

***Address of His Holiness Pope Francis
Interreligious Meeting with Youth
Maputo, Maxaquene Stadium
Thursday, 5 September 2019***

Thank you very much for your words of welcome. I thank all of you for your fine artistic performances.

You thanked me for having taken time to be with you. But what could be more important than for a shepherd than to be with his flock? What is more important for us pastors than to meet with our young people? You are important! You need to know this. You need to believe it. You are important! Because not only are you the future of Mozambique, or of the Church and of humanity. You are their present! In everything that you are and do, you are even now contributing to this present by offering the best of yourselves today. Without your enthusiasm, your songs, your joie de vivre, what would this land be like? Watching you sing, laugh and dance amid all your difficulties is – as you were just telling us – the best sign that you, young people, are the joy of this land, the joy of our time.

This joie de vivre is what distinguishes you. We can see it here here! A shared and celebrated joy that reconciles is the best antidote to all those who want to create dissension, division and conflict. How much that joie de vivre of yours is needed in some parts of our world!

I thank the members of different religious confessions who have joined us, and those who do not belong to any particular religious tradition. Thank you for encouraging one another to live and celebrate today the challenge of peace as the family that we are. You are experiencing that all of us are necessary: with our differences, we are all necessary. Together, you are the beating heart of this people and all of you have a fundamental role to play in one great creative project: to write a new page of history, a page full of hope, peace and reconciliation. Do you want to write this page?

You asked me two questions, which in my mind are related. One of them was: “How do we make young people’s dreams come true?” The other was: “How do we get young people involved in the problems that plague the country?” Today you yourselves showed us the way. You gave us the answer to these questions.

You expressed yourselves with art and music, and all the cultural treasures that you displayed with such pride. You expressed some of your dreams and realities. In all of this, we see a variety of ways to bring the world together and to look to the horizon: with eyes ever full of hope, full of the future, full of dreams. Like adults, young people walk on two feet. But unlike adults, who keep their feet parallel, you always have one foot in front of the other, ready to set out, to take off. You have great strength and you are able to look ahead with immense hope. You are a promise of life, and you have a tenacity (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 139) that you must never lose or let anyone steal from you.

How do you make your dreams come true? How do you help to solve your country's problems? My words to you are these. Do not let yourselves be robbed of joy. Keep singing and expressing yourselves in fidelity to all the goodness that you have learned from your traditions. Let no one rob you of your joy! I told you that there are many ways to look at the horizon, our world, the present and the future. But be on guard against two attitudes that kill dreams and hope. The attitudes of resignation and anxiety. These are great enemies of life, because they usually propel us along an easy but self-defeating path, and the toll they take is high indeed... We pay with our happiness and even with our lives. How many empty promises of happiness end up ruining lives! Surely you know friends or acquaintances – or have even experienced it yourselves – that in difficult and painful times, when everything seems to be falling apart, it is easy to give up. You have to be very careful, because this attitude “makes you take the wrong road. When everything seems to be standing still and stagnant, when our personal issues trouble us, and social problems do not meet with the right responses, it does no good to give up” (ibid., 141).

I know most of you are enthused about football. I remember a great player from these lands who learned not to give up: Eusébio da Silva, the Black Panther. He began his athletic career in this city. The severe economic hardships of his family and the premature death of his father did not prevent him from dreaming; his passion for football made him persevere, keep dreaming and moving forward. He managed to score seventy-seven goals for Maxaquene! Despite having plenty of reasons to give up...

His dream and his desire to play kept him going, but equally important was finding someone to play with. You know that in a team not everyone is the same; they don't all do the same things or think the same way. Each player has his own gifts. We can see and appreciate this even in this meeting of ours. We come from different traditions and we may even speak different languages, but this has not stopped us from being here together as a group.

Much suffering has been and still is caused because some people feel entitled to determine who can “play” and who should sit “on the bench”. Such people spend their lives dividing and separating. Today, young friends, you are giving an example and a witness to how we should act. You asked me: “How can we do something for our country?” By doing just as you are doing now, by staying together despite everything that can divide you, by always looking for a chance to realize your dreams for a better country. But always together.

It is essential never to forget that “social enmity... is destructive. Families are destroyed by enmity. Countries are destroyed by enmity. The world is destroyed by enmity. And the greatest enmity of all is war. Today we see that the world is destroying itself by war... So find ways of building social friendship. It is not easy; it always means having to give something up and to negotiate, but if we do it for the sake of helping others, we can have the magnificent experience of setting our differences aside and working together for something greater. If, as a result of our own simple and at times costly efforts, we can find points of agreement amid

conflict, build bridges and make peace for the benefit of all, then we will experience the miracle of the culture of encounter” (ibid., 169).

An old proverb says: “If you want to get somewhere in a hurry, walk alone; if you want to go far, walk with others”. We need always to dream together, as you are doing today. Dream with others, never against others. Keep dreaming the way you dreamed and prepared for this meeting: all together and without barriers. This is part of Mozambique’s “new page of history”.

Playing as a team makes us see that the enemy of dreams and commitment is not just giving up but also anxiety. This “anxiety can work against us by making us give up whenever we do not see instant results. Our best dreams are only attained through hope, patience and commitment, and not in haste. At the same time, we should not be hesitant, afraid to take chances or make mistakes” (ibid., 142). The most beautiful things take shape over time, and if something doesn’t work out at first, don’t be afraid to keep trying. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes! We can make a thousand mistakes, but we must never fall into the trap of giving up because things did not go well at first. The worst mistake would be to let worrying make you abandon your dreams of a better country.

For example, you have before your eyes that beautiful testimony given by Maria Mutola, who learned to persevere, to keep trying, even though she did not attain the goal of a gold medal in her first three Olympic Games. Then, on her fourth attempt, this 800-metre athlete won the gold medal at the Sydney Olympics. Her efforts did not make her self-absorbed; her nine world titles did not let her forget her people, her roots: she continued to look out for the needy children of Mozambique. We see how sport teaches us to persevere in our dreams!

I would like to add another important thing: pay attention to older people.

The elderly can help keep your dreams and aspirations from fading, from faltering at the first experience of difficulty or powerlessness. They are our roots. “Think about it: if someone tells young people to ignore their history, to reject the experiences of their elders, to look down on the past and to look forward to a future that he holds out, doesn’t it then become easy to draw them along so that they only do what he tells them? He needs the young to be shallow, uprooted and distrustful, so that they can trust only in his promises and act according to his plans. That is how various ideologies operate: they destroy (or deconstruct) all differences so that they can reign unopposed. To do so, however, they need young people who have no use for history, who spurn the spiritual and human riches inherited from past generations, and are ignorant of everything that came before them” (ibid., 181).

Older generations have much to tell you and offer you. True, sometimes we elderly people can be overbearing and nagging, or we can try to make you act, speak and live the same way we do. You will have to find your own way, but by listening to and appreciating those who have gone before you. Isn’t this what you did with your music? In the marrabenta, the

traditional music of Mozambique, you incorporated other modern rhythms, and the pandza was born. What you listened to, what you saw your parents and grandparents singing and dancing to, you took and made your own. This, then, is the path that I would point out to you, a path “born of freedom, enthusiasm, creativity and new horizons, while at the same time cultivating the roots that nourish and sustain us” (ibid., 184).

All of these are little things, but they can give you the support you need not to give up in times of trouble but to move forward with hope, to find new ways and outlets for expressing your creativity, and to face problems together in a spirit of solidarity.

Many of you were born at a time of peace, a hard-won peace that was not always easy to achieve and took time to build. Peace is a process that you too are called to advance, by being ever ready to reach out to those experiencing hardship. What power there is in an outstretched hand and a friendship that finds concrete expression! I think of the suffering of those young people who came full of dreams to find work in the city, and who today are homeless, without family and real friends. How important it is to learn to offer others a helping and outstretched hand! Try to grow in friendship with those who think differently than you, so that solidarity will increase among you and become the best weapon to change the course of history.

The image of an outstretched hand also makes us think of the need to be committed to caring for the earth, our common home. You have indeed been blessed with stupendous natural beauty: forests and rivers, valleys and mountains and so many beautiful beaches.

Sadly, however, a few months ago you suffered the collision of two cyclones, and saw the consequences of the ecological disaster that we are experiencing. Many people, including a great number of young people, have already taken up the pressing challenge of protecting our common home. This is the challenge before us: to protect our common home. Here you have a beautiful dream to cultivate together, as a family, a great challenge that can keep you united. I am convinced that you can be the agents of this much-needed change: protecting our common home, a home that belongs to all and is meant for all.

Let me leave you with one last thought: God loves you, and this is something on which all our religious traditions are agreed. “For him, you have worth; you are not insignificant. You are important to him, for you are the work of his hands. That is why he is concerned about you and looks to you with affection. Trust the memory of God... His memory is a heart filled with tender compassion, one that finds joy in ‘deleting’ from us every trace of evil. He does not keep track of your failings and he always helps you learn something even from your mistakes. Because he loves you. Try to keep still for a moment and let yourself feel his love. Try to silence all the noise within, and rest for a second in his loving embrace” (Christus Vivit, 115).

This love of God is simple, silent and discreet: it does not overpower us or force itself on us; it is not strident or flashy. It is “a love that is free and freeing, a love that heals and raises

up. The love of the Lord has to do more with raising up than knocking down, with reconciling than forbidding, with offering new changes than condemning, with the future than the past” (ibid., 116).

I know that you believe in this love that makes reconciliation possible. And because you believe in this love, I am certain that you are hopeful and that you will not fail to walk joyfully in the ways of peace.

Thank you very much and, please, do not forget to pray for me.

God bless you all.