

**Homily for the Mass for Pilgrims of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois
at World Youth Day - Rio de Janeiro**

**The Memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary
July 26, 2013**

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

My brother priests, chaperones, pilgrims, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is a joy for me as your bishop to gather with you during this World Youth Day here in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro. We have all travelled a great distance to join our Holy Father, Pope Francis, in celebrating the universality of the Church with youth from throughout the world. I thank you for your willingness to heed the call of the Lord to “go and make disciples of all nations” (cf. Mt. 28:19), a call that you will be better able to respond to having participated in these days of prayer, study, and celebration.

Anybody who has done much travelling knows that each city has something distinctive that sets it apart from the rest. We think about the center of our diocese, Springfield, and we think of the many memorials to President Lincoln, commemorating the impact he had in our state as well as recognizing the many contributions he had on our nation. If we leave our diocese and cross the Mississippi River into St. Louis, we are greeted

by the Gateway Arch, symbolizing the city's geographic significance during the westward expansion of our country. As you entered into this city of Rio de Janeiro, I am sure that it did not take you long to notice the mighty statue of Christ the Redeemer atop Corcovado Mountain. This statue which has, for the past eighty-two years, been the symbol associated with this city speaks of the strong Catholic tradition that exists not just in this city, but in the country as well, as it holds the distinction having more Catholics than any other country in the world. In his Message for World Youth Day, Pope-Emeritus Benedict remarks that "Christ's open arms are a sign of his willingness to embrace all those who come to him, and his heart represents his immense love for everyone and for each of you."¹ It is that love of Christ that we have come to experience in a profound way, so that we might take that love back home with us and share it with those we encounter in our daily lives.

In our Gospel for today, we hear Jesus speaking in the terms of seeds being sown in the ground. We know that seeds are just the beginning of a complex process. They are not to remain what they are, but are called to grow up and produce fruit. This parable is a very apt description of the spiritual life of Christians.

In our Baptism, we receive this seed of faith which is intended to grow, not to remain dormant. In order to help that faith grow, we need to make sure that we provide an environment which is conducive to that growth. The regular practice of prayer, studying the faith, reading the Scriptures, and receiving the sacraments is the sure means of giving that seed of faith the best chance to grow up and bear fruit. Your participation in World Youth Day is another effective means of enhancing that soil to be able to bear even greater fruit. Any time we go on a pilgrimage like this, we have to make sure that we always keep this goal in front of us. You have certainly already had, and will have many fun and enjoyable experiences while here in Brazil, almost as if you were on a vacation. It is not a bad thing to have those joyful experiences, but they can never take the place of approaching this trip with the primary focus of deepening your faith and then renewing your commitment to being disciples in your everyday lives.

But the benefits of growing in your faith are not just for you alone. What you will gain from this experience is meant to be shared, just like fruit grown from a seed. If the fruit just remains on the tree and is never shared, what good is it? The same is true with the fruits of a deepened

faith. You are called to share these gifts with those in your schools, your parishes, your families, and your communities when you return home. As your bishop, I count on and look forward to the contribution that you will provide in spreading the Good News to the people of our diocese.

In his Apostolic Letter announcing the Year of Faith, Pope-Emeritus Benedict writes:

What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.”²

This credible witness is exactly what you are called to bring back home with you, having been strengthened yourself by the witness of more than a million young people from every corner of the world who demonstrate joy and enthusiasm for their faith. It is a witness that shows that living our faith is not a burden, but a joy.

In his Homily for Palm Sunday, our present Holy Father, Pope Francis said:

Young people must say to the world: 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!"³

Admittedly, it will likely be more challenging to provide this witness when you are not surrounded by so many people who share that same view of the faith as something good and worth following in their daily lives. As young people, you face many challenges that attempt to lure you away from being faithful to the teachings of Christ and His Church. It is not always the most popular thing to do and it can even result in our being criticized for standing up for what is true and what is good. But do not lose courage. What God is asking of you is not impossible. He will provide for all that you need, even the strength to suffer ridicule or persecution because of your faith. But we must not let the threat of suffering for our faith bring us fear. As St. John reminds us: "perfect love drives out fear" (1 Jn 4:18) May your experience of Christ's love during this time of World Youth Day motivate you to go forth and share that love in joy with those you live with on a daily basis. As Pope-Emeritus Benedict so beautifully concludes in his message for this gathering

As the great statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro shows, his heart is open with love for each and every person, and his arms

are open wide to reach out to everyone. Be yourselves the heart and arms of Jesus! Go forth and bear witness to his love! Be a new generation of missionaries, impelled by love and openness to all!"⁴

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Twenty-Eighth World Youth Day, October 18, 2012.

²Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* §15, October 11, 2011

³Pope Francis, Homily, March 24, 2013.

⁴Pope Benedict XVI, Message, §8, October 18, 2012.