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PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY
INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON WYD
MADRID 2011 - RIO 2013
Rocca di Papa, 28 March - 1 April 2012

OPENING ADDRESS

Welcome to all of you, dear friends, who have come here to Rocca di Papa for this International Meeting of WYD organisers: *Madrid 2011 - Rio 2013*. I would particularly like to welcome the delegation from the Madrid WYD Organising Committee – Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco Varela, archbishop of Madrid and president of the Spanish Bishops' Conference, Bishop César Augusto Franco Martínez, Prof. Yago de la Cierva, Rev. Gregorio Roldán and all on their team. I also wish to give a warm welcome to the delegation from the Rio de Janeiro WYD Organising Committee – Most Rev. Orani João Tempesta, archbishop of Rio; the auxiliary bishops Most Rev. Paolo Cezar Costa and Most Rev. Antônio Augusto Dias Duarte; the president of the Youth Commission of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, Most Rev. Pinheiro da Silva, and all on their team.

Let me now address all of you, dear friends. You have come from 98 countries and five continents. You have been sent here by the youth commissions of your bishops' conferences, and you have also come from 45 international ecclesial movements, new communities and youth associations. I am mentioning these numbers because they demonstrate how World Youth Day has become an integral part of youth ministry at world level. This is a sign of hope for all of us. Together with this new generation of young people (the "WYD generation", the "pope's youth"!), there is a new generation of youth pastoral workers emerging. They have come to realise the importance of the pastoral plan of the Church that is brought to the world through WYD. On behalf of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, I wish to take this opportunity to thank each one of you for your daily commitment and work in the Church for the sake of the younger generations. You all make a decisive and indispensable contribution to each WYD so that it can bear fruit in the lives of so many young people. I thank you for accepting our invitation. Some of you have had to undertake a lengthy and tiring journey to be with us at this time.

We have a very full and interesting programme for this Meeting. Today we shall hear a report on the memorable WYD in Madrid 2011. When Pope Benedict XVI was speaking to journalists on the flight to Madrid, he said that WYDs "are a sign, a cascade of light; they give visibility to the faith and to God's presence in the world, and thus create the courage to be believers". All of us present in Madrid saw how true those words are. It was a time of grace for us all, a real *kairos*, a passing of the Lord. We recall the theme: "*Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith*" (cf *Col 2:7*). Over a million young people from all over the globe came to Madrid to give witness to their faith, and this astonished the whole world. Those young people gathered in Plaza de Cibeles and in Cuatro Vientos and gave a decisive "yes". They showed that faith is indeed possible today. In fact, it is the most beautiful adventure that can happen to us in life. It was a true

epiphany of a youthful Church, overflowing with joy and missionary zeal.

WYD in Madrid also left a deep impression on the heart of the Holy Father Benedict XVI. A large part of his Christmas address to the Roman Curia was dedicated to that event. He defined WYD as a “remedy against faith fatigue”, “a new, more youthful form of Christianity”, and “new evangelization put into practice”. He explained the meaning of WYD spirituality by speaking of five characteristics that we, for our part, should explore further. They are: a new experience of the universality of the Church; a new way of living our humanity and of being Christians (the meeting with volunteers); Eucharistic adoration; the celebration of sacramental reconciliation; joy (“Faith makes one happy from deep within. That is one of the wonderful experiences of World Youth Day” – the Holy Father said).

In order to help us remember the beauty of WYD in Madrid, the John Paul II Youth Foundation has given us all the latest issue of *World Youth Day Magazine*. This is a publication in four languages that contains the best, and perhaps the most significant, images of WYD in Spain. I take this opportunity to thank Mr Marcello Bedeschi, president of the Foundation, and also the Youth Section of our dicastery who undertook the editing of the magazine. We also sincerely thank the Spanish Organising Committee for giving to each one of us here a copy of the illustrated book of the Madrid WYD and the video entitled *Semana inolvidable*.

We now turn to the programme of our Meeting. First we shall hear from Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco Varela who will tell us about the pastoral fruits seen in the Church in Madrid and in all of Spain following WYD. Then representatives of the Spanish Organising Committee will give an account of important aspects of the event. After that, we shall hear from young people themselves, how they experienced the last WYD and what struck them most. Today is essentially a day of thanksgiving to God for WYD in Madrid. We wish to give special thanks to the Church in Spain, and in particular to the Church in Madrid, for the generous attentiveness and kind hospitality they showed towards us all.

The great pilgrimage of young people in the footsteps of the Successor of Peter continues. Tomorrow will introduce the next stage which is WYD 2013 in Rio de Janeiro. 25 years after WYD 1987 in Buenos Aires in Argentina, WYD is returning to Latin America, the young continent. It is returning with the theme: “*Go and make disciples of all nations!*” (cf Mt 28:19), thus joining the great continental missionary project that was launched by the 5th Conference of Latin-American Bishops in Aparecida in 2007.

Archbishop Orani João Tempesta of Rio de Janeiro and his team will make the presentation. Some weeks ago, I had the pleasure of visiting Rio, and I can assure you that the Local Organising Committee are doing excellent work with great enthusiasm. There is exemplary collaboration between the Rio Archdiocese and the Brazilian Bishops’ Conference. This is a very important factor. We must not forget that Brazil is an enormous country – a continent! It cannot be easy to coordinate pastoral ministry all over the country. The civil authorities of Rio City and Rio State are working very efficiently on the preparations together with the LOC. The pilgrimage of the WYD Cross and the Icon of Our Lady *Salus Populi Romani* is underway. The spiritual grace they are bringing is truly extraordinary. Wherever they go they attract crowds of over 100,000 in each diocese. Rio, the place where it will all culminate in July 2013, is really very beautiful. There is Christ the Redeemer of Corcovado, the great rock of Pão de Açúcar, the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema, etc. When we look at the imposing statue of Christ the Redeemer of Corcovado, we become aware of the very essence of WYD. It is Christ with his

arms opened wide in a gesture of love and welcome that is the real centre of this event, and it is He that young people want to meet. We remember the words of Pope Benedict XVI at the start of his papal ministry: “If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great... He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything”.

On the last day of our Meeting we shall reflect on the ultimate purpose of WYD, because WYD is not an end in itself! Pope Benedict XVI insisted that WYD should always be a “new beginning for youth ministry”, a new awareness of the importance of the Church’s work for the younger generations. Blessed John Paul II said: “The Church has so much to talk about with youth and youth have so much to share with the Church” [*Message for the 5th WYD*]. A new generation of young people is a new WYD generation, and it brings a new generation of pastors, new evangelisation and new youth pastoral ministry. Prof, Fabio Attard, a Salesian, will speak to us about “Youth ministry and the challenges for education today”. We must not forget the difficult situation we are experiencing with the educational crisis that has come about in this post-modern culture. Pope Benedict XVI speaks about it often. He sees in the pastoral plan of WYD a way to overcome this emergency in the Church. In order to help us with this reflection, the Pontifical Council for the Laity has prepared a booklet, a small guide, that gathers significant quotations from Benedict XVI on education and the Christian initiation of young people today. Once again I thank our Youth Section – and I do so also on your behalf – for this useful compendium.

Then, on Palm Sunday, our meeting will conclude as we join the pope in Saint Peter’s Square to celebrate the 27th WYD together with the diocese of Rome. The theme for this WYD is: “*Rejoice in the Lord always*” (*Phil 4:4*). In his message to young people, the Holy Father tells them that joy is one of the constitutive elements of the Christian experience, that their hearts are made for joy, and the source of true joy is God. “The discovery and preservation of spiritual joy is the fruit of an encounter with the Lord”. The pope concludes his message with a heartfelt call to young people: “Dear friends, to conclude I would encourage you to be missionaries of joy [...] Go and tell other young people about your joy at finding the precious treasure which is Jesus himself. [...] Be enthusiastic witnesses of the new evangelization!” The Holy Father tells us that it is thanks to WYD that there is “a new, more youthful form of Christianity”, full of the joy of faith and missionary zeal. This invitation to joy does not stand in contrast to the atmosphere of Holy Week that begins with Palm Sunday. Blessed John Paul II explained this very well when he said that young people want to search for Christ in the very heart of his Mystery, and that means the Paschal Mystery.

We entrust our Meeting to the Lord, and we ask for the intercession of the patron saints of WYD in Madrid and in Rio. In particular, we ask for the intercession of John Paul II through whom the Church has received the great gift of World Youth Day.