

May the Madrid World Youth Day be the Damascus for many young people who are ready to open their lives to Christ and to others, to serve as credible and vibrant witnesses of the Gospel—ever old and ever new. The world so urgently needs this witness.

Article “Faithfulness and Happiness,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, Rome (August 18, 2011)

Madrid 2011, a New Starting Point

Ever since Blessed John Paul II, with great intuition, initiated the first World Youth Day in Rome, 26 years ago, we could say that each of these gatherings has been a “starting point” in the life of thousands of young people. They have come to know Jesus Christ better and have decided to give a new direction to their life, orienting it in a conscientious and mature way towards God and others, with the optimistic Christian vision proper to those who know themselves to be sons and daughters of God. For some of them, over time, that initial enthusiasm encountered the ordinary obstacles of our earthly path. But with God’s grace, many have attained the happiness that comes from being faithful: the “*felicidad de la fidelidad*,” two words that rhyme in Spanish, as St. Josemaría Escrivá used to say. Faithfulness is nothing other than the maturity of love over time. Indeed, many of the participants in the first

world youth days were among the millions of people who came to Rome to say a last good-bye to John Paul II, a “good-bye” that was also a “thank you” and a plea: “continue helping us.”

The years have gone by and, now with Benedict XVI, the world youth days have continued their extraordinary ability to draw young people. This magnetism is not something artificial since, with the successor of Peter, it is Christ himself who is passing by. Christ’s look is directed at many, but, above all, at each individual, and that look is a flame that purifies and a love that calls. Many decisions of true dedication will come about, I am certain, to seek the high goal of Christian holiness in all circumstances: in married life, in apostolic celibacy, without changing one’s state in life, or in embracing the priesthood or the religious life. The “thank you,” “continue helping us,” reaches heaven, through Peter, to be converted into deeds: “here I am!” “you can count on me!” This is the Christian response to Paul’s exhortation to the Colossians: As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him (*Col 2:6*).

In St. Paul’s defense of the faith, in the passage from his letter that has been chosen as the motto for this World Youth Day, the Apostle speaks of vain philosophies and fallacies (*Col 2:8*). In this world of ours so torn by wars and rebellions linked to the uncertainties and injustices of life (a world we also have to love since it is the place where God in his infinite love has placed us), the

world youth days bring us a breath of fresh air. Our global society, marked by technological innovation and constant change, shows that it is sensitive to truth and to hope. And it discovers in its midst so many young Catholics who suddenly recognize that they count for something, for a great deal: that they have to be the soul of society. We believe in God's love, they say, and here we are.

Youth is a time for hope and adventure, a time for generosity. It is a moment when it is easier to see Christ as "man's plenitude and the fulfillment of his longing for justice and peace," as Benedict XVI said this past May 1. Madrid, as in past years Rome, Sydney, Cologne, Krakow, Toronto, Paris, Denver, Manila, Buenos Aires—among other cities—will be for many, I have no doubt, a call to build their life on Christ, to turn their own lives into service to others.

More than 80 years ago, Madrid was for St. Josemaria the place of a special meeting with God. In 1928 he saw that God was calling him to found *Opus Dei*, and in recalling that episode he would make reference to Christ's call to Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus: "Madrid was my Damascus," he would say, "because here the scales fell from the eyes of my soul and I received my mission."

The young 26-year-old priest began to work untiringly among workers and students. He sought the strength he needed to carry out his mission among the sick and poor in the Spanish capital: spending hours

traveling through the poor districts of the city every day, going from one place to another. While he tried to assist and encourage each person, he asked them to offer their hardships and sufferings for the souls of the young people he was dealing with. The prayer of children, the poor, and the sick is especially pleasing to God. I am certain that those prayers of sick people back in the thirties, as well as those of so many persons who today are uniting their hearts to the World Youth Day, will sustain the young people who are preparing for their meeting with Peter in the streets of Madrid. They are the invisible force that will make Madrid a new Damascus for many.

During those years, St. Josemaria gave a book on the Passion of Christ to a young architecture student; and on the first page, he wrote these words of dedication:

"+ Madrid, May 29, 1933
May you seek Christ
May you find Christ
May you love Christ."

I think that these brief phrases are a good summary of the experience of these world youth days, which bring Christ to the furthest corners of the world.

"Seeking Christ" defines the first step. Love always begins with a search, which leads to personal contact, intimacy: "It's like courting," St. Josemaria used to tell those young people. "A couple need to get to know each other well, for if they don't, they will not really love each other. And our life is a life of Love" (*The Forge*, no. 545). One needs to

open one's heart: it's not something mechanical that can be programmed. Pray that this happens with many young people, with the grace of the Holy Spirit and the help of true human friendship.

"Finding Christ" means being attached to him, ever more closely, as the branch to the vine (*Jn* 15:1-8). "Being built up in Jesus Christ," explains Benedict XVI in his message for the 26th World Youth Day, "means responding positively to God's call, trusting in him and putting his word into practice . . . Listen to him as a true friend with whom you can share your path in life."

"Loving Christ," finally, means finding the strength needed to love others, and to want to love always more. It means being "built up" in Christ, letting the Holy Spirit shape in us the image of the Word Incarnate, who offers himself for all men and women. The Pope's words challenge us to seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in order to receive Christ's love—a sacrament that Benedict XVI himself will celebrate in Madrid, as an eloquent testimony to divine mercy. And this love means letting ourselves be loved by Jesus in the Eucharist, so as to bring him afterward to many other people.

I ask Our Lady of Almudena, Mother of God and our Mother, for myself and for everyone, that she obtain for us the joy of a new conversion, a new beginning on the path of faith, so that, knowing ourselves to be weak but at the same time strong in faith (*Col* 2:7), we may believe in the love of our Father God and feel

ourselves to be truly daughters and sons of God in Christ.

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Interview on the Italian Eucharistic Congress, *Zenit*, Rome (September 12, 2011)

Why is the Eucharist the "center and root of the life of every Catholic?"

Putting the Eucharist at the center of Christian life means putting Christ at the heart of everything. In the Eucharist we are called to enter into the love of the Blessed Trinity. Making the Holy Mass the center of our interior life, unites us to Jesus and, in him, to the whole Church, to all mankind.

This was the constant teaching of St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, who said: "If the Tabernacle is at the center of your thoughts and hopes, how abundant, my son, will be the fruits of holiness and apostolate!" The Eucharistic Jesus is the culmination of his gift of himself to mankind. Therefore, if we identify ourselves with him, he will transmit to us the same desire to increase our gift of self and our service to others.

How important, in the charism of Opus Dei, is the practice of Confession and the Eucharist?