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International Meeting
WYD Madrid 2011 - WYD Rio 2013

HOLY MASS
Rocca di Papa, 31 March 2012

Greeting and introduction

My cordial greetings to you all, dear friends. All of you who are taking part in this Meeting are forming a sort of bridge between World Youth Day in Madrid in 2011 and World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro in 2013. In this Mass we entrust to the Lord the last day of our Meeting, a day being spent on reminding ourselves of the educational challenges that must be addressed by the Church today. World Youth Day is certainly a significant “educational laboratory” that can teach us so much. Not only that, but it is also a sign of hope that fills us with renewed courage and pastoral zeal to go out and meet the younger generations.

We now prepare ourselves to meet Christ who comes to us in every celebration of the Eucharist to nourish us with his Word and his Body. Aware of our sins, we confidently ask for his divine mercy. Let us say together: *I confess to Almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned....*

Homily

WYD: a youthful Church called together by Christ...

1. The liturgy of the Word in today’s Mass brings us directly into the spiritual atmosphere of Holy Week which begins tomorrow, Palm Sunday. The Gospel passage tells us that the leaders of the Jewish people convened a meeting and took a decision, one that would have major consequences for the history of humankind. They decided to have Jesus killed – Jesus, the Son of God who had become a human being like us for our salvation. The drama of human

freedom had reached its climax. Caiaphas the high priest explained the reasons for this death sentence: “It is better for you that one man should die instead of the people...” (*Jn* 11: 50). It was indeed a true prophecy. It was true that Jesus had to die for the people, “to gather into one the dispersed children of God” (*Ibid.*). In this way too, the prophecy of Ezekiel, that we heard in the first reading, was fulfilled: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people...” (*Ez* 37: 27). The prophet spoke of a God who gathers his people, Israel, from every part of the earth. From Christ’s paschal mystery a new people is born, the Church is born. It is a “holy gathering”.

2. This image of God gathering his people together is filled with meaning. It helps us to understand the significance of these huge gatherings of young people from all over the world around the Successor of Peter during World Youth Day. For example, there was Tor Vergata in Rome, Marienfeld in Germany, Cuatro Vientos in Madrid, among others. Yet, even though there were so many young people there, they were not at all an amorphous multitude or throng. They are a people called together by Christ. They are the image of a youthful Church summoned by Christ from the most remote corners of the planet to come together around Peter – the principle of unity. They are the image of the universal Church endowed with singular beauty. It is a practical lesson in ecclesiology for us all – for young people and for priests, bishops and everyone else.

This was one of the great challenges that Blessed John Paul II addressed when he instituted World Youth Day. At that time, many people looked on large religious events with suspicion. They saw them as demonstrations of ecclesial triumphalism. Pope John Paul II knew that this was not so. He knew that many young people live their faith in the diaspora and alone, in a society that confines religion to the strictly private sphere. He knew that faith – especially the faith of young people – needs to have a concrete experience of community and communion, that is, of the Church. They need to find out that they are not alone in their faith. This is the great gift of World Youth Day: being able to experience the Church and experience faith shared by so many others. After WYD, young people return home to their families, schools, universities and workplaces. They return home stronger. They have a different concept of Church. It is no longer a cold and distant institution. It is a company of friends.

3. There is more... In the Gospel passage that we have just heard, John points out that many pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the Passover “looked for Jesus” (*Jn* 11: 56). This detail in the Gospel story is another reminder of WYD. Why do these young people respond to the pope’s invitation? Why do so many of them come? What attracts them? Here is the answer: they are seeking Jesus Christ. They are looking for Christ when they come to meet the pope and other witnesses to the faith like the bishop catechists. They are looking for Christ in the sacrament of reconciliation, the celebration of the Eucharist and in eucharistic adoration. They want to meet Jesus Christ in the company of friends who have come from every corner of the earth...

Some weeks ago I had the joy of celebrating Mass at the Shrine of Corcovado at the foot of the great statue of Christ the Redeemer that overlooks the city of Rio de Janeiro and watches over the whole of Brazil. The outstretched arms of Christ the Redeemer are an expression of the deepest meaning of WYD – the central place of Jesus Christ. His arms outstretched in welcome are an unconditional invitation to all the young people of the world: Come! Do not be afraid! I am expecting you! I am counting on you!.. Christ the Redeemer in Rio also has something important to say to all of us – youth pastoral workers from different countries and continents. Christ reminds us that we, in our everyday pastoral care of young people, should become his arms in welcoming, supporting and helping young people to get to their feet after they stumble, and to find again the pathway where Christ’s footprints go before them. To become the arms of the Redeemer of Corcovado – this is the great challenge for us to take on at each WYD and, I would say, at WYD in Rio in particular. This is the sure way out of the current educational emergency that is also being felt in the Church.