



From A Bishop's Journal (744)

“You will receive power...”

The twenty-third World Youth Day will take place in Sydney, Australia, from July 15 to July 22, 2008. I am happy to know that a few of our young people will be attending this extraordinary event in their lives and in the life of the whole Church. I am certain that the faithful here will be closely united in thought and prayer with the hundreds of thousands of youth who are expected for this 2008 “Pentecost event.” I use the word ‘Pentecost’ because everything will be focussed on the Holy Spirit.

An Unavoidable Topic

As soon as he arrived as Bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul II, impressed by what Pope Paul VI had been able to do with the youth of the world, decided to close the 1973 Jubilee Year of Redemption, with a massive gathering of youth from the world over. In 1984 and 1985, during the year dedicated to the youth by the United Nations, Pope John Paul II gathered the youth together on a more regular basis. He decided that every Palm Sunday would be a World Youth Day, and he hoped that they, following the young people who acclaimed Jesus as he entered Jerusalem, would enter deeply into the model of the holy days by deepening the great paschal mystery. This is how the young people have been experiencing intimately the events of Holy Thursday and the Eucharistic mystery, Good Friday and its stations of the cross through town, Holy Saturday, the Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunday, the great day of the Resurrection.

General Assembly

While youth ministry must not be limited to taking part in a huge world assembly that is held every two or three years, every diocese can find inspiration in the deep motivation underlying these grand activities, notably the 2008 Sydney WYD. Our youth ministry teams cannot help but view this as an excellent way of deepening their faith. The WYD is a “movement” for the promotion of greater holiness in our youth, according to their age and lifestyle. Every young person is called to holiness, but all are not at the same stage of spiritual maturity. And the ideal of holiness and intimacy with Jesus is a wonderful challenge to give to youth. At the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI, those in charge of organising the 2008 WYD found at the core of the Gospel the promise and realisation of Jesus’ promise, a promise that can touch every young person: “You will receive power when the

Holy Spirit comes down on you. Then you are to be my witnesses.” Most of the young people who will go to Sydney, along with our youth ministry team members, have been confirmed and have received the power of the Spirit, a power that only asks to be “internalised” so as to become “externalised.” If at the heart of our pastoral activities our young people took notice of the wonderful treasure they have within, they would be “transfigured” and our communities would then be “transformed.” This may be an old-fashioned saying, but nonetheless true and beautiful: A soul that is raised up lifts up the world.

Major Motives

The organisers of the 2008 WYD follow the Pope’s lead in inviting us to discover the power of the Holy Spirit. In the letters that the young people write me when they ask to receive the sacrament of Confirmation, several of them say that they want to be confirmed especially to receive “the gift of power” that will enable them to live more and more as disciples of Jesus in the world of today. They realise what the disciples became after having received “power from God,” and how far the Holy Spirit led them. They also acknowledge that throughout the centuries, especially in our days, the Holy Spirit raises up outstanding witnesses of goodness and solidarity, of kindness and mercy, of peace and joy. Besides, Pope Benedict offers them the examples of two “patrons” of the missions: Saint Francis Xavier (1506-1552), whose heart was filled with the fire of evangelisation for Eastern Asia and Japan, and who died before reaching China, and Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus (1873-1897), a young Carmelite nun who never left her cloister but who is “spending eternity,” according to her wish, doing good on earth. I am certain of this: several of our young people carry this sacred fire deep within themselves, the thirst for God and thirst for saving souls, and that they are ready to give up everything so as to be, more and more, disciples of Jesus.

Thirsting for the Word of God

“Discovering the importance and even the ‘centrality’ of the Word of God and of the sacraments in our lives:” this, too, is one of the major objectives of the 2008 WYD. Couldn’t this also be the objective of every youth ministry team and of all youth gatherings? I believe that none of our Christian communities can be evaluated by the material “riches” it could have: I know the financial situation of every one of our parishes, and I know that it is thanks to the boundless generosity of the faithful of the diocese that they can continue. However, we have an extraordinary richness that surpasses every material good: this richness is the Word of God. As priest-poet Robert Lebel sings: “We bear a treasure in earthen pots, the clay of our body, a Gospel treasure.” Discovering the Word of God is certainly one of the principal objectives of every youth ministry team, and of every youth movement. “As rain and snow fall from the sky and do not return without having watered the earth, without making things grow, giving the sower seed and bread to all, so does my word not return before producing results, without having accomplished what I wanted, and carried out its mission.” Thanks to modern mass media, thanks also to parish- and family-based catechesis and Sunday homilies, the Word of God is available to all the youth, and these receive it as God’s great gift to them.

Best Wishes for a Successful 2008 WYD

Despite the distance and our full agendas, I ask you to remain close in spirit to those who will be attending the 2008 WYD. May the experience bring home to our youth movements and youth ministry teams the great role that the Holy Spirit plays in the heart of our youth: His power is the power of the whole Church.

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