

Christ The King Sunday – Year B

Dan 7:13-14; Rev 1:5-8; John 18:33b-37

Excerpts from Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

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Brothers and sisters, last year, on the Solemnity of Christ the King on 22 November 2020, Pope Francis announced that the celebration of World Youth Day (WYD), which has been traditionally held on Palm Sunday, starting in 2021, will be held on the Sunday of the Solemnity of Christ the King. On reading the Pastoral Guidelines for the Celebration from the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life in Rome, I understood the reason and the connection.

We recall that on the Solemnity of Christ the King in 1984, Saint John Paul II summoned young people to a gathering on the occasion of the International Year of Youth (1985). Pope John Paul II said, “On this feast day [...] the Church proclaims the Kingdom of Christ, already present, but still growing in all its mystery towards its full manifestation. You, young people, are indispensable bearers of the dynamics of the Kingdom of God, the hope of the Church and the world”. Young people from **all** over the world were invited “to come to Rome for a meeting with the Pope at the beginning of Holy Week, on Saturday and Palm Sunday”.

Indeed, it is not difficult to see the link between Palm Sunday and Christ the King. In the Palm Sunday celebration, the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is commemorated as that of a “king... and mounted on a donkey” (*Mt* 21:5) and acclaimed as Messiah by the crowd. The evangelist Luke explicitly adds the title “King” to the crowd’s acclamation of “the one who comes”, to emphasize that the Messiah is also King. This is precisely Pilate’s question to Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus answers indirectly, but by saying that his “kingdom is not from this world”, like Pilate, we too see him as our King.

But let us come back to the Pastoral Guidelines for the WYD Celebration. World Youth Day offers young people a lively and joyful experience of faith and communion, a space to experience the beauty of the face of God. It is a *festival of faith*, “when together we praise the Lord, sing, listen to the word of God, remain in the silence of worship: all of this is the height of WYD”. The Pope wants to see World Youth Day as an “experience of Church”. not only on an international level, but a local one as well. Even more, he wants to see World Youth Day as a “missionary experience”. Meaning, their very presence and their joyful faith already constitute a “living proclamation” of the Good News that attracts other young people. Not surprising, World Youth Day is a great “opportunity for vocational discernment” and a “call to holiness”.

WYD has been a great pilgrimage right from the beginning. It has been a pilgrimage through space and time. Pilgrims have travelled from different cities, countries and continents to the place chosen for the meeting with the Pope and the other young people. The pilgrimage through time has gone from one generation of young people to

the next cohort who ‘pick up the baton’, and this has profoundly marked the past 35 years in the life of the Church. The young people of WYD are therefore a pilgrim people. They are not vagabonds who move around aimlessly. They are a united people, pilgrims who ‘walk together’ towards a goal, towards an encounter with the One who can give meaning to their existence, the God who became one of us and who calls every young person to be a disciple, to leave everything and to follow. Pilgrimage requires a focus approach that asks young people to leave behind empty comforts and certainties, to adopt a style of travel that is sober and welcoming and open to Providence and to “God’s surprises”, a style that teaches them to go beyond themselves and to face the challenges that arise along the way.

Let us not forget that “the **Church** has so much to talk about with youth, and **youth** have so much to share with the Church”. To invest in young people is to invest in the future of the Church. It is about encouraging vocations, and it effectively means the initiation of remote preparation for the families of tomorrow. It is, therefore, a vital task for every local Church and not simply one more activity.

I myself participated in four (4) World Youth Days. My first one was in Denver Colorado in 1993. Being with 350,000 youths of the world meant that I was not alone of my age group in believing in Jesus. But I did not feel necessary to do another World Youth Day. It was only seven (7) years later, in the year 2000, that I accepted the invitation to go to Rome. It is there that I really met the Universal Church, as many came for the Jubilee Year. I then participated of course in 2002 the one in Toronto. This time I participated as a priest and it was a Church experience with the youth. My last World Youth Day was in 2005 in Cologne Germany.

The fact that Pope Francis wants WYD to be more present in the dioceses is a good thing. We should not wait for large international gatherings to unite young people, to support young people. Young people are already part of our Church and young people bring a lot to it. How many times have I heard people say that after the WYD, not only do the young people come back with contagious energy, but they energize their parish, and even their diocese.

This year’s theme is: “Stand up. I appoint you as a witness of what you have seen.” In reality, this theme is not just for young people. It is for all of us. It is the hope that all of us will be witnesses of the things we have seen, what God has done for me, for you, for the young and old.

Mary our Mother, as Pope Francis reminds, “looks to this pilgrim people: a youthful people whom she loves, and who seek her in the silence of their hearts amid all the noise, the chatter and the distractions of the journey. Let us entrust the path of youth ministry throughout the world to Our Lady.