

Brother Bishops and Priests,
Dear Young Friends,

“Go and make disciples of all nations.” With these words, Jesus is speaking to each one of us, saying: “It was wonderful to take part in World Youth Day, to live the faith together with young people from the four corners of the earth, but now you must go, now you must pass on this experience to others.” Jesus is calling you to be a disciple with a mission! Today, in the light of the word of God that we have heard, what is the Lord saying to us? Three simple ideas: *Go, do not be afraid, and serve.*

1. *Go.* During these days here in Rio, you have been able to enjoy the wonderful experience of meeting Jesus, meeting him together with others, and you have sensed the joy of faith. But the experience of this encounter must not remain locked up in your life or in the small group of your parish, your movement, or your community. That would be like withholding oxygen from a flame that was burning strongly. Faith is a flame that grows stronger the more it is shared and passed on, so that everyone may know, love and confess Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and history (cf. Rom 10:9).

Careful, though! Jesus did not say: “if you would like to, if you have the time”, but: “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Sharing the experience of faith, bearing witness to the faith, proclaiming the Gospel: this is a command that the Lord entrusts to the whole Church, and that includes you; but it is a command that is born not from a desire for domination or power but from the force of love, from the fact that Jesus first came into our midst and gave us, not a part of himself, but the whole of himself, he gave his life in order to save us and to show us the love and mercy of God. Jesus does not treat us as slaves, but as free men, as friends, as brothers and sisters; and he not only sends us, he accompanies us, he is always beside us in our mission of love.

Where does Jesus send us? There are no borders, no limits: he sends us to everyone. The Gospel is for everyone, not just for some. It is not only for those who seem closer to us, more receptive, more welcoming. It is for everyone. Do not be afraid to go and to bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem farthest away, most indifferent. The Lord seeks all, he wants everyone to feel the warmth of his mercy and his love.

In particular, I would like Christ’s command: “Go” to resonate in you young people from the Church in Latin America, engaged in the continental mission promoted by the Bishops. Brazil, Latin America, the whole world needs Christ! Saint Paul says: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16). This continent has received the proclamation of the Gospel which has marked its history and borne much fruit. Now this proclamation is entrusted also to you, that it may resound with fresh power. The Church needs you, your enthusiasm, your creativity and the joy that is so characteristic of you. A great Apostle of Brazil, Blessed José de Anchieta, set off on the mission when he was only nineteen

years old. Do you know what the best tool is for evangelizing the young? Another young person. This is the path to follow!

2. *Do not be afraid.* Some people might think: “I have no particular preparation, how can I go and proclaim the Gospel?” My dear friend, your fear is not so very different from that of Jeremiah, a young man like you, when he was called by God to be a prophet. We have just heard his words: “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth”. God says the same thing to you as he said to Jeremiah: “Be not afraid... for I am with you to deliver you” (Jer 1:7,8). He is with us! “Do not be afraid!” When we go to proclaim Christ, it is he himself who goes before us and guides us. When he sent his disciples on mission, he promised: “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20). And this is also true for us! Jesus does not leave us alone, he never leaves you alone! He always accompanies you.

And then, Jesus did not say: “One of you go,” but “All of you go”: we are sent together. Dear young friends, be aware of the companionship of the whole Church and also the communion of the saints on this mission. When we face challenges together, then we are strong, we discover resources we did not know we had. Jesus did not call the Apostles to live in isolation, he called them to form a group, a community. I would like to address you, dear priests concelebrating with me at this Eucharist: you have come to accompany your young people, and this is wonderful, to share this experience of faith with them! But it is a stage on the journey. Continue to accompany them with generosity and joy, help them to become actively engaged in the Church; never let them feel alone!

3. The final word: *serve*. The opening words of the psalm that we proclaimed are: “Sing to the Lord a new song” (Psalm 95:1). What is this new song? It does not consist of words, it is not a melody, it is the song of your life, it is allowing our life to be identified with that of Jesus, it is sharing his sentiments, his thoughts, his actions. And the life of Jesus is a life for others. It is a life of service. In our Second Reading today, Saint Paul says: “I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more” (1 Cor 9:19). In order to proclaim Jesus, Paul made himself “a slave to all”. Evangelizing means bearing personal witness to the love of God, it is overcoming our selfishness, it is serving by bending down to wash the feet of our brethren, as Jesus did. Go, do not be afraid, and serve. If you follow these three ideas, you will experience that the one who evangelizes is evangelized, the one who transmits the joy of faith receives joy. Dear young friends, as you return to your homes, do not be afraid to be generous with Christ, to bear witness to his Gospel. In the first Reading, when God sends the prophet Jeremiah, he gives him the power to “pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (1:10). It is the same for you. Bringing the Gospel is bringing God’s power to pluck up and break down evil and violence, to destroy and overthrow the barriers of selfishness, intolerance and hatred, so as to build a new world.

Jesus Christ is counting on you! The Church is counting on you! The Pope is counting on you! May Mary, Mother of Jesus and our Mother, always accompany you with her tenderness: “*Go and make disciples of all nations.*” Amen.