

**Mass with the Diocesan World Youth Day Pilgrims
San Jeronimo el Real, Madrid, Spain**

**The Memorial of Saint John Eudes
August 19, 2011**

**+ Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear young friends,

It gives me great joy to be able to join you in your pilgrimage to this World Youth Day 2011, this great vision of Blessed Pope John Paul II of a great festival of faith in which young people can gather together for “an experience of the Lord Jesus, risen and alive, and of his love for each of us.”¹

We have heard the invitation of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to join him in here in Madrid to pray together, to reflect together and to learn together how to be “planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith” (cf. Colossians 2:7).

We from the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois come from a part of the country where farming is very important and we can appreciate the Holy Father’s metaphor of being firmly planted in the faith. Earlier this week, Father Daren Zehnle and I were driving to Alton for Mass with the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George. I noticed that the corn had already

grown very tall. It was a visible reminder that the seed firmly planted bears fruit in abundance.

Each of us, by the virtue and grace of our Baptism, has already been planted in Jesus Christ. He has grafted us onto his Body, the Church, and has given us a share in his own divine life. What is needed on our end is to let our roots grow deeply into his soil, that is, into his teachings and his will for us.

Each of us, by the virtue and grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation, has also already been built up in Jesus Christ. In being sealed with the seven-fold gift of the Holy Spirit, we have been strengthened by his grace to be faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, to resist the devil and his temptations and to bring the Gospel to everyone we meet. What is need on our end is to make use of the Spirit's gifts in our struggle against temptation.

If we are to let our roots grow deeply, if we are call upon the aid of the Spirit, we must remain firm in the faith. It is for this reason that we have come to this ancient city with hundreds of thousands of your peers to be with the Successor of Peter who has come from Rome to strengthen us in the faith of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 22:32).

Indeed, we can rightly say that is not simply because of the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI that we have left our homes; it is, rather, because of the invitation of Jesus Christ that we have come here.

We are here because we have been drawn by Jesus Christ, for it is he “who takes the initiative to plant, build up and confirm the faithful.”² Because of his initiative we have set out on a pilgrimage, which is different from a tour or a vacation. To set out on a pilgrimage is to travel to a particular destination with the intention of being touched by divine grace and to return home changed.

To go on pilgrimage is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasures of nature, art or history. To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shown with particular splendor and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe.³

Perhaps you have not yet begun to make this pilgrimage interiorly; perhaps you have not yet begun to open yourself to experience the grace of the Lord; perhaps you have not yet said to him, “Teach me your paths, my God, guide me in your truth” (Psalm 45:4b, 5a).

I know and you know, and the Pope also knows, that “many young people experience a deep desire for personal relationships marked by truth

and solidarity” and that you “yearn to build authentic friendships, to know true love, to start a family that will remain united, to achieve personal fulfillment and real security, all of which are the guarantee of a serene and happy future.”⁴ Such relationships are nothing less than true friendships.

In each of our lives there are certain friendships without which we cannot imagine life, so dear are these people to us. But there are other friendships that, while good and important to us as they are, are not quite so highly prized. This pilgrimage is a time for us to examine our relationships and to consider our friendships.

Saint Jerome, to whom this church is dedicated, wrote many letters in his life and devoted no small part of them to friendship. Among his words of wisdom are these: “The friendship that can cease has never been real.” Are your friendships real? Can they cease? These questions are another way of asking, Are your friendships planted and built up in Jesus Christ? Are they firm in the faith?

Dear brothers and sisters, the “Christian faith is not only a matter of believing that certain things are true, but above all a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is an encounter with the Son of God that gives new energy to the whole of our existence. When we enter into a personal

relationship with him, Christ reveals our true identity and, in friendship with him, our life grows towards complete fulfillment.”⁵

This is what the Lord Jesus means when he holds up the love of God and the love of neighbor as the greatest of the commandments (cf. Matthew 22:37-39). If we say to him each day, “Teach me your paths, my God, guide me in your truth,” he will show us and help us to love authentically. By living in this way, all of our friendships will be true.

I encourage you, then, in these days of festivity and of faith, to step out of yourselves in order to encounter the Lord present in his Sacraments. In these days, “learn to ‘see’ and to ‘meet’ Jesus in the Eucharist, where he is present and close to us, and even becomes food for our journey.” Go and meet him “in the sacrament of Penance [where] the Lord reveals his mercy and always grants us his forgiveness.”⁶ When you are reconciled to the Lord and nourished with his Body and Blood, then you will be able to remain firm in the faith and to know the realization of your deepest longings and desires.

Earlier this week, Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko, president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, responsible for organizing the World

Youth Days, welcomed youth to Madrid with the affirmation that their presence is an “unwavering ‘yes.’ Yes, faith is possible.” “You have come to this meeting with the Holy Father Benedict XVI bringing with you all your plans and hopes, as well as your concerns and apprehensions about the choices that lie ahead,” the Cardinal stated. “These will be days that you will never forget, days of important discoveries and decisions that will be decisive for your future.”

Over the years, I have met priests and nuns who have said that they heard their vocational call while participating in a World Youth Day. I pray that this World Youth Day here in Madrid will be decisive in same way for you as well, that you will hear God’s call for you and He will give you the grace to say yes to that call.

There is one final thought with which I want to leave you. Today, Holy Mother Church celebrates the memorial of Saint John Eudes, a priest who lived in the seventeenth century. When speaking of Christ, he said: “He belongs to you, but more than that, He longs to be in you, living and ruling in you, as the head lives and rules in the body. He wants His breath to be in your breath, His heart in your heart, and His soul in your soul.”

Throughout the course of your various pilgrimages you have been in my prayers and you will remain in my prayers through the course of this World Youth Day and beyond. I pray that you will recognize the truth of Saint John's words and allow the Lord to rule over you and in you. Do not be afraid of Christ! Let yourselves be conquered by the beauty and strength of his love, and you will know the fullness of joy and peace, you will remain planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith!

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the XXVI World Youth Day 2011, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, Address at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, November 6, 2010.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Message for the XXVI World Youth Day 2011, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.