

World at war needs signs of brotherhood, friendship, pope says



VATICAN CITY (CNS) — In a world traumatized by war, young people gathered for World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland, gave strong signs of hope and brotherhood, Pope Francis said.

World Youth Day was a “prophetic sign for Poland and Europe” and took on a “global dimension” in a world threatened by a war fought in pieces, the pope said Aug. 3 at his weekly general audience.

“Precisely in this world at war, we need brotherhood, we need closeness, we need dialogue, and we need friendship. And this is the sign of hope: when there is brotherhood,” he said.

The pope entered the Paul VI audience hall greeted by thousands of pilgrims reaching out to him, asking him to bless their religious articles, kiss their babies or receive their gifts. But one gift stopped the pope in his tracks: a pope doll.

Pope Francis pointed to the doll and to himself, not completely convinced of the similarity, and then laughed, thanking the pilgrim for her present.

Before taking his place on the stage, the pope greeted Rabbi Alejandro Avruj, an old friend from Argentina seated in the front row. Also present were bishops and pilgrims from Panama, the country Pope Francis announced would host World Youth Day 2019.

In addition, a group of 65 young refugees from Eritrea and Syria came to see the pope. According to the Vatican, the children are from the Center for Asylum Seekers at Castelnuovo di Porto, about 15 miles north of Rome. The pope greeted them and posed for a group photo after the audience.

In his main audience talk, Pope Francis reflected on his visit to Krakow July 27-31 to join hundreds of thousands of young people from across the globe who met to celebrate their faith and who answered the call to “go forth together, to build bridges of brotherhood,” he said.

“They also came with their wounds, with their questions but, above all, with the joy of meeting each other,” the pope said.

Despite language barriers, he said, the youths were able to understand each other, creating a “mosaic of

brotherhood” that is “emblematic of World Youth Day.”

Recalling his visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi death camp, the pope said the great silence there “was more eloquent than any spoken word.”

“In that silence I heard, I felt the presence of all the souls that have passed there; I felt the compassion, the mercy of God that several holy souls brought there to that great abyss,” Pope Francis said. “In that great silence, I prayed for all the victims of violence and war.”

At Auschwitz, he said, he learned the “value of memory” not only as a remembrance of past tragedies, but also as a warning and call to responsibility today “so that the seed of hate and violence does not take root in the furrows of history.”

“Looking at that cruelty, at that concentration camp, I immediately thought of today’s cruelty, which is very similar. Not as concentrated as in that place, but around the world. This world that is sick with cruelty, pain, war, hate and sadness. And for this I ask you to pray so that the Lord may give us peace,” he said.

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