

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO LUXEMBOURG AND BELGIUM
26-29 September 2024

*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis
Meeting with the Catholic Community
Notre-Dame Cathedral, Luxembourg
26 September 2024*

Your Royal Highness,
Your Eminence and brother Bishops,
Dear brothers and sisters!

I am very happy to be with you here in this magnificent cathedral. I thank His Royal Highness the Grand Duke and his family for their presence; I thank Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich for his kind words, as well as Diogo, Christine and Sister Maria Perpetua for their testimonies.

Our encounter takes place during an important Marian Jubilee: the Church in Luxembourg is commemorating four centuries of devotion to Mary, Consoler of the Afflicted, Patroness of this country. This Marian title corresponds well to the theme you have chosen for this visit: “To serve”. Consoling and serving are in fact two fundamental aspects of the love that Jesus has given to us, the love he has entrusted to us as our mission (cf. *Jn* 13:13-17), and that he has shown as the only path to full joy (cf. *Acts* 20:35). For this reason, in the prayer for the opening of the Marian Year, we will ask the Mother of God to help us be “missionaries, ready to bear witness to the joy of the Gospel”, conforming our hearts to hers in order “to put our lives at the service of our brothers and sisters”. Let us now pause to reflect on three words: *service*, *mission* and *joy*.

First of all, *service*. We just heard it said that the Church in Luxembourg wants to be “the Church of Jesus Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve” (cf. *Mt* 20:28; *Mk* 10:45). In this regard, the image of Saint Francis embracing the leper and curing his wounds was also put forth. In connection to service, I would like to emphasize an aspect that is very urgent today, namely welcoming others. I mention this here among you precisely because your country has a centuries-old tradition in this regard, a tradition that is still alive, as Sister Maria Perpetua reminded us. We heard of it in the other testimonies and in your repeated shouts of “todos, todos, todos!”, “everyone, everyone, everyone!”. Yes, the spirit of the Gospel is a spirit of welcoming, of openness to everyone; it does not admit any kind of exclusion (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 47). I encourage you, therefore, to be faithful to this legacy, and to continue to make your country a friendly home for those who knock at your door seeking help and hospitality.

To be welcoming is a requirement of charity but is foremost a matter of justice, as Saint John Paul II stated when he recalled the Christian roots of European culture. He encouraged the young people of Luxembourg to forge a path for “a Europe marked not only by goods and commodities, but by values, by men and women, by hearts”, a Europe where the Gospel is shared “through the words you proclaim and your loving actions” (*Address to Young People of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg*, 16 May 1985, 4). I too would like to emphasize that we are in need of a Europe and a world in which the Gospel will be shared through the words you proclaim together with your loving actions.

This brings us to the second theme: *mission*. The Cardinal Archbishop just spoke about an “evolution of the Church in Luxembourg in a secularized society”. I liked the expression that the Church, within a secularized society needs to evolve, mature and grow. We cannot close ourselves off in sadness, resignation or resentment. On the contrary, we must accept the challenge while remaining faithful to the Church’s perennial values. We should rediscover and esteem anew these values as paths for evangelization, going beyond an approach of simple pastoral care to one of missionary proclamation. In order to do this, the Church must be ready to evolve. This can happen through the examples mentioned by Christine: sharing responsibilities and ministries, walking together as a missionary community and making synodality a lasting way to relate among its members.

Our young friends have shown us a beautiful image of the value of this type of growth through their performance of a scene from the musical *Laudato Si’*. Well done! Thank you for this gift! Your work is the result of a communal effort that involved many people in the Archdiocese. It is also a prophetic sign for us in two ways. Firstly, your work reminds us of our responsibilities towards our “common home”, and that we must care for it, rather than oppress it. At the same time, it also makes us consider that if we live out this mission together, it will become a magnificent piece of music we can sing in order to proclaim the beauty of the Gospel to all. We must also remember that what drives us to be missionaries is not the need to meet quotas or to proselytise, but rather our desire to make known to as many brothers and sisters as possible the joy of encountering Christ.

Thus, as we overcome difficulties, the living power of the Holy Spirit is at work within us! Love moves us to proclaim the Gospel, which opens us to others. Accepting the challenge of this proclamation allows us to grow as a community, thus helping us to overcome the fear of embarking on new paths and to welcome gratefully each other’s contribution. This is a beautiful, healthy, joyful dynamism that we would do well to cultivate in ourselves and among those around us.

And so we have reached the third word: *joy*. Diogo recalled his experience at World Youth Day and shared with us the happiness he experienced during the Vigil, as he waited for our encounter to take place, side by side with other youth from every people and nation. He also described his excitement when he woke up the next morning surrounded by so many friends. During the preparation for that event in Portugal he was full of enthusiasm, and now, a year later, he is filled with joy to be reunited with other young people here in Luxembourg. Do you see? Our

faith is full of joy, it is a “dance”, because we know that we are children of a God who is our friend, who wants us to be happy and united, who rejoices above all in our salvation (cf. *Lk* 15:4-32; SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 34,3).

I would like to conclude by recalling another beautiful tradition of your country. I have been told that you celebrate the Spring procession, *Springprozession*, which takes place in Echternach at Pentecost. This procession commemorates the tireless missionary efforts of Saint Willibrord, who evangelized these lands. The entire city pours out onto the streets and dances through the city squares, accompanied by the many pilgrims and visitors who join you. Moreover, the procession becomes a great unified dance, as the elderly, the young, and everyone dances together – even in the rain, as was the case this year! – as they process towards the Cathedral, bearing enthusiastic witness to the beauty of walking together and meeting their brothers and sisters around the Lord’s table, as they commemorate this saintly pastor.

Dear sisters, dear brothers, the mission the Lord entrusts to us is beautiful. Let us *console* and *serve*, following Mary’s example and with her help. Thank you for the work you do, and thank you for helping the needy with such generosity. I bless you and pray for you. And please also pray for me.