

Talk at Saturday Night Prayer Service: Francis rebuilding the church

Dear Young Friends,

We have just recalled the story of Saint Francis of Assisi. In front of the crucifix he heard the voice of Jesus saying to him: “Francis, go, rebuild my house.” The young Francis responded readily and generously to the Lord’s call to rebuild his house. But which house? Slowly but surely, Francis came to realize that it was not a question of repairing a stone building, but about doing his part for the life of the Church. It was a matter of being at the service of the Church, loving her and working to make the countenance of Christ shine ever more brightly in her.

Today too, as always, the Lord needs you, young people, for his Church. Today too, he is calling each of you to follow him in his Church and to be missionaries. How? In what way? Well, I think we are able to learn something from what has happened these days: how we had to move this vigil from Campus Fidei in Guaratiba because of the bad weather. Would not the Lord be willing to say to us that the real area of faith, the true campus fidei, is not a geographical place but are we that very place? Yes! Each of us, each one of you. And missionary discipleship means to recognize that we are the Campus Fidei of God! Starting with the name of the place where we are, Campus Fidei, the field of faith, I have thought of three images that can help us understand better what it means to be a disciple and a missionary. First, a field is a place for sowing seeds; second, a field is a training ground; and third, a field is a construction site.

A field is a place for sowing seeds. We all know the parable where Jesus speaks of a sower who went out to sow seeds in the field; some seed fell on the path, some on rocky ground, some among thorns, and could not grow; other seed fell on good soil and brought forth much fruit (cf. Mt 13:1-9). Jesus himself explains the meaning of the parable: the seed is the word of God sown in our hearts (cf. Mt 13:18-23). This, dear young people, means that the real Campus Fidei, the field of faith, is your own heart, it is your life. It is your life that Jesus wants to enter with his word, with his presence. Please, let Christ and his word enter your life, blossom and grow.

Jesus tells us that the seed which fell on the path or on the rocky ground or among the thorns bore no fruit. What kind of ground are we? What kind of terrain do we want to be? Maybe sometimes we are like the path: we hear the Lord’s word but it changes nothing in our lives because we let ourselves be numbed by all the superficial voices competing for our attention; or we are like the rocky ground: we receive Jesus with enthusiasm, but we falter and, faced with difficulties, we don’t have the courage to swim against the tide; or we are like the thorny ground: negativity, negative feelings choke the Lord’s word in us (cf. Mt 13:18-22). But today I am sure that the seed is falling on good soil, that you want to be good soil, not part-time Christians, not “starchy” and superficial, but real. I am sure that you don’t want to be duped by a false freedom, always at the beck and call of momentary fashions and fads. I know that you are aiming high, at long-lasting decisions which will make your lives meaningful. Jesus is capable of letting you do this: he is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). Let’s trust in him. Let’s make him our guide!

A field is a training ground. Jesus asks us to follow him for life, he asks us to be his disciples, to “play on his team.” I think that most of you love sports! Here in Brazil, as in other

countries, football is a national passion. Now, what do players do when they are asked to join a team? They have to train, and to train a lot! The same is true of our lives as the Lord's disciples. Saint Paul tells us: "athletes deny themselves all sorts of things; they do this to win a crown of leaves that withers, but we a crown that is imperishable" (1 Cor 9:25). Jesus offers us something bigger than the World Cup! He offers us the possibility of a fulfilled and fruitful life; he also offers us a future with him, an endless future, eternal life. But he asks us to train, "to get in shape," so that we can face every situation in life undaunted, bearing witness to our faith. How do we get in shape? By talking with him: by prayer, which is our daily conversation with God, who always listens to us. By the sacraments, which make his life grow within us and conform us to Christ. By loving one another, learning to listen, to understand, to forgive, to be accepting and to help others, everybody, with no one excluded or ostracized. Dear young people, be true "athletes of Christ!"

A field is a construction site. When our heart is good soil which receives the word of God, when "we build up a sweat" in trying to live as Christians, we experience something tremendous: we are never alone, we are part of a family of brothers and sisters, all journeying on the same path: we are part of the Church; indeed, we are building up the Church and we are making history. Saint Peter tells us that we are living stones, which form a spiritual edifice (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). Looking at this platform, we see that it is in the shape of a church, built up with stones and bricks. In the Church of Jesus, we ourselves are the living stones. Jesus is asking us to build up his Church, but not as a little chapel which holds only a small group of persons. He asks us to make his living Church so large that it can hold all of humanity, that it can be a home for everyone! To me, to you, to each of us he says: "Go and make disciples of all nations." Tonight, let us answer him: Yes, I too want to be a living stone; together we want to build up the Church of Jesus! Let us all say together: I want to go forth and build up the Church of Christ!

In your young hearts, you have a desire to build a better world. I have been closely following the news reports of the many young people who throughout the world and also here in Brazil who have taken to the streets in order to express their desire for a more just and fraternal society. They are young people who want to be protagonists of change. I encourage them, in an orderly, peaceful and responsible way, motivated by the values of the Gospel, to continue overcoming apathy and offering a Christian response to the social and political concerns present in their countries.

But the question remains: Where do we start? What are the criteria for building a more just society? Mother Teresa of Calcutta was once asked what needed to change in the Church. Her answer was: you and I!

Dear friends, never forget that you are the field of faith! You are Christ's athletes! You are called to build a more beautiful Church and a better world. Let us lift our gaze to Our Lady. Mary helps us to follow Jesus, she gives us the example by her own "yes" to God: "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me as you say" (Lk 1:38). All together, let us join Mary in saying to God: let it be done to me as you say. **Let it be so!**