

WYD Lisbon: the arrival of the pilgrims in a sea of colours, songs and messages of peace

(from Lisbon). Some arrived by bus, others by train or plane. All of them with flags, colours and singing to express their joy. The first group of Italian pilgrims has arrived in Lisbon - they are the first of an estimated 65,000 Italian young people on their way to the Portuguese capital for the World Youth Day, which will take place from tomorrow until the 6th of August. They are accompanied by 106 bishops, along with priests, men and women religious, educators and animators, representing 180 dioceses. Their yellow, green and red T-shirts fill the streets. This is the scene in front of the Church of Our Lady of Loreto, known as the "Church of the Italians", where a Mass was celebrated yesterday for all the Italian nationals present. The stories of these young people, who came from the north to the south of Italy, are stories of faith, commitment and enthusiasm. This is what they have in common as they look forward to meeting the Pope and their peers from many other parts of the world. For the first time, pilgrims and volunteers came together to share the joy of a week of encounter and celebration. **Arrival of the young pilgrims.** Marco, from the town of Fano, is one of the volunteers of the international team. He is based in a parish where other volunteers from Poland arrive between 8 pm and midnight. "I greet them when they return at the end of the day, help them with whatever they need and pray with them. I know it's not a core activity, but during the practical formation sessions we did, both online and in person, we realised that this is what service is all about: offering a helping hand, even in small tasks, without expecting any great reward." Approximately 60 young people between the ages of 16 and 30 have arrived from Milan - Vigentina area. They are actively involved in the local parishes. Luigi is one of them: "We thought it would be a nice experience to share with each other. So we set off. We know it will be tiring, but we also expect great joy and happiness."



Thirty-one young people, aged between 15 and 25, arrived from St Sophia's Basilica in Rome, the church of the Ukrainian community in the city. They wore T-shirts with the Italian flag emblazoned with the Ukrainian flag. "It was an exhausting journey. We expected it. We also wanted to be here to visit Lisbon and Portugal. I think it is also a way to make new friends," say Lavinia and Veronica, two teenage girls of Ukrainian origin. "We expect it to be a beautiful experience, we will make new friends. We will also be able to represent our Ukrainian culture. Besides the Italian flag, we will carry the Ukrainian flag to send a message of peace." **The programme.** Everyone is looking forward to the arrival of Pope Francis on the morning of August 2. The first meeting with the young people is

scheduled for the afternoon of the following day, Thursday August 3, in the Edward VII Park, a 25-hectare park where the World Youth Day opening ceremony will take place. On the morning of Friday August 4, the Pope will administer the sacrament of reconciliation to a group of young people in the Vasco da Gama Garden in Belém. Shortly afterwards, at the 'da Serafina' parish centre, the Pope will meet with representatives of various charities and outreach centres. In the late afternoon, after lunch with ten young people of different nationalities at the Apostolic Nunciature, Pope Francis will arrive in an open car at the Edward VII Park where he will lead the Stations of the Cross with the young people. On the morning of Saturday, August 5, the Holy Father will visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima. There he will give a speech, pray the Holy Rosary with the sick young people and offer a golden wreath to the Virgin Mary. He will return to Lisbon shortly before noon: at 20:45 there will be a prayer vigil with young people in Tejo Park. Gathering, moving forward and taking off are the themes of the young people's songs and prayers. The closing Mass of the WYD will be celebrated in Tejo Park on Sunday morning, August 6th. In the afternoon, after the presentation of the cross to some young people and the announcement of the venue for the next international WYD, there will be a meeting with the volunteers.

