



**DICASTERIUM
PRO LAICIS, FAMILIA ET VITA**

**HOLY MASS DURING THE SECOND PREPARATORY MEETING
FOR WORLD YOUTH DAY SEOUL 2027
(September 14, 2026)**

**HOMILY
(Exaltation of the Cross: Phil 2:6–11; Ps 77; Jn 3:13–17)**

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Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. With the eyes of faith, we return to the final moment of Jesus’ life, which encapsulates the full meaning of his mission on earth. In the cross we find the clearest manifestation of Jesus’ love for us—a universal, total love, without reservation, without ulterior motives, and without seeking “gain”. In Jesus’ death on the cross, the true face of God is revealed; we contemplate his deepest nature; we come to understand that God is love in himself: love among the divine Persons, love for his creatures. When we contemplate the cross, we can no longer think that God is distant from us; we can no longer say that He is a heartless master; we can no longer say that He is jealous of His privileges. These are the falsehoods that the devil has sown in the human heart since the time of Adam and Eve, our first parents, and which he continues to sow today.

The cross shatters every false image of God and, in a certain sense, leaves humanity defenseless and without excuses. Having come to know who God is, why

do we reject him? Why do we resist his love? Why do we exclude him from our lives? We can no longer say that we are afraid of God, because Christ on the cross threatens no one. We can no longer say that we do not trust God, because Christ on the cross has shown how precious we are in his eyes. We can no longer say that we feel judged or condemned by God because, as the Gospel reminded us, “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.” Before the cross, then, the mystery is no longer that of God, but that the human heart closes itself off to grace.

Dear friends, we are here so that many hearts may open themselves to grace. This is the mission of the Church. This is also the mission of World Youth Day. At World Youth Day in Seoul, too, the cross of Christ will be raised so that many young people may look to Him, welcome His love, and become His disciples.

You know well that the cross is one of the most powerful symbols of World Youth Day and has accompanied its journey from the very beginning of its history. Throughout the Holy Year of Redemption in 1984, Saint John Paul II had placed a cross near the high altar of St. Peter’s Basilica. At the end of that Jubilee, the Pope entrusted that very same cross to the youth of the world, saying:

«Dear young people, at the end of the Holy Year, I entrust to you the very sign of this Jubilee Year: the Cross of Christ! Carry it throughout the world as a sign of the Lord Jesus’ love for humanity, and proclaim to everyone that only in Christ, who died and rose again, is there salvation and redemption» (*Words to young people on Easter Sunday, April 22, 1984*).

Since then, that cross, with all that it represents, has been carried among young people on every continent and has touched the hearts of many.

In the first reading, we heard the story of the fiery serpents that bite the people during a difficult time of trial in the desert. The action the people were told to take to save themselves from the poison was to look at a bronze serpent set on a pole. Lift up

your head and look—nothing more! This is an eloquent symbol of the act of faith: not relying on one's own strength, but lifting one's gaze toward God and asking Him for help.

Even today, many young people find themselves in the desert of life, going through difficult trials, moments of confusion, rebellion, and emptiness. Even today, many young people are bitten by the “burning serpents” of sin, sadness, depression, and unbelief. For them, too, salvation lies neither in human strategies, nor in material possessions, nor in new technologies: it lies in lifting their gaze and receiving from God forgiveness, love, and life. This takes place before the cross. The act of faith in Christ who saves us was foreshadowed by that bronze serpent. The Gospel states: “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

Therefore, we too will lift up the crucified Jesus so that many young people may believe in him and have life. Everything we do during World Youth Day will serve this purpose. And we will do it without fear, without shame, and without compromise. We cannot be ashamed of Jesus; we cannot be ashamed of the cross! Today's feast shows us the cross as a symbol of victory. The cross is exalted because it marks the end of evil's dominion in the human heart. And this must be proclaimed to young people because, as Pope Leo stated during the Youth Jubilee in Rome: “Friendship with Christ, which is the foundation of faith, is not just one aid among many for building the future: it is our North Star” (*Prayer Vigil*, August 2, 2025).

We are called to be courageous apostles, truthful witnesses, who know full well that there are many treasures to be discovered in the cross; that only in the cross is God's love known; and that only in the cross is true unity among people realized.

Many spiritual authors have seen in the cross the symbol of universal reconciliation, where the vertical beam unites heaven and earth—God and humanity—and the horizontal beam unites all of humanity in a single embrace of forgiveness and brotherhood. We too want to do the same at World Youth Day: to

find true unity in Jesus. One of the most beautiful aspects of World Youth Day is the presence of different cultures, languages, and races, all united in the one faith. Thus, the universal reconciliation signified by the cross is realized. During World Youth Day, young people show the world that divisions, prejudices, and hostilities can be overcome. Young people show that by welcoming Christ, a new humanity is born. A desire emerges to encounter and discover others, to embrace diversity, without fear or closed-mindedness. This is the miracle of communion in the one Spirit that the cross of Christ has brought into the world.

I am certain that this will also happen in Seoul. Young people will meet many of their peers from other parts of the world, and will enrich one another with their talents, their stories, and the beautiful things that grace brings to life in their hearts. Many young people will discover faith in God, and the beautiful face of the Church. They will also rediscover faith in humanity and savor the beauty of being part of one great family, loved by God and blessed. They will regain confidence in the future. They will feel the desire to devote their lives to something great, rather than wasting time on vain and deceptive idols. They will discover a call to a special consecration in the priesthood or religious life, or they will discover the beauty of God's plan for human love and thus understand the importance of starting a family—the place that, more than any other, safeguards love, nourishes it, and makes it generative and selfless.

The fruits of a World Youth Day are many, and I cannot list them all now—not least because many will remain known only to God. But I mention these immense graces simply to say that it is worth committing to this preparation; it is worth working, making sacrifices, investing resources, and mobilizing so many people—because young people are the future of the Church and of the world. To rekindle hope in even one young person means helping all of humanity take a step forward.

Dear friends, let us lift our gaze to the cross of Christ; let us ask Him for every blessing for Korea, for this World Youth Day, for all the young people who will come, and for all the young people of the world. Christ on the cross redeemed the world, but the fruits of this redemption must be received in our hearts; they must be brought to the men and women of today, and for this our collaboration is required. Let us entrust our work to the merciful Father and to the Virgin Mary, so that everything we do in preparation for the upcoming World Youth Day may be inspired by the same love for souls that overflows from the heart of Jesus.

Amen.