

This column was originally printed in the September 2011 issue of New Earth, the newspaper for the Diocese of Fargo.

Pope Benedict XVI invites us to deepen and live our Catholic faith

Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila
Bishop of Fargo

World Youth Day 2011 is now finished and the Diocese of Fargo was blessed to have two groups go — a diocesan group and a group from Holy Spirit Church in Fargo. The theme for World Youth Day, held in Madrid, Spain, was “Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith” (Colossians 2:7). Numerous activities, liturgies and times of catechesis filled the six days, Aug. 16 through 21.

I was blessed to be able to lead three catechetical sessions. Wednesday’s theme was “Firm in the Faith,” with the catechesis addressing how the young people should examine the gift of faith “which illumines and transforms the lives of the believers because we are made for God” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 153-155). On Thursday, we discussed the theme “Established in Jesus Christ,” which invited the pilgrims to develop a personal relationship with Jesus and to build their lives with Jesus on solid foundations. The theme for the final catechesis, given on Friday, was “Witnesses to Christ in the World.” This theme reminded the young people that they are called to participate in missionary activity and that this is especially important among their peers.

Attending the sessions that I presented were young people from the United States, Uganda, Cameroon, Australia, England, Canada, the Philippines and India. Pilgrims from the Diocese of Fargo were present at the third session.

After the catechesis, there was prayer and a time for questions and answers. The questions and dialogue from the young people were fantastic. A Ugandan pilgrim, for example, asked how one can remain convinced of his faith when he experiences so much violence. Mass was celebrated after the question and answer time, and the music was provided by a group from Uganda at one Mass, from India at another, and from the United States at a third.

The words Pope Benedict XVI shared through the World Youth Day Masses and events are applicable to everyone, for they call each of us, in our own vocation, to deepen and live our Catholic faith. I provide for you, through this column, some brief excerpts and encourage you to read the full texts by visiting the Vatican website at www.vatican.va.

First: Our Holy Father’s words for the young people, from his homily at the Aug. 21 final Mass:

“I think of the special love with which Jesus is looking upon you. Yes, the Lord loves you and calls you his friends (cf. John 15:15). He goes out to meet you and he wants to accompany you on your journey, to open the door to a life of fulfillment and to give you a share in his own closeness to the Father . . .

“Dear young people, today Christ is asking you the same question which he asked the Apostles: ‘Who do you say that I am?’ Respond to him with generosity and courage, as befits young hearts like your own. Say to him: ‘Jesus, I know that you are the Son of God, who has given your life for me. I want to follow you faithfully and to be led by your word. You know me and you love me. I place my trust in you and I put my whole life into your

hands. I want you to be the power that strengthens me and the joy which never leaves me.'
. . .

"I ask you, dear friends, to love the Church, which brought you to birth in the faith, which helped you to grow in the knowledge of Christ and which led you to discover the beauty of his love. Growing in friendship with Christ necessarily means recognizing the importance of joyful participation in the life of your parishes, communities and movements, as well as the celebration of Sunday Mass, frequent reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation, and the cultivation of personal prayer and meditation on God's word. Friendship with Jesus will also lead you to bear witness to the faith wherever you are, even when it meets with rejection or indifference. We cannot encounter Christ and not want to make him known to others. So do not keep Christ to yourselves! Share with others the joy of your faith. The world needs the witness of your faith, it surely needs God."

Second: His words for seminarians, given during his homily at the Aug. 20 Mass:

"Under the guidance of your formators, open your hearts to the light of the Lord, to see if this path, which demands courage and authenticity, is for you. Approach the priesthood only if you are firmly convinced that God is calling you to be his ministers, and if you are completely determined to exercise it in obedience to the Church's precepts.

"With this confidence, learn from him who described himself as meek and humble of heart, leaving behind all earthly desire for his sake so that, rather than pursuing your own good, you build up your brothers and sisters by the way you live, as did the patron saint of the diocesan clergy of Spain, St. John of Avila. Moved by his example, look above all to the Virgin Mary, Mother of Priests. She will know how to mold your hearts according to the model of Christ, her divine Son, and she will teach you how to treasure forever all that he gained on Calvary for the salvation of the world."

Third: His words for young women religious, given during his Aug. 19 meeting with them:

"It is not by accident that consecrated life 'is born from hearing the word of God and embracing the Gospel as its rule of life. A life devoted to following Christ in his chastity, poverty and obedience becomes a living 'exegesis' of God's word. . . . Every charism and every rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it, thus opening up new pathways of Christian living marked by the radicalism of the Gospel' (Verbum Domini, 83).

"This Gospel radicalism means being 'rooted and built up in Christ, and firm in the faith' (cf. Colossians 2:7). In the consecrated life, this means going to the very root of the love of Jesus Christ with an undivided heart, putting nothing ahead of this love (cf. St. Benedict, Rule, IV, 21) and being completely devoted to him, the Bridegroom, as were the saints, like Rose of Lima and Rafael Arnáiz, the young patrons of this World Youth Day.

"Your lives must testify to the personal encounter with Christ, which has nourished your consecration, and to all the transforming power of that encounter. This is all the more important today when 'we see a certain 'eclipse of God' taking place, a kind of amnesia which, albeit not an outright rejection of Christianity, is nonetheless a denial of the treasure of our faith, a denial that could lead to the loss of our deepest identity' (Message for the 2011 World Youth Day, 1).

"In a world of relativism and mediocrity, we need that radicalism to which your consecration, as a way of belonging to the God who is loved above all things, bears witness."