

## **Sunday 12- A**

### **Croatian Youth Festival**

Immaculate Heart of Mary Church

25 June 2017

Dear brother priests, Sisters, and young people gathered for the fifth  
gathering of Croatian Catholic  
Youth:

#### ***Introduction***

It is a real pleasure for me to welcome you to the Archdiocese of Vancouver. You have been experiencing our beautiful city and the vibrancy of the faith of our youth in the midst of Canada's most secularized city, where the number of Christians and the number of those who express "no religion" are approximately equal.

#### ***Challenge of the Mission***

Of course, throughout Canada and the United States the challenges to faith and the Church's mission are many. In today's Gospel, the Lord Jesus, who is sending his disciples on mission, instructs and prepares them to face the trials and persecutions they will encounter. "Jesus' sending the disciples on mission does not guarantee them success, as it does not shelter them from failures and sufferings. They must take into account be it the possibility of rejection be it that of persecution. This is somewhat frightening, but it is the truth."<sup>1</sup>

That is why the first step in taking up the mission lies in becoming

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, Angelus (25 June 2017).

closer to God. It is about giving God a chance to show you the power of his glory, love, patience and mercy. I am sure that your journey these last few days has strengthened your faith and given even greater force to your determination to become closer to Christ and his mission.

Dear friends: the Lord gives you the time of youth, a time which inevitably passes, to enable you to discover what gives your life meaning. As you well know, and as I can remember from years past, It is a time of powerful emotions, of concern about long-term life choices, of challenges in your studies and in the workplace, a time of wondering about the mystery of suffering and injustice. What is even more evident is that this time of life is also marked by a deep longing for making sense of what it means to be a happy person.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus asks his disciples: “What are you looking for?” (Jn 1:38) – a question that reaches beyond the limitations of first-century Palestine.

Jesus is asking that question of you. He is seeking you out even before you begin to look for him! While fully respecting your freedom, he approaches each one of you and offers himself as the authentic and decisive response to the longing deep within your hearts, to your desire for a life worth living.

Trust in Jesus who says in today’s Gospel: “And even the hairs of your head are all counted” (Mt 10:30). That trust is the foundation of

being a disciple, a follower and friend of Jesus.

Today, it would be good to ask yourself sincerely: in whom do you place your trust? In yourselves, in material things, or in Jesus? “We all have the temptation often to put ourselves at the centre, to believe that we are the axis of the universe, to believe that we alone build our lives or to think that our life can only be happy if built on possessions, money, or power. But we all know that it is not so. Certainly, possessions, money and power can give a momentary thrill, the illusion of being happy, but they end up possessing us and making us always want to have more, never satisfied.”<sup>2</sup>

The answer to happiness is to place your trust in Jesus, and you will never be disappointed! If you remove yourself from the centre and put the Lord there, your faith will immerse you in his love and give you the security, strength, and hope that are necessary for being a disciple on mission. In the words of Pope Benedict, spoken to young people gathered six years ago in Zagreb:

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<sup>2</sup> Francis, Address of Welcome, World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro (25 July 2013).

Let him [Jesus] take you by the hand! Let him become more and more your friend and companion along life's journey. Put your trust in him and he will never disappoint you! Jesus enables you to know at first hand the love of God the Father; he helps you realize that your happiness comes from his friendship, from fellowship with him. Why? Because we have been created and saved by love, and it is only in love, the love which desires and seeks the good of others, that we truly experience the meaning of life and find happiness in living it, even amid difficulties, trials and disappointments, even when it means swimming against the tide.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Be Surprised by God's Love***

Love, being both a beloved and a lover, is the key to a happy and meaningful life. This means both loving God and others and, even more importantly, letting yourself be loved.

It is often harder to let ourselves be loved than it is to love. True love is being open to God's love which is always there first and catches us by surprise. To fall in love is always a surprise, because it starts with a dialogue between two persons: the one who loves and the one who is loved. We say that God is the God of surprises, because he always loves us first and he takes us by surprise.

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, Vigil for Young People, Zagreb (4 June 2011).

Think here of St. Matthew, the author of today's Gospel. He was a good businessman. But he also betrayed his country because he collected taxes from the Jews and paid them to the Romans. He was loaded with money from these collections. Then the unexpected. Jesus comes along, looks at him and says: "Come, follow me." Matthew couldn't believe it. Those who were with Jesus were probably saying: "He is calling this man, a traitor, a scoundrel." And Matthew hangs on to his money and doesn't want to leave.

But the surprise of being loved wins him over and he follows Jesus. That morning, when Matthew was going off to work and said goodbye to his wife, he never thought that he was going to return in a hurry, now without money, to tell his wife to prepare a banquet for the one who loved him first, who surprised him with something more important than all the money he had.

So, dear friends, let yourselves be surprised by God! Don't be afraid of surprises that they will shake you up. Be ready for whatever he asks of you.<sup>4</sup> While I cannot know all the specifics of the Lord's plans for your life, the definite service he wants from you and from no one else, I do know that he wants you to be missionary disciples: followers who share the Good News with others.

And in today's Gospel it is evident that Jesus is not a Teacher who

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<sup>4</sup> Francis, Address to Youth, Manila (18 January 2015).

deceives his disciples: he tells them clearly that walking by his side calls for commitment and personal sacrifice.

Disciples – and you are today’s disciples – are called to conform themselves to Christ’s own life, who was persecuted by men, knew rejection, abandonment and death on the Cross. Likewise, to be missionary disciples is not to embrace a tranquil life in a worldly sense. Trials and difficulties are part of the work of evangelization, and we are all called to find in these tribulations the occasion to verify the authenticity of our relationship and trust in Jesus.

In the difficulties you will face among your peers, many, if not most of whom, are indifferent to God, remember that you are never forgotten, but always helped by the Father’s loving concern. Therefore, in today’s Gospel, for three times, Jesus reassures the disciples saying: “Have no fear!”

He continues to say to us, as he said to the disciples of his time: “Have no fear!” Do not forget this command of consolation: When we experience difficulty, indifference or persecution, something that makes us suffer, we must always listen to Jesus’ voice in our heart: “Have no fear! Have no fear; go on! I am with you!” Have no fear of someone who derides you and mistreats you; and have no fear of someone who ignores or combats the Gospel. Jesus does not leave us alone: each one is

precious for Jesus, and he accompanies us.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Francis, Angelus (25 June 2017).

Never let go of Jesus' hand, never leave him; and if you do move away from him on an occasion, get up and keep moving forwards. He understands what you are going through. Hand in hand with Jesus it is possible to live fully, by holding his hand it is possible to believe that life is worth the effort, it is worth giving of your best, to be leaven, salt and light among friends, in your families, universities, places of work and communities.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Be Missionaries***

Where is Jesus sending you? There are no borders, no limits: he sends you to everyone. The Gospel is for everyone, not just for some. It is not only for those who seem closer to us, more receptive, more welcoming. It is for everyone. Do not be afraid to go and to bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem farthest away, most indifferent. The Lord seeks all, he wants everyone to feel the warmth of his mercy and his love.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Francis, Address to Young People, Morelia (16 February 2016).

“Do not be afraid!” “Fear no one!” When you go to proclaim Christ, it is he himself who goes before you and guides you. When he sent his disciples on mission, he promised: “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20). And this is also true for you. Jesus never leaves anyone alone. He will always accompany you.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

As we continue this Mass in which the Lord gives himself to us by becoming present, let us invoke the intercession of of the Virgin Mary, Advocate of Croatia, Most Faithful Mother and of St. Joseph, Patron of Croatia, that you, Croatian Catholic Youth in North America, will be strong and convinced missionary disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily, World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro (28 July 2013).