the current by letting God help them. “Rowing requires regularity,” said the Pope. “But perseverance brings rewards, even if the path is difficult.”

We are a gift for others

Pope Francis then turned to the second verb that describes Mary: “go.”

“If rising is welcoming oneself as a gift, going means making oneself a gift,” he said. “If life is a gift, I am called to live by giving myself for others.”

The Pope invited young people gathered in Venice to embrace God’s call to participate in His creation.

“Creation invites us to be creators of beauty ourselves, to create something that did not exist before,” he said. “Life asks to be given, not managed; we must break out of the hypnotic world of social media that numbs the soul.”

Paint the streets of life with the Gospel

In conclusion, Pope Francis urged young people to create a simple prayer from the heart and offer a “gesture of love to someone who cannot reciprocate.”

“Open your heart to God, thank Him, and embrace the beauty that you are; fall in love with your life,” he concluded. “Then go! Go out, and walk together with others; look for those who are alone, colour the world with your creativity, and paint the streets of life with the Gospel. Arise and go.”





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