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Pope Francis greets children bringing the offertory gifts during Mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican May 26, 2024, wrapping up the first World Children's Day held May 25-26. The pope shakes hands with Roman Oleksiv, a Ukrainian boy who lost his mother and suffered life-threatening burns from a Russian missile strike July 14, 2022. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Always pray, and pray especially for an end to all wars, Pope Francis told children during Mass concluding the first World Children's Day.

"We are here to pray, to pray together and to pray to God," the father, who created the world, to his son, Jesus, who saved humanity, and to the Holy Spirit, "who accompanies us in life," he said in his homily May 26, the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

About 50,000 children and adults gathered in St. Peter's Square for the Mass wrapping up the two-day event which began in Rome's Olympic Stadium May 25. Francis established the world day as a "movement of boys and girls who want to build a world of peace, where we are all brothers and sisters, a world that has a future because we want to take care of the environment around us," he said at the stadium.

Girls and boys were active participants during the Mass, ministering as altar servers, singing in the choirs, doing some of the readings including the prayers of the faithful, and bringing the offertory gifts. The pope also took the time to briefly and simply explain different moments of the Mass when it was his time to speak.

The pope did not read his prepared homily, choosing instead to remind the children of the meaning of the Holy Trinity as three persons in one God and why it is important to pray to them.

"God loves us so much," he said, and the faithful always ask him to "accompany us in life and help us grow," especially by praying the "Our Father."

"We pray to Jesus so that he may help us, so he may be close to us," the pope said. The faithful receive Christ by taking Communion, and Jesus forgives all sins, even the worst ones.

"Do not forget this. Jesus always forgives everything, and we must have the humility to ask for forgiveness," as well as recognize one's mistakes and difficulties, and one's intention to change course and seek help from God, he said.

The Holy Spirit "is inside of us," after receiving him with baptism and the sacraments, the pope said. The Holy Spirit "tells us in our hearts the good things we should do," and "he scolds us when we do something bad." He gives the faithful strength and consolation during difficulties.

"The Holy Spirit accompanies us in life," he said, asking the children often to repeat what the Holy Spirit does.

"We are happy because we believe. Faith makes us happy, and we believe in God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit," he said.

Blessing the children, Francis asked that they pray for each other so that they all may continue to forge ahead in life, to pray for their parents, grandparents and for children who are ill, some of whom were at the Mass.

"Always pray and, above all, pray for peace so that there will be no more wars," he said.

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After Mass and the Angelus, the pope shook hands and greeted dozens of kids who went up to his chair. He also announced that the next world day would be in September 2026.

Italian actor and comic, Roberto Benigni, gave an energetic "pep talk" to the children, encouraging them to read, create and share fairy tales.

He assured parents that fairy tales don't teach children that dragons and ogres exist; kids already know they exist. "Fairy tales teach kids that dragons can be defeated!"

Benigni told the children that when they become adults, they might not like some things they see, but they should not be afraid, "don't run away, dive right in" the vortex and open their wings.

"We know the world is very often governed by people who don't know what mercy and love are, people who commit the most serious and stupidest of sins: war," he said.

"When children play 'war,' as soon as one of them gets hurt, they stop. The game is over. So why, when (adults) wage war, don't they stop when a child suffers or gets hurt? Why? What cowardice is this? Wars must end," he said.

He said there is only one rule in life, and it is "the only sensible thing" he has ever heard "in the history of humanity," and that is what Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes. Basically, be deeply good, he said.

"Don't wait for the world to take care of you. Take care of the world, at least what is within reach. Love each other, love everyone closest to you, be good," he said.