

Thoughts from the Rectory ...

Dear friends of St. John the Evangelist,

While the summer heat continues to bear upon us and the waning days of vacation make us treasure every moment, I give thought to an August day in the Rocky Mountains in 1993. The 15th of August, on which we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was the occasion of World Youth Day in Denver, the first of its kind in the United States. Although I was not present myself, it remains a lasting memory for many in the American Church and an invigoration for countless families, even among our own here at St. John's.

With great vibrancy and enthusiasm, Pope St. John Paul the Great spoke to the young people of our country and, with them, set the course for a new generation of American Catholicism. Especially in the witness and life of Mary, the Mother of God, the mediatrix of graces, the Blessed Virgin, the one whose soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, we can find courage and hope to likewise have our spirit rejoice in God our Saviour.

I share with you some of the saintly Holy Father's words:

Young people from every corner of the world, *in ardent prayer* you have opened your hearts to the truth of Christ's promise of new Life. Through the Sacraments, especially Penance and the Eucharist, and by means of the unity and friendship created among so many, you have had *a real and transforming experience of the new Life which only Christ can give*. You, young pilgrims, have also shown that you understand that Christ's gift of Life is not for you alone. You have become more conscious of your vocation and mission in the Church and in the world. For me, our meeting has been a deep and moving experience of your faith in Christ, and I make my own the words of Saint Paul: *"I have great confidence in you, I have great pride in you; I am filled*

with encouragement, I am overflowing with joy" (2 Cor 7:4).

These are not words of empty praise. I am confident that you have grasped the scale of the challenge that lies before you, and that you will have the wisdom and courage to meet that challenge. *So much depends on you*.

This marvelous world – so loved by the Father that he sent his only Son for its salvation (Cf. Jn 3:17) – *is the theater of a never – ending battle being waged for our dignity and identity as free, spiritual beings*. Death battles against Life: *a "culture of death" seeks to impose itself on our desire to live, and live to the full*. There are those who reject the light of life, preferring "the fruitless works of darkness" (Eph 5:11). Their harvest is injustice, discrimination, exploitation, deceit, violence. In every age, a measure of their apparent success is the *death of the Innocents*. In our own century, as at no other time in history, the "culture of death" has assumed a social and institutional form of legality to justify the most horrible crimes against humanity: genocide, "final solutions", "ethnic cleansings", and the massive "taking of lives of human beings even before they are born, or before they reach the natural point of death" (*Dominum et vivificantem*, 57).

... Young pilgrims, Christ needs you to enlighten the world and *to show it the "path to life"* (Ps 16:11). The challenge is to *make the Church's "yes" to Life concrete and effective*. The struggle will be long, and it needs each one of you. Place your intelligence, your talents, your enthusiasm, your compassion and your fortitude at the service of life!

Have no fear. The outcome of the battle for Life is already decided, even though the struggle goes on against great odds and with much suffering. This certainty is what the Second Reading declares: *"Christ is now raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ...so in Christ all will come to life again"* (1 Cor 15:20-22). The paradox of the Christian message is this: Christ – the Head – has already conquered sin and death. Christ in his Body – the pilgrim People of God – continually suffers the onslaught of the Evil One and all the evil which sinful humanity is capable of.

... At her Assumption, Mary was *"taken up to Life"* – body and soul. She is already a part of "the first fruits" (1 Cor 15:20) of our Savior's redemptive Death and Resurrection. The Son

took his human life from her; in return he gave her the fullness of communion in Divine Life. She is the only other being in whom the mystery has already been completely accomplished. In Mary *the final victory of Life over death is already a reality*. And, as the Second Vatican Council teaches: "In the most holy Virgin *the Church has already reached the perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle*" (*Lumen Gentium*, 65). In and through the Church we too have hope of "an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us".

Happy and Holy Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary!

St. John the Evangelist, pray for us!

Fr. Pierz