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28TH WORLD YOUTH DAY

The Opening Mass of WYD Rio 2013

Rio de Janeiro, 23 July 2013

Words of greeting addressed to the young people

Dear young people,

This is the day that you have all been waiting for: the opening of the 28th World Youth Day. Welcome to Rio de Janeiro. Welcome to this Brazilian city of outstanding beauty which is watched over by the statue of Christ the Redeemer located at Corcovado. For the next few days, this city will be the world capital of Catholic youth, filled with young people who have come from the most remote places on this planet. After a long and demanding path of preparation in your parishes and communities, you have gathered together here. Here is the young Church, filled with the joy of faith and missionary zeal. The words of the psalmist encourage us: “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (*Ps* 118:24).

Dear young people, on behalf of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Vatican office that has been entrusted by the Holy Father with the organisation of World Youth Day, I extend a cordial welcome and affectionate greeting to you all. I would like to thank your bishops, priests and teachers, lay and religious, who have accompanied you in your spiritual preparation for this great adventure of faith that we are experiencing here together in Rio. The Lord has surprises in store for each one of us. You will find that these will be memorable days with important discoveries, days of decisive choices for your lives.

World Youth Day in Rio is quite special. It returns to Latin America after 26 years, this young continent full of hope. It is worth recalling what Blessed John Paul II said to the young people at WYD in Buenos Aires back in 1987. He said: “I want to repeat to you something I said on the first day of my pontificate: you are the hope of the pope, you are the hope of the Church”. He went on to say, “Yes. I too want to repeat with you: “Latin America, be yourself! In your fidelity to Christ, resist those who try to suffocate your vocation of hope”. WYD in Rio is also special because it was called and prepared by Pope Benedict XVI and will be presided by

Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope. The ways of the Lord are truly amazing.

This WYD is taking place at the foot of the imposing statue of Christ the Redeemer of Corcovado. He is the central person of this event. His heart beats with infinite love for each one of you, and his open arms are ready to welcome you all. During this WYD, allow yourselves to be embraced by Christ! Entrust all your desires to Him, and all your plans for the future and your deepest joys. Also entrust to Him the difficult choices you have to make, and the fears and concerns that you hold in your hearts. Youth is a great treasure. You possess it, and you must let it bear fruit. Entrust it to Christ! The person who chooses Christ loses nothing – absolutely nothing. On the contrary, they gain everything and find true happiness and fullness of life.

The guiding theme of this WYD is, as you know, the missionary mandate that Christ entrusted to his Church: “*Go and make disciples of all nations!*” (cf Mt 28:19). This mission is the Church’s reason for being, and that of every Christian. We are all invited to be salt of the earth and light of the world. During this WYD, Christ calls us to go out from ourselves – as Pope Francis often tells us. Christ asks us to turn away from our comfortable lives, to knock down the walls of our selfishness, and to go with courage to the geographic and existential peripheries of the world, and to take Christ and his Gospel there. Here at WYD let us adopt the words of Saint Paul: “*Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel*” (1Cor 9:16). Let us shout out to the whole world, as the pope asked us to: “to follow Christ is good; to go with Christ is good; the message of Christ is good; emerging from ourselves, to the ends of the earth and of existence, to take Jesus there, is good!”.¹

Christ needs you young people with your young faith, full of joy and missionary enthusiasm. Christ is counting on each one of you.

Dear young people of the world, WYD in Rio has begun!

Again I say to you, welcome to Rio de Janeiro!

¹ POPE FRANCIS, Homily on Palm Sunday 2013.