
Pope Francis to the children: “I look forward to seeing you in September 2026”

Up to 100,000 children from over 100 nations. The first World Children's Day, promoted by the Dicastery for Culture and Education, was celebrated on two days in the Olympic Stadium and St Peter's Square. The next Children's Day - **Pope Francis** announced after a speech by actor **Roberto Benigni** that closed the event - will take place in September 2026: "We look forward to seeing you there," Francis said. Both in the Olympic Stadium and in St Peter's Square, the Holy Father chose to have a dialogue with the children, in the first venue by answering their questions and in the second in the form of a dialogue homily. During the first part of the World Children's Day, the Pope spoke directly with the children gathered in the Olympic stadium, and showed them what it means to be a peacemaker by shaking the hand of one of the little ones and asking each of the children present to do the same. The Pope then kicked off a short match between sports champions, led by professional footballer **Gigi Buffon**, and the young protagonists of the Day. Many Italian musicians, artists, performed live on the pitch, including Renato Zero, Albano, Orietta Berti and Lino Banfi. "If you had the opportunity to work a miracle, what would you ask?" asked one of the children. The Pope replied: "I would ask that all children have all they need to live, to eat, to play, to go to school": "This is the miracle I would like to perform: for all children to be happy." "You must not neglect the grandparents", he urged. Followed by the revelation: "I am happy because you are joyful, you have hope for the future. Continue to be joyful." "**Dear children, we are here to pray, to pray together, to pray to God. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. One in three persons.**" These were the opening words of Francis' homily at the Mass for the first Children's Day in Saint Peter's Square, which he delivered extemporaneously, without reading the written text.

“The Holy Spirit accompanies us in life”,

the Pope said on several occasions, calling on the children to do the same. “The problem is: who is the Holy Spirit?”, Francis asked explaining the Holy Trinity to the children: “It is not easy, because the Holy Spirit is God, He is within us. We receive the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and in the Sacraments. The Holy Spirit is the one who accompanies us in life. He is the one who tells us in our hearts the good things we need to do. He is the one within who rebukes us when we do something wrong. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us strength and comforts us in difficulties.” “We are all happy because we believe”, the Pope remarked: “Faith makes us happy. And we believe in God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father who created us, Jesus who saved us, and the Holy Spirit who accompanies us in life. Pray for us, pray for parents, pray for grandparents, and pray for sick children- there are many sick children - and especially pray for peace, for there to be no wars.” “Greet your parents, greet your friends, greet grandparents!”, Francis said to the children in his concluding remarks at the end of Mass. “A round of applause to grandparents as well”, Francis said, thanking the organisers of the event.

"Children are our future, they are the joy of tomorrow".

These were the opening lines of the speech by the Italian actor Roberto Benigni. Before speaking, he kissed the Pope, saying it was on behalf of all the children attending. “If you are not like these children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus said,” he continued: “Today we are in the Kingdom of Heaven because we have all become children anew. And the youngest of them all is Pope Francis." "Children are not a vase to be filled, they are a flame to be kindled, and it is their imagination that you ignite," Benigni said, focusing on the importance of fairytales, which sometimes have the merit of coming true: “Create fairy tales, because you will become unique, although you

already are: each one of you is the protagonist of a story that will never be repeated. You are the heroes of your own lives. You need to do difficult things: and if you get it wrong, don't worry. Keep trying over and over again". "Love whatever you do: don't be satisfied with doing a good job, you have to do it to the best of your ability," the comedian, actor and filmmaker continued: "Don't trust those who tell you to be confident: you must be insecure, the more doubts you have the better. Ask and do not be afraid, as John Paul II said. Open your wings, take your life in your hands and make a masterpiece of it. Make the world a more beautiful place, we have not succeeded in that. Try to contribute to what is good."

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