MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER LEO XIV FOR THE 41ST WORLD YOUTH DAY

[22 November 2026 – 3–8 August 2027]
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"Take courage! I have overcome the world." (Jn 16:33)

Dear young people,

I wish to reach out to each of you with this message and, above all, to give thanks to God for the gift that you are to the Church and to society. He knows you, loves you and accompanies you on your journey through life. His Spirit inspires in all of you — different as you are and spread throughout the world — the same desire for things that are great and lasting, and moves you to seek freedom and truth. From God comes your desire to love and to be loved, as well as the hope that the Holy Spirit awakens in your hearts — a hope that can also become a light for others. For all of this, I give thanks to the Lord.

We are preparing to celebrate the 41st World Youth Day in our local Churches on 22 November, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, even as we look forward to our international gathering in Seoul in August 2027. In preparation for these events, I wish to entrust to you the words of Jesus: "Take courage! I have overcome the world" (*Jn* 16:33). These words will serve as our theme in the coming months, and I invite you now to begin reflecting on them with me.

Where does courage come from?

Christ's words begin with an invitation to take courage. I know well that, at times, instead of courage it is uncertainty or fear that can prevail in us, just as they did in the first disciples. Many of you carry questions and concerns that weigh heavily on your hearts. Perhaps you are anxious about the future, feel pressured to succeed and appear perfect, or experience the stress of constantly comparing yourselves with others or with unattainable, manufactured ideals. Under the influence of carefully curated images on social media, you may find it difficult to recognize and accept who you truly are. Indeed, you are longing for genuine affection, since technology cannot replace authentic human closeness but can only imitate empathy. Some of you know what it means to experience loneliness, disappointment or the fear of not being good enough.

For these reasons, perhaps you too have felt like Jesus' disciples, crossing the lake at night in a small boat. The wind grows stronger, the waves rise, and the shore disappears into the darkness. It is in circumstances like these that we hear the Gospel's invitation to take courage. Jesus comes toward his disciples and says to them: "It is I; do not be afrai d" (*Jn* 6:20). This is the assurance I wish to place in your hearts: even before you begin to seek Christ, he is already seeking you, walking across the troubled waters of life. Christian courage does not arise primarily from our own strength; it comes from his presence.

Christ himself certainly did not live a life free from storms, nor does he promise us one. Yet no darkness or suffering is stronger than his love. He will never abandon you. He invites you into friendship with him and asks you to entrust to him your own journey and that of your communities. Allow yourselves, then, to be encountered by Jesus Christ who is seeking you, and entrust to him the path you walk, both individually and together. In this way, you will feel a new and lasting courage growing in your hearts.

The victory over the world

The Lord Jesus, who came toward his disciples walking on the water, now says to us: "Take courage! I have overcome the world" (*Jn* 16:33). Receive these words as a promise addressed personally to each of you and to the brothers and sisters with whom you share your journey. More than an exhortation, these words are a gift. Christ does not say, "You will overcome the world." He says, "I have overcome the world." We know that, in this Gospel passage, the "world" does not mean the universe created and loved by God and destined for salvation, but rather the "world of darkness" (cf. *Eph* 6:12), which is that mysterious reality, present even in the human heart, that resists and opposes God. Jesus, and he alone, through his death and Resurrection, has overcome this darkness and reopened for humanity the path to God, to happiness, to justice, and to peace.

We can thus understand other dimensions of the courage to which Jesus calls you. This courage does not come from your own determination or strength of character. It comes from trusting in the One who goes before you; it is born of faith in Jesus Christ. When we reflect on how Christ conquered the world by loving it, we come to understand that Christian courage is not courage *against* something or someone, but courage *for* something: for life, for truth, for freedom, and for justice.

With the courage that Christ gives us, we can look with new eyes upon the world that God so loved (cf. *Jn* 3:16). We, too, have a part to play, however small, in helping transform a "world of darkness" into a "world redeemed." Christ does not call you to flee from this world, but to see it through his eyes and touch it with his love, which heals all things. Allow yourselves to be moved and touched by the reality around you! Jesus did not love the world from a distance. He entered fully into our human condition, humbling himself even to the point of death on a cross (cf. *Phil* 2:7-8). He experienced joy and friendship, but also hardship, rejection, loneliness and suffering, without ever closing his heart.

You, too, live in a world created good, yet wounded — a world full of possibilities, yet marked by injustice, tensions and fears. Many long for peace but encounter violence; many yearn for communion but experience loneliness. Amid these contradictions, Christians are called to follow Christ in his gentle courage: the courage to show love when harshness seems easier and more effective; the courage to seek peace when confrontation appears more advantageous; and the courage to hold fast to hope when cynicism seems more convincing.

The victory of self-giving love

When we hear the word "victory," some might think it means being stronger than others, asserting ourselves or constantly having to prove our worth. But those are the kinds of victories promoted by the prevailing mentality — the victories of a world without God. When we look to Jesus, we discover a different kind of victory. Saint Paul tells us that Christ, though he was in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (cf *Phil* 2:6-7). The Son of God humbles himself because his love is freely given: he has nothing to prove and nothing to secure for himself. In humbling himself, he does not lose his dignity; rather, he reveals the greatness and depth of his divine heart, capable of giving life to those who were dead. His victory is the victory of love that gives itself without counting the cost.

Dear young people, true victory does not lie in seeking to prevail over others, but in giving yourselves to them. By following the path opened by Jesus Christ, you too have no need to impose yourselves, to constantly prove your worth, to appear perfect or to conceal your weaknesses, doubts and limitations. Have the courage to be your true selves before God and others. Your dignity does not come from the image you manage to create for yourselves. You are precious because you have been created in the image of God, known by him and loved by him. We discover who we truly are when we recognize that our hearts were created for God: to love him and, in him, to love our brothers and sisters. Indeed, deep within us is the desire to give of ourselves, to devote our lives to the happiness and well-being of others. This is the freedom Christ offers you: the freedom to move beyond an exclusive concern for yourselves and to open your hearts to the generous creativity of love.

The courage of humility

Christ's self-emptying out of love for us does not end on the cross. The Father raises the Son from the dead and exalts him above all creation (cf. *Phil* 2:9-11). Notice that the Resurrection is not an act of self-exaltation; it is a gift of the Father and his Holy Spirit. Here we discover another dimension of courage: the courage to receive. We might call it the courage of humility. To be friends of Jesus means growing ever more like him in this respect as well.

A certain way of thinking tells us that we must do everything on our own, constantly working to improve ourselves and to develop a stronger personality and character. Yet this can ultimately lead us to believe that we are our own saviors. The Gospel shows us another path to growth: not saving ourselves, but allowing ourselves to be saved by Jesus Christ. This requires the courage to accept help from others, acknowledge our limitations, pause, listen and entrust our lives to God.

Dear young people, opening your hearts to Christ will not cause you to lose yourselves. On the contrary, you will discover more deeply who you are in God's eyes and come to know yourselves as he sees you. Turn, then, to the depths of your hearts. You will not lose your way, for it is there that God awaits you. Open yourselves to his saving grace. Let his love — the Holy Spirit — shape your lives, and let Jesus dwell within you and guide your decisions. When this happens, everything is made new, even in the ordinary circumstances of daily life: in your faithfulness to your friends, in your respect for those who think differently from you, in your attentiveness to those who are lonely, in your closeness to the most vulnerable, and even in the way you conduct yourselves in the digital world. Everything is transformed by love. Many regard love as a form of weakness but Christ shows us that it is a source of freedom and strength.

The risen Christ comes to meet you with his peace

On the evening of the Resurrection, when the light of Easter had already entered the world, the disciples were still gathered behind locked doors in the Upper Room, filled with fear. Faith does not immediately dispel the darkness, but neither does it leave us alone in it. Jesus, the Victor, does not wait for the disciples to overcome their fear or open the doors. He comes into their midst, and his first words are: "Peace be with you" (*Jn* 20:19). They had abandoned him. One had betrayed him, and another had denied him. Yet he offers them his peace.

Perhaps there are doors in your own hearts, and in the communities to which you belong, that remain closed because of disappointments, wounds, resentments or feelings of guilt. Christ comes to offer you his peace and to reconcile you with one another. Christian courage springs from the presence of the risen Lord who forgives and sends us forth. The gift of his peace fills us with a courage that the world cannot give, a courage through which, despite our wounds, fear no longer has the final word.

Open your hearts to Christ

When we gather in Seoul, you will experience in a special way the beauty of the universal Church and the generous hospitality of the Church in Korea. Young people from different nations, languages and cultures will come together, united in Christ. Through the Eucharist, the Way of the Cross, catechesis, liturgical celebrations and the many encounters of those days, you will experience anew how the Gospel transcends every boundary and speaks to every people. Let those days become a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ, an opportunity to entrust your lives to him. This is why World Youth Day was established. Our pilgrimage has already begun. Do not limit your preparations to the practical arrangements for your journey to Seoul: prepare your hearts!

Bring to Christ your questions and your wounds, but also the wounds that tear apart your societies and set your countries against one another. Bring to him this creation that groans and suffers, the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, which Pope Francis taught us to hear. Share with Jesus your joys and hopes. It is in this spirit that I make my own the words with which Saint John Paul II began his pontificate: "Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ!" Do not wait until you are perfect before opening yourselves to him. He comes to meet you just as you are. Open your lives to Christ. Open your communities to Christ. Open the paths that lead to the hearts of the people you will meet. The risen Lord, who entered through locked doors, continues to come into our midst today. Therefore, do not settle for a life that falls short of the one to which Christ calls you. Allow yourselves to be united and transformed by his love.

Dear young people, I eagerly look forward to meeting you in Seoul. But remember: the Lord whom we will encounter there is already coming to meet you. Welcome his promise — "Take courage! I have overcome the world" (*Jn* 16:33) — and let it accompany you throughout your journey.

I entrust each of you to the maternal intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. May she teach you, as she herself did, to open your hearts to Christ, to trust in his word and to receive his peace with joy, so that you may share it with everyone.

From the Vatican, 22 October 2026, Memorial of Saint John Paul II.

LEO PP. XIV

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