

Australian Gathering Blessing
World Youth Day, Lisbon, Portugal, Tuesday 1 Aug 2023

Greetings young Catholic Australia and Oceania! What an awesome sight it is to see three and a half thousand of you, ready for the grace-filled week of World Youth Day. Like the first Christian pilgrim, Mary, who immediately upon receiving the news of the Incarnation "arose and went with haste" and made for the Judean hills, you have joined millions of your peers who also arose, wherever they were in the world, and came with haste, excitement, purpose to Lisbon. With your lay leaders, pastors and pope you will be living-breathing, singing-dancing, praying-acting proof that the Catholic Church is alive and well. But we're not here just to profile the Church. No, we're here so something big will happen to you and through you. So, I want to conclude our gathering by issuing three charges to you today and giving you a blessing.

First invitation. Do we have some Maronites and other Eastern Christians here today? In the iconography of the Eastern churches Mary is the Theotokos, the God-carrier. She's grand with her arms open in prayer and a see-through belly. The unborn Jesus is in a bubble in her, a baby fully vested, with his right hand raised, already blessing the world. It's like Mary is a monstrance offering us a glimpse of the God within, like she was when she brought Christ growing within her to visit her cousin Liz, her husband Zack and their unborn baby JB (the Hifi store owner). This week is a super-opportunity for you to become a Theotokos, a God-bearer like Mary, open to God and saying YES to Him. There will be so many ways to strengthen your relationship with God, Mary and the saints, including the young saints living among us. You'll have chances to speak, listen, discuss and discern. There'll be great liturgies, talks, concerts, displays. There'll be chances to hear God's Word, receive His sacraments of Mercy and Communion, talk to Him in prayer, and celebrate your Catholic identity with your friends. So, the first charge to you is: ***make the most of all those opportunities so you can be a God-bearer like Mary.*** Will you accept that challenge?

A second invitation. If in Eastern iconography Mary is the God-bearer, the one who carries Jesus within, in Western iconography she is the God-sharer, the one who holds Jesus out for the world. The Church and the world need you to be both God-bearers and God-

sharers, in what you say and do. Mary pondered many things in her heart, but then she got out there and did something about it, like her Aussie namesake Mary MacKillop. She brought the world to Christ in her prayer and then brought Christ to the world in her action. This week is a super-opportunity for you to go more than a bit public about your faith and have fun in the process. It will be a chance to resolve how you will share Christ through works of evangelisation, justice and mercy in the future. So, my second charge to you is: **to make the most of your WYD opportunities so you can be a God-sharer like Mary.** Will you accept the challenge?

A third invitation. WYD isn't magic. It may inspire you to see the world around you differently and to act differently in it, but when you get home the world will be carrying on as it was before you left. WYD may inspire you to see **yourself** differently and develop some new aspirations, but when you get home it will be easy just to fall back into your old patterns. So this week you must resolve to find new forms and places of prayer, community and action to sustain the energy you've found here. So, my third charge to you is: **to carry forward this week's experiences of being a God-bearer and a God-sharer into the places you inhabit in the years ahead.** Will you accept the challenge?

So three invitations: in the end you decide, or you and God. But if you want to be truly happy, if you want to make the most of the life ahead of you, if you want eternal life, those are three great starts. Will you do it young Australia, young Oceania? Will you try? The Church has great confidence in you. Your pastors, families, teachers, leaders and peers have great confidence in you. By God's grace you will do great things!

So let's all stand for a final commissioning and blessing.

The Lord be with you all. R/ And with your spirit.

Heavenly Father pour out your grace upon these your servants that they may encounter you in the week ahead,

in your Word and Sacraments,

*in the liturgies and devotions,
in the catecheses and testimonies,
in the music and actions,
in Pope Francis and their pastors,
in the crowds of fellow pilgrims, and
in their quieter moments with you.*

*Come close to them, Jesus,
that they see you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
follow you more nearly.*

*Make them, like your mother, God-bearers and God-sharers,
joyful witnesses of the Gospel,
missionaries to our culture,
friends to the poor and marginalised,
stewards of your natural world,
citizens of your supernatural kingdom.*

We ask this, Lord Jesus, in your most Holy Name. Amen.

*And may almighty God bless all of you gathered here, ✠ the Father ✠ and the Son ✠ and
the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Go now God-carriers in haste—and witness to the Good News.