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POUR LA PROMOTION
DE L'UNITÉ DES CHRÉTIENS

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ECUMENICAL MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE
ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
Kaarli Lutheran Church (Tallinn, Estonia)
Tuesday, 25 September 2018

Dear Young Friends,

Thank you for your warm welcome, for your songs and for the testimonies of Lisbel, Tauri and Mirko. I am grateful to the Archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Urmas Viilma, for his kind and fraternal words of welcome, and for the presence of Archbishop Andres Pöder, President of the Estonian Council of Churches, of Bishop Philippe Jourdan, Apostolic Administrator in Estonia, and of representatives from the different Christian communities in the country. I am also grateful for the presence of Madam President of the Republic.

It is always good to meet, to share our life stories, and to share with one another our thoughts and hopes; it is wonderful, too, for us to come together as believers in Jesus Christ. These meetings bring to fulfilment that dream of Jesus at the Last Supper: "That they may all be one... so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). If we try to see ourselves as pilgrims journeying together, we will learn to entrust our heart to our travelling companions without fear and distrust, looking only to what we all truly seek: peace in the presence of the one God. Just as crafting peace is an art, so too, learning to trust one another is also an art and a source of happiness: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9). And we do not make this path, this journey, with believers alone, but with everyone. Everyone has something to say to us. We have something to say to everyone.

The great painting in the apse of this church contains a phrase from the Gospel of Saint Matthew: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). You, as young Christians, can identify with some of the things going on in this section of the Gospel.

Just before Jesus speaks those words, Matthew tells us that he was saddened because he felt that those who heard him simply did not understand what he was trying to say (cf. Mt 11:16-19). Frequently you too, as young people, can feel that the adults around you do not appreciate your hope and desires; sometimes, when they see you very happy, they get suspicious; and if they see you anxious about something, they downplay it. In the consultation prior to the forthcoming Synod on young people, many of you expressed the desire to have a companion along the way, someone who can understand you without judging and can listen and answer your questions (cf. Synod on Young People, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 132). Our Christian churches – and I would say this of every institutionally structured religious organization – at times bring attitudes that make it easier for us to talk, give advice, speak from our own experience, rather than listen, rather than be challenged and learn from what you are experiencing. Christian communities often close themselves off, without being aware of it, and do not listen to your concerns. We know that you want and expect "to be accompanied not by an unbending judge, or by a fearful and hyper-protective parent who generates dependence, but by someone who is not afraid of his weakness and is able to make the treasure it holds within, like an earthen vessel, shine (cf. 2 Cor 4:7)" (ibid., 142). Today, I am here to tell you that we want to mourn with you when you mourn, to accompany and support you, to share in your joys, and to help you to be followers of the Lord. You, young people, you should know this: when a Christian community is truly Christian, it does not proselytize. Only listening, welcoming, accompanying and moving forward; but imposing nothing.

Jesus goes on to complain about the cities he visited, where he worked great miracles and demonstrated signs of great tenderness and closeness, and was displeased at their inability to see that the change he came to bring was urgent and not to be delayed. He even says that they are more stubborn and obdurate than Sodom (cf. Mt 11:20-24). When we adults refuse to acknowledge some evident reality, you tell us frankly: "Can't you see this?" Some of you who are a bit more forthright might even say to us: "Don't you see that nobody is listening to you any more, or believes what you have to say?" We ourselves need to be converted; we have to realize that in order to stand by your side we need to change many situations that, in the end, put you off.

We know – and you have told us – that many young people do not turn to us for anything because they don't feel we have anything meaningful to say to them. It is bad, when a Church, a community, behaves in such a way that young people think: "These ones have nothing to say to me that will be useful in my life". In fact, some of them expressly ask us to leave them alone, because they feel the Church's presence as bothersome or even irritating. This is true. They are upset by sexual and economic scandals that do not meet with clear condemnation, by our unpreparedness to really appreciate the lives and sensibilities of the young, and simply by the passive role we assign them (cf. Synod on Young People, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 66). These are just a few of your complaints. We want to respond to them; as you yourselves put it, we want to be a "transparent, welcoming, honest, inviting, communicative, accessible, joyful and interactive community" (ibid. 67), that is, a community without fear. Fear imprisons us. Fear drives us to proselytize. But fraternity is something else: an open heart and a fraternal embrace.

In the verses that immediately precede the words of the Gospel quoted in the painting above us, Jesus breaks out in praise of the Father. He does so because he realizes that those who did understand, who did grasp the meaning of his message and his person, are the little ones, the ones who have simple, open souls. Seeing all of you like this, gathered as one and singing together, I add my own voice to that of Jesus and I marvel that, for all our lack of witness, you continue to discover Jesus in our communities. Because we know that where Jesus is, there is always renewal; there are always new opportunities for conversion and for leaving behind everything that separates us from him and our brothers and sisters. Where Jesus is, life always has the flavour of the Holy Spirit. You, here today, reflect something of the marvel that Jesus felt.

So yes, let us repeat his words: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). But let us say them in the conviction that, beyond all our limitations and divisions, Jesus is still the reason for our being here. We know no greater peace of mind can be found than by letting Jesus carry our burdens. We also know that many people still do not know him, and live in sadness and confusion. A famous singer of yours, about ten years ago said in one of her songs: "Love is dead, love is gone, love don't live here anymore" (Kerli Kõiv, *Love is Dead*). No, please! Let us ensure that love is alive, and all of us must do this! Many people have that experience: they see that their parents no longer love one another, that the love of newlyweds soon fades. They see a lack of love in the fact that nobody cares that they have to migrate to look for work, or look askance at them because they are foreigners. It might seem that love is dead, as Kerli Kõiv said, but we know that it is not, and that we have a word to say, a message to bring, with few words and many actions. For you are a generation of images, a generation of action, more than speculation and theory. And that is how Jesus likes it, because he went about doing good, and when dying he preferred the striking message of the cross over mere words. We are united by our faith in Jesus, and he is waiting for us to bring him to all those young people whose lives are no longer meaningful. And the risk, even for us believers, is that we lose the meaning of our lives. And this happens when we believers are inconsistent. Let us accept together that newness that God brings to our life, that newness that impels us to set out anew to all those places where humanity is most wounded. Wherever men and women, beneath the appearance of a shallow conformity, continue to seek an answer to the question of life's meaning. Yet we will never go alone: God comes with us; he is unafraid, "unafraid of the fringes, he himself became a fringe (cf. Phil 2:6-8; Jn 1:14). So if we dare to leave ourselves behind – our selfishness, our narrow-minded ideas – and go to the fringes, we will find him there; indeed, he is already there. Jesus is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, in their troubles and in their profound desolation. He is already there" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 135).

Dear young people, love is not dead. It calls us and sends us forth. It asks us only to open our hearts. Let us ask for the apostolic strength to bring the Gospel to others – but to offer it, not impose it – and to resist the tendency to see our Christian life as if it were a museum of memories. The Christian life is our life, our future, our hope! It is not a museum. May the Holy Spirit help us to contemplate history in the light of the risen Jesus, so that the Church, so that our Churches will be able to continue to welcome the Lord's surprises (cf. ibid., 139), and the youthfulness, joy and beauty that Mirko was speaking about, of the Bride who goes forth to meet her Lord. The surprises of the Lord. The Lord surprises us because life always surprises us. Let us go forward, to meet these surprises. Thank you!