

30/07/2024
121b – eng

PRESS RELEASE
GERMAN BISHOPS'
CONFERENCE



The spoken word prevails!

Welcoming statement

by Pope Francis

**at the Papal Audience on the occasion of the
XIII International Pilgrimage of Altar Servers
on St. Peter's Square on 30 July 2024**

Dear young friends, good evening!

Saint Peter's Square is always a beautiful place, but your presence makes it even more so! Thank you for this! And thank you for coming to Rome, for some of you perhaps it is for the first time. Welcome! *Willkommen!*

The theme of your pilgrimage, *With you*, particularly strikes me. Do you know why? Because it says everything in two words. This is beautiful, and it leaves room for searching and for finding possible meanings.

With you. This is an expression that encapsulates the mystery of our lives, the mystery of love. When a human being has been conceived in the womb, the mother says to him or her, "Do not be afraid, I am with you". Yet mysteriously, the mother also feels that this little baby is saying to her, "I am with you". In a different way, this also applies to the father.

As I think of you, and see you here, this "with you" takes on new meanings! Let me tell you about the ones I find most beautiful and important.

Your experience of serving the liturgy reminds me that the first subject, the agent of this "with you", is God. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, *I am there among them*" (Mt 18:20). This occurs above all during Mass, in the Eucharist, where the God who is "with you" becomes a real and concrete presence in the Body and Blood of Christ. The priest sees this mystery take place every day in his hands; and you see it too, when you serve at the altar. When we receive Holy Communion, we experience that Jesus is "with us" both spiritually and physically. He says to you, "I am with you", but not in words, instead he does so with that gesture, that act of love, which is the Eucharist. You too, in Communion, can say to the Lord Jesus, "I am with you", not in words, but with your heart and your body, with your love. Precisely because Jesus is with us, we can truly be with him.

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That is the key point, dear young friends! I hope I can make myself understood that the “with you” of Jesus, thanks to his love, becomes my, your, our “with you” that we can share with others. In this way, we can carry out his commandment to “love one another *as I have loved you*”. If you minister with an attentive mind, heart and body, like Mary, then the mystery of God who is *with you* gives you the ability to be *with others* in a new way. Thanks to Jesus, always and only thanks to him – you also can say to your neighbour, “I am with you”, not in words, but in deeds, with gestures, with your heart, with concrete closeness. You can do so by weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who rejoice, without judgement or prejudice, without selfishness and excluding no one. Even with those we might not like; with those different from me; with foreigners; with those whom we feel do not understand us; with those who never come to church; with those who say they do not believe in God.

Dear young people, such a great mystery is contained in these two little words, *with you*! Let us thank those who chose them, and special thanks to you for coming here as pilgrims in order to share the joy of belonging to Jesus, of being servants of his love, servants of his wounded heart that heals our wounds, that saves us from death, and that gives us eternal life.

Thank you, young friends! And have a good journey with Jesus!