



*To the Participants in
the "Ursuline Global Education Compact"
30 September 2022*

Dear young students!

I am pleased to meet you and to offer my best wishes for your time together. I would like to encourage you to carry out your projects with enthusiasm. I always speak willingly with young students, since I consider my school experiences, both as a student and as a teacher, as among the most beautiful and important periods of my life. But these are far from nostalgic memories! In fact, we can continue throughout our entire lives to learn and share what we have experienced.

I have heard about the initiatives you have implemented as well as those you have in the pipeline, concerning the protection of the environment, sustainability, human fraternity and attention to the poorest and most vulnerable. This is much to your credit, and shows that you are young people who are awake rather than asleep. I also know that you are actively participating in the Global Compact on Education, which I launched three years ago as an alliance open to all and aimed at educating ourselves and others in universal fraternity.

I certainly do not wish to give you a lesson here, but simply to tell you two things that I believe are very important: one concerning *being* and the other *doing*. I will do so by taking a cue from a figure you know well: the beautiful girl named Ursula.

According to the biographers, she was a young woman of exceptional beauty, who was admired by princes and knights and who inspired many young people. This included Angela Merici, who began her work in education, together with her companions, under the name “Ursulines”.

The first thing I wish to tell you, dear young people, is *allow your beauty to shine!* True beauty, not like that of worldly fashion. In our society, suffocated by so much unpleasantness, may you show forth that beauty which has always belonged to us, from the first moment of creation, when God made mankind in his own image and saw that it was very good. This beauty must both be shared and defended. For if it is true that beauty will save the world – as Prince Myshkin said in Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* – then we must be vigilant so that the world also saves beauty. To achieve this, I invite you to embrace a “global beauty compact” with all the young people of the world, for there is no education without beauty. “We cannot educate without leading a person to beauty, without leading the heart to beauty. Forcing my talk a little, I would say that an education is not successful if you do not know how to create poets. The path of beauty is a challenge that must be addressed” (*Address to the participants in the “Education: the Global Compact” Seminar, 7 February 2020*).

The beauty we are talking about is not turned in on itself like that of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own image and drowned in the lake in which he saw himself mirrored. Nor of the beauty that comes to terms with evil, like Dorian Gray who, when the spell ended, found himself with a disfigured face. Instead, we are speaking of the beauty that never fades because it is a reflection of divine beauty. Indeed, our God is inseparably good, true and

beautiful. And beauty is one of the privileged ways of finding him (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 167).

The second thing I wish to tell you concerns *doing*. The beauty that Jesus revealed to us is a splendour that communicates itself through action; a beauty that is embodied in order to be shared; a beauty that is not afraid of getting its hands dirty, of becoming disfigured in order to be faithful to the love of which it is made. You too, then, must not remain a “sleeping beauty” in the woods: you are called to act, to do something. True beauty is always fruitful, it pushes us outwards and gets us moving. Even contemplation of God cannot remain at the enjoyment of seeing him, as the three disciples on Mount Tabor thought at the moment of Jesus’ Transfiguration: “How beautiful to be here! Let us make three tents...” (cf. *Mt* 17:4). No, you have to come down the mountain and roll up your sleeves.

I wish for each of you, then, a *healthy restlessness* in your desires and projects, a restlessness that always pushes you to keep on walking, and never has the sense of having “arrived”. Do not cut yourselves off from the world by locking yourselves in your room like a Peter Pan, who does not want to grow up, or like young *hikikomori* afraid to face the world. Always be open and courageous like Saint Ursula, the “little bear”, who had the courage to embark on a long journey with her companions and fearlessly faced attacks to the point of martyrdom. May you too be “little bears” who never shy away from their responsibilities. If young people do not change the world, who will?

You will say to me: yes, but how? By defending the scarred beauty of so many outcasts of our world; by opening yourselves to welcome others, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized;

by looking at those who are different not as a threat but as a treasure. And by defending the wounded beauty of creation, protecting the resources of our common home, adopting more moderate and environmentally friendly lifestyles. In this regard, I invite you to read with your schoolmates the message that I addressed to the young people gathered in Prague for the “EU Youth Conference” in July this year. I am sure that you too will find there further encouragement for your commitments.

Dear young people, I hope to see you at next year’s World Youth Day in Lisbon, which promises to be a great sign of hope and beauty for all the young people of the world.

Through the intercession of the beautiful and restless Ursula, may God bless all of you, your teachers and your endeavours; and also bless the world’s students so that they will never cease to dream of a better world, and with courage and patience try to build it up piece by piece each day.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 21 September 2022
Feast of Saint Matthew, Apostle

Francis