



A continuous visitation

*Homily for the Opening Mass of World Youth Day
Eduardo VII Park, August 1, 2023*

Dear friends who have come here from around the whole world for World Youth Day Lisbon 2023

Welcome all! Welcome also in the eccumenial, interreligious, and goodwill breadth that these days have and also bring together. I desire for you all to feel “at home,” in this common home where we will live World Youth Day. Welcome!

The Mass we are celebrating, in anticipation of the arrival of our dear Pope Francis, is that of the Visitation of Our Lady - the general motto of the World Youth Day: Mary arose and went with haste to encounter Elizabeth. It is a Gospel passage that includes us as well.

A while ago we heard: “During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.”

She set out, traveled to the hill country in haste, entered the house of Zechariah, and greeted Elizabeth - Three points I will briefly talk about in these opening words.

Mary set out. A path that was difficult and without the means of transportation that we have available today. She was young like all of you, and had just conceived Jesus in a unique way which the Gospel recounts.

All of you also set out. For many it was a difficult journey due to the distance, the connections, and the costs that the trip required. It was necessary to bring together resources, organize activities to obtain them, and rely on solidarity which, thanks to God, was not lacking.

From near or far, you all set out. It is very important to set out. This is how we should face our own lives, as a journey to be traveled, making each day a new segment.

It is true that today many things can detain you, dear friends, with the possibility that we replace true reality, which can only be reached while on the path to others, as they truly are, by the virtual appearance of a world of choice. A world of choice, in front of a screen and dependent on a click that changes it to different one.

Virtual reality keeps us seated in front of means that easily use us when we think we use them. Quite to the contrary, reality consists in going out to encounter others and the world as it is, both to admire and make better.

We thank the media for the possibility to get to know each other more, each of us and the world. We live through the media, and we would not know how to live any other way. We count on its support, but we do not exempt ourselves from setting out on our own, from directly contacting and verifying the reality that touches us and everyone.

The path you traveled to get here was worth the effort, and during this time you will find, in the variety of who you are and in the quality that you bring, each and every one, from each land, language, and culture. Nothing can substitute this personal path and path together, to encounter the path of all.

Mary carried in her womb the “blessed fruit” that was Jesus. Christians also carry Him, spiritually and actually because they receive Him in the Word, the sacraments, and in charity, where He offers Himself. Since we believe in Jesus as a path to God, we walk with Him to bring Him to others. With the same impulse that led Mary, in the same Spirit that leads us, let us head out!

Mary went in haste to the hill country, as we also heard.

It is no coincidence that the text speaks about Mary’s haste, as other Gospel passages speak of the urgency of the announcement, of the testimony, and of the continuous visitation of others, as we must do.

Dear young people, you know well that when the heart is filled, it quickly overflows. How impossible it is to suffocate what goes in your soul, when it is truly strong and mobilizing.

Mary carried with her Jesus Himself, whom she had conceived. And Jesus is “God is with us,” to be God with all. Because of this, she made haste to bring Him to Elizabeth, even climbing mountains.

You know this “haste” because others also made haste to come to your encounter to bring you Jesus and all He offers you from broad horizons and life in abundance.

Nor do you always need to understand the words, as is the case now, among the many languages gathered here. Because your own eyes speak, and you feel safe and confident in the Christian atmosphere that you create together and in the simple gestures that you communicate with. There truly is "haste in the air" which circulates among you and where you go during these days. An air in which the Divine Spirit Himself circulates, with the readiness that only God has and communicates.

When I told Pope Francis that this was precisely the motto of our World Youth Day – Mary arose and went with haste... – he immediately added that yes, with haste but not anxiously.

In fact, the craving is for what we do not yet have, and we intend to be restless. The haste is different; it is to share what already carries us forward. That is why it is an urgency that is serene and without trampling. How you got here and how you will be here, bringing to others what brought you.

In this regard, I recall a passage from the first Christians, even in a society that was slow to understand them: "...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience..." (1 Peter 3:15-16).

So you will be, in this haste, without anxiety, as one who shares what he has. What has brought you here and what you will take with you, is made greater by the grace of these days!

Finally, the text said that Mary entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.

Dear friends, in this way, you too will come to one another with a true and joyful greeting.

The Gospel tells us of the joy of Mary's encounter with Elizabeth and of the mutual recognition in which it took place. Mary's greeting was such that it awakened in her relative the exclamation that we so often repeat: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" And Mary responded to Elizabeth's words with one of the most beautiful hymns we have sung since that moment, the Magnificat.

It is very important that this be the case with you and with everyone. In fact, every meeting we have must begin with a true greeting, in which we exchange words of sincere welcome and full sharing.

Lisbon welcomes you wholeheartedly, and so the other lands in which you have been or will be in this Portugal will also be yours. You are welcomed by the families and institutions that have made their spaces and their service available. Thanking all of them, I see in each one the house of Elizabeth, which welcomed Mary and Jesus whom she carried with her!

Much of this is lacking even in the world we are in, when we neither notice the presence of others, nor notice others we meet the way we should.

Let us learn from Mary to greet each and every person. Let us intensely put it to practice this World Youth Day. The new world begins in the newness of every encounter and in the sincerity of the greeting we exchange, so that we may be people among people, in a mutual and constant visitation! I wish you all a happy and inspiring World Youth Day!

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