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Young people cheer as Pope Francis arrives in the popemobile for the World Youth Day Stations of the Cross with young people at Eduardo VII Park in Lisbon, Portugal, Aug. 4. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Lisbon, Portugal — August 4, 2023
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Pope Francis on Aug. 4 led 800,000 young people in prayer for those suffering the effects of mass shootings, wars, abuse, anxiety, eating disorders and persecution, saying that despite the hardships today's youth face, Jesus is always present.

"Jesus weeps with us," the pope said during a Way of the Cross ceremony here at World Youth Day, a Catholic youth festival that has drawn young people from over 200 countries here to the Portuguese capital.

Francis, speaking without a script, asked the young people to reflect on what makes them weep, assuring them that despite life's tribulations, Jesus journeys with them.

"All of us in life have cried and we cry still," said the pope. "And there is Jesus with us, he cries with us, because he accompanies us in the darkness that leads us to tears."

During the Way of the Cross — a popular Catholic devotional of prayers reflecting on Christ's crucifixion — the pope heard video testimonials from an American man who had struggled with self-harm and drug addiction, a disabled Spanish woman who had an abortion she came to regret, and a Portuguese student battling poor mental health.

> 'Concrete love is that which gets its hands dirty.'
> —Pope Francis
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Before the event, the pope spent nearly an hour in the popemobile providing the hundreds of thousands of young people a chance to see him up close. While the scene resembled something akin to a rock concert, when the prayer service began a somber, hushed tone fell over the city center of Lisbon — practically silencing the

just previously electrified crowd.

The cross of Christ, Francis told the young people, is a message of hope, one of victory over death, and shows that sacrificial love, while risky, is always worth it.

During the service, the massive crowd listened to a number of meditations that offered specific reflections on the everyday lives of young people in the modern world, especially heightened by technology.

"We live in a world of mirrors where all that matters is our appearance, our image. Selfies after selfies. The tyranny of the right body and the perfect smile," read one reflection. "Photos of us on social media in carefully studied poses. Artificial posts waiting for likes."

The pope told the young people that despite these temptations, fears and distractions, Christ and the church offer a message of inclusion and renewal.

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The pope began his morning by hearing the confessions of three young people from Guatemala, Italy and Spain.

As he arrived at the outdoor park with rows of confessionals — organizers said priests have been hearing more than 10,000 confessions a day during the weeklong youth festival — Francis forewent the larger confession box that had been prepared for him, replete with a cushioned, high back chair, and opted to hear the confessions in one of the regular makeshift confessionals with simple plywood benches.

The pope then traveled to a neighborhood once known for its crime and poverty for a meeting with charity workers. As he entered the parish center to meet with aid workers, the pope stopped and greeted a young boy in a wheelchair to give the child two high-fives.

Soon after beginning his speech, the pope scrapped his prepared remarks, saying that he was having difficulty reading with his glasses, and decided to speak off the cuff.

"When I shake the hand of someone in need, to a sick person, to a marginalized person, do I do this right after so they don't infect me?," the pope asked while

rubbing his hand on his cassock.

"Concrete love," he told the aid workers, "is that which gets its hands dirty."

This story appears in the **World Youth Day 2023** feature series. View the full series
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