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Pope Francis said that in order to face the challenges ahead, young indigenous men and women must protect and never forget their roots and their cultures.

In a video message sent to the World Meeting of Indigenous Youth in Soloy, Panama, Jan. 18, the pope urged the young people to "be grateful for the history of their people," which will help them "go forward full of hope."

"Return to your culture of origins," he said. "Take charge of your roots, because from your roots comes the strength to make things grow, flourish and bear fruit."

According to a press release, over 2,000 indigenous young people were expected to attend the Jan. 17-21 meeting to prepare for World Youth Day in Panama.

The pope, who will arrive in the country Jan. 23, said he looked forward to meeting them at WYD and said their presence would be a way "of showing the indigenous face of our church" as well as being a confirmation of the church's "commitment to protect our common home."

The gathering of young indigenous men and women, he added, will "stimulate the search for answers from an evangelical perspective to the many scandalous situations in the world such as the marginalization, exclusion and impoverishment that condemn millions of young people, especially youths from the original peoples."

"Take charge of your cultures, take charge of your roots!" Pope Francis exclaimed. "A poet once said that 'everything that blooms from a tree comes from that which is underground,' the roots. But roots that grow toward the future, projected toward the future. This is your challenge today."

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