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## Pope Francis: “Jesus walks to the cross so that our soul may smile”

“Jesus is walking, but he is waiting for something: he is waiting for our company, he is waiting for us to look at him. He is waiting from the soul of each one of us, which is not a closed soul, but one that smiles within.” This is one of the phrases of the short yet intense meditation of **Pope Francis** at the Stations of the Cross with the young people in the Eduardo VII Park, where the welcoming ceremony of the World Youth Day and the first embrace with the Pope had taken place a few days before. Speaking to some 800,000 young people whom he greeted during a seemingly never-ending tour of the park in the white open-top jeep, the Pope said: “Jesus walks, but the way that is most engraved in our hearts is the way of the cross. And today, with me, you will renew the way of the cross.” The Pope began his third day in Portugal on Friday morning in the Vasco de Gama Garden, renamed Reconciliation Park for WYD, in the Bélem district. Wooden confessionals were set up in neat rows on the large green esplanade to guarantee the privacy of the young people and their respective confessors. Among them was a special one: the one where Francis took his place and administered the sacrament of reconciliation to three young people. On Thursday evening a stream of 500,000 young people crowded into the Eduardo VII Park for the welcoming ceremony, whose enthusiasm was much appreciated by Bergoglio. But Friday was the day of reflection and intimacy, culminating in the Stations of the Cross in the evening, one of the most eagerly awaited moments for the young participants in the World Youth Day.

“We will watch Jesus pass by and we will walk with Him”,

the Pope’s first invitation to the youths: “The Way of Jesus is God coming out of Himself, stepping out of Himself to walk among us. It is what we hear so many times at Mass: ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.’ And he did it out of love, he does it out of love. And the cross that accompanies each World Youth Day is the icon, the image of this journey. The cross is the sign of the greatest love, the love with which Jesus wants to embrace our life, the life of each one of us.”

“Jesus walks for me. We have to tell everyone!”,

Francis exclaimed. “Jesus starts this journey for me, to give his life for me. No one has greater love than the one who laid down his life for others: let us not forget this. This is what Jesus has taught us. Therefore, when we look at the cross - which is so painful, so difficult to behold - we see the beauty that Jesus brings to the life of each one of us.” The Pope went on to quote, in the form of a prayer:

“Lord, it is through your unspeakable agony that I can believe in love.”

“Jesus is walking, but he is waiting for something,” the Pope continued: “He is waiting for our company, he is waiting for us to look at him.

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Jesus is walking and he is waiting. With his love, with his tenderness, he hopes to console us, to dry our tears.” “I would like to ask you a question,” the Pope said to the young people of the WYD: ‘Do I sometimes cry? Are there things in life that make me cry? All of us in life have cried and still cry, and Jesus cries with us because he accompanies us in the darkness that leads to weeping.’”

“Let each of us now say in silence what makes us weep in life,”

Francis exhorted: “With his tenderness, Jesus wipes away our hidden tears. He is always present to fill our loneliness with his closeness, to fill my fears, the darkness of your fears. With his consolation, he drives us to embrace each other. It is a risk to love, and he knows better than we do that it is a risk to love. It is worth taking the risk to love because he is always with us, he is always close to us at every stage of our life. Today we will walk with him through our suffering, our fears, our loneliness. Each of us will think of our sorrows, our fears, the things we fear most. Think about it and think about the soul's longing to smile again.

And Jesus walks with the Cross. He carries the Cross so that our soul may smile.”

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