



Message of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for the First World Day for Children 25th – 26th May 2024

Dear Children!

Your first World Day, which will be held in Rome on 25-26 May this year, is fast approaching. That is why I thought of sending you a Message. I am happy that you will be able to read it and I thank all those responsible for passing it on to you.

I want to speak to *each of you*, dear children, because, as the Bible teaches us, and as Jesus showed so often, “you are precious” in God’s eyes (*Is 43:4*).

At the same time, I am addressing this Message to *all of you*, because all children, everywhere, are a sign of every person’s desire to grow and flourish. You remind us that we are all children, brothers and sisters. We would not be alive unless others brought us into this world, nor could we grow without having others to love and from whom to receive love (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 95).

All of you, girls and boys, are a source of joy for your parents and your families, but also for our human family and for the Church, in which each of us is like a link in a great chain stretching from the past to the future and covering the whole earth. That is why I encourage you to pay attention to the stories of grown-ups: your moms and dads, your grandparents, and great grandparents. And not to forget all those other children and young people who are already battling illness and hardship, in hospital or at home, and those who even now are being cruelly robbed of their childhood. I think of children who are victims of war and violence, those experiencing hunger and thirst, those living on the streets, those forced to be soldiers or to flee as refugees, separated from their parents, those prevented from going to school, and those who fall prey to criminal gangs, drugs or other forms of slavery and abuse. Let us listen to their voices. We need to hear those voices, for amid their sufferings they remind us of reality, with their tearful eyes and with that tenacious yearning for goodness that endures in the hearts of those who have truly seen the horror of evil.

Dear young friends, in order for us and our world to grow and flourish, it is not enough to be united with one another; we need, above all else, to be united with Jesus. From him we receive a great deal of courage. He is always close to us, his Spirit goes before us and accompanies us on all the world’s pathways. Jesus told us: “Behold, I make all things new” (*Rev 21:5*); this is the theme I have chosen for your first World Day. These words invite us to become as clever as children in grasping the new realities stirred up by the Spirit, both within us and around us. With Jesus, we can dream of the renewal of our human family and work for a more fraternal society that cares for our common home. This starts with little things, like saying hello to others, asking permission, begging pardon, and saying thank you. Our world will change if we all begin with these little things, without being ashamed to take small steps, one at a time. The fact that we are small reminds us that we are also frail and need one another as members of one body (cf. *Rom 12:5*; *1 Cor 12:26*).

That is not all. The fact is that we cannot be happy all by ourselves, because our joy increases to the extent that we share it. Joy is born of gratitude for the gifts we have received and which we share in turn, and it grows in our relationships with others. When we keep the blessings we have received to ourselves, or throw tantrums

to get this or that gift, we forget that the greatest gift that we possess is ourselves, one another: all of us, together, are “God’s gift.” Other gifts are nice, but only if they help us to be together. If we don’t use them for that purpose, we will always end up being unhappy; they will never be enough.

Instead, when we are all together, everything is different! Think of your friends, and how great it is to spend time with them: at home, at school, in the parish and the playground, everywhere. Playing, singing, discovering new things, having fun, everyone being together and excluding no one. Friendship is wonderful and it grows only in this way: through sharing and forgiving, with patience, courage, creativity and imagination, without fear and without prejudice.

Now, I am going to share a special secret with you. If we really want to be happy, we need to pray, to pray a lot, to pray every day, because prayer connects us directly to God. Prayer fills our hearts with light and warmth; it helps us to do everything with confidence and peace of mind. Jesus constantly prayed to the Father. Do you know what Jesus called him? In his language, he simply called him “Abba”, which means “Daddy” (cf. *Mk* 14:36). Let’s do the same thing! We will always feel that Jesus is close to us. He himself promised us that, when he said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (*Mt* 18:20).

Dear children, you may know that in May, many of us will be together in Rome, to be together with children from all over the world. To prepare well for this, I would ask all of you to pray the same prayer that Jesus taught us – the *Our Father*. Recite it every morning and every evening, in your families too, together with your parents, brothers, sisters and grandparents. But not just by saying the words! Think about those words that Jesus taught us. He is calling us, and he wants us to join actively with him, on this World Children’s Day, to become builders of a new, more humane, just and peaceful world. Jesus, who offered himself on the Cross to gather all of us together in love, who conquered death and reconciled us with the Father, wants to continue his work in the Church through us. Think about this, especially those of you who are preparing to receive First Communion.

God has loved us from all eternity (cf. *Jer* 1:5). He looks upon us with the eyes of a loving father and a gentle mother. He never forgets us (cf. *Is* 49:15) and every day he accompanies us and renews us with his Spirit.

Together with the Most Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, let us pray in these words:

Come, Holy Spirit,
show us your beauty,
reflected in the faces
of children all over the world.
Come, Jesus,
you who make all things new,
who are the way that leads us to the Father,
come and remain with us always.
Amen.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 2 March 2024

FRANCIS