

Whatever your vocation, I urge you: be brave, be generous and, above all, be joyful!



HOLY MASS WITH THE YOUTH.

Homily of his Holiness Pope Francis. St Mary's Cathedral (Yangon) Thursday, 30 November 2017

As my visit to your beautiful country draws to a close, I join you in thanking God for the many graces we have received in these days. Looking out at you, the young people of Myanmar, and all those who are united with us outside this cathedral, I want to share with you a phrase from today's first reading that resonates within me. Taken from the prophet Isaiah, it was echoed by Saint Paul in his letter to the young Christian community in Rome. Let us listen once again to those words: "*The footsteps of those who bring good news are a welcome sound*" (*Rom 10:15; cf. Is 52:7*).

Dear young people of Myanmar, hearing your young voices and listening to you sing today, I want to apply those words to you. Yes, you are "a welcome sound"; you are a beautiful and encouraging sight, for you bring us 'good news', the good news of your youth, your faith and your enthusiasm.

Indeed, you are good news, because you are concrete signs of the Church's faith in Jesus Christ, who brings us a joy and a hope that will never die.

Some people ask how it is possible to speak of good news when so many people around us are suffering? Where is the good news when so much injustice, poverty and misery cast a shadow over us and our world? But I want a very clear message to go out from this place. I want people to know that you, the young men and women of Myanmar, are not afraid to believe in the good news of God's mercy, because it has a *name and a face*: *Jesus Christ*. As messengers of this good news, you are ready to bring a word of hope to the Church, to your own country, and to the wider world. You are ready to bring good news for your suffering brothers and sisters who need your prayers and your solidarity, but also your enthusiasm for human rights, for justice and for the growth of that "love and peace" which Jesus brings.

But I also have a challenge to set before you. Did you listen carefully to the first reading? There Saint Paul repeats three times the word *unless*. It is a little word, but it asks us to think about our place in God's plan. In effect, Paul asks three questions, and I want to put them to each of you personally. First, *how are people to believe in the Lord unless they have heard about him?* Second, *how are people to hear about the Lord unless they have a messenger, someone to bring the good news?* And third, *how can they have a messenger unless one is sent?*" (*Rom 10:14-15*).

I would like all of you to think deeply about these questions. But don't be worried! As a loving "father" (or better, a "grandfather"!), I don't want you to wrestle with these questions alone. Let me offer a few thoughts that can guide you on your journey of faith, and help you to discern what it is that the Lord is asking of you.

Saint Paul's first question is: "How are people to believe in the Lord unless they have *heard* about him?" Our world is full of many sounds, so many distractions, that can drown out God's voice. If others are to hear and believe in him, they need to find him in people who are *authentic*. People who know how to listen! That is surely what you want to be! But only the Lord can help you to be genuine, so talk to him in prayer. Learn to hear his voice, quietly speaking in the depths of your heart.

But talk also to the saints, our friends in heaven who can inspire us. Like Saint Andrew, whose feast we keep today. Andrew was a humble fisherman who became a great martyr, a witness to the love of Jesus. But before he became a martyr, he made his share of mistakes, and he needed to be patient, and to learn gradually how to be a true disciple of Christ. So do not be afraid to learn from your own mistakes! Let the saints lead you to Jesus and teach you to put your lives in his hands.

You know that Jesus is full of mercy. So *share with him all that you hold in your hearts*: your fears and your worries, as well as your dreams and your hopes. Cultivate your interior life, as you would tend a garden or a field. This takes time; it takes patience. But like a farmer who waits for the crops to grow, if you wait the Lord will make you bear much fruit, a fruit you can then share with others.

Paul's second question is: "How are they to hear about Jesus without a *messenger*?" Here is a great task entrusted in a special way to young people: to be "missionary disciples", messengers of the good news of Jesus, above all to your contemporaries and friends. Do not be afraid to make a ruckus, to ask questions that make people think! And don't worry if sometimes you feel that you are few and far between. The Gospel always grows from small beginnings. So make yourselves heard.

I want you to shout! But not with your voices. No! I want you to *shout with your lives*, with your hearts, and in this way to be signs of hope to those who need encouragement, a helping hand to the sick, a welcome smile to the stranger, a kindly support to the lonely.

Paul's last question is: "How can people have a messenger unless one is *sent*?" At the end of this Mass we will all be sent forth, to take with us the gifts we have received and to share them with others. This can be a little daunting, since we don't always know where Jesus may be sending us. But he never sends us out without also walking at our side, and always just a little in front, leading us into new and wonderful parts of his kingdom.

How does our Lord send Saint Andrew and his brother Simon Peter in today's Gospel? "Follow me!", he tells them (*Mt 4:19*). That is what it means to be sent: to *follow Christ*, and not to charge ahead on our own! The Lord will invite some of you to follow him as priests, and in this way to become "fishers of men". Others he will call to become religious or consecrated men and women. And yet others he will call to the married life, to be loving fathers and mothers. Whatever your vocation, I urge you: be brave, be generous and, above all, be joyful!

Here in this beautiful cathedral dedicated to Our Lady's Immaculate Conception, I encourage you to look to Mary. When she said "yes" to the message of the angel, she was young, like yourselves. Yet

she had the courage to trust in the “good news” she had heard, and to express it in a life of faithful dedication to her vocation, total self-giving, and complete trust in God’s loving care. Like Mary, may all of you be gentle but courageous in bringing Jesus and his love to others.

Dear young people, with great affection I commend all of you, and your families, to her maternal intercession. And I ask you, please, to remember to pray for me.

God bless Myanmar! [*Myanmar pyi ko Payarthakin Kaung gi pei pa sei*]