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23RD WORLD YOUTH DAY - FINAL MASS

Sydney, 20 July 2008

Concluding words addressed to the Holy Father

Holy Father,

The twenty-third World Youth Day is drawing to a close. Here before you are the young pilgrims who have come from every corner of the earth to take part in the event. They are a wonderful illustration of a young Church, filled with hope, with the joy of faith, and with missionary courage. They have had to overcome quite a number of difficulties and to travel long distances so that here in Sydney they could gather around the Successor of Peter to relive the mystery of Pentecost. Sydney, this great modern metropolis, has been transformed into an immense outdoor cenacle, the venue for a renewed Pentecost. The streets and squares have been swarmed with young Catholics of different nationalities and nations. In so many languages and in many different ways, they have proclaimed Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of humanity. They have given witness that to be disciples of Christ is very rewarding; to be Christian is a very beautiful thing! Throughout these few days we have been present at a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We have been aware of the breath and power of the Spirit among us. For each one of us, this has been an unforgettable time. It has been marked throughout with the great prayer: "Come Holy Spirit!"

On the day of Pentecost, the apostles emerged from the cenacle in Jerusalem, and they were different, transformed. This was the birth of the missionary Church! This was the beginning of the powerful "revolution of the Spirit" which is the only force capable of really changing the heart of the human person and, consequently, the history and face of the Earth! We are convinced that the young people of the twenty-third World Youth Day will also be different when they return home. This is how they will confirm the words of Christ: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses" (*Acts* 1:8). The Church in Australia is also different, this Church that so generously opened the doors for this wonderful event! Thanks to the witness of faith of its many sons and daughters - a witness that can always be depended on - the Church in Australia can look to the

future with greater confidence. And Australia itself is different. This land of great beauty is now surely even more blessed with the “great hope” brought to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Holy Father, as we come to the end of this twenty-third World Youth Day, in the name of each one of us, I wish to extend our deep and filial gratitude. Thank you, because you too have undertaken a long and tiring journey in order to be here with us. Your paternal presence is great encouragement for us because it is an eloquent sign of the love of the Church for the young generations. In you, Holy Father, we see a Church that is a friend to young people: a Church that listens to them, searches them out, accompanies them and teaches them. Above all, thank you for the words you addressed to these young people. Your words touched their hearts and will serve as a compass that they can depend on as they continue on their way.

Holy Father, the culminating point of the twenty-third World Youth Day has come: the sending out on mission. In a year that is dedicated to Saint Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, this takes on a very special significance. Recalling Paul’s powerful missionary zeal - “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!...” (1 *Cor* 9:16) - all of these young people wish to set out from Sydney to their respective countries and the places where they live and there to be young missionaries of Christ and the Gospel. They are very aware of what you once told us “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Christ and to speak to others of our friendship with Him... Christ takes nothing away, and he gives you everything” (24 April 2005).

Holy Father, bless these young missionaries who have been strengthened by the gifts of the Holy Spirit and are prepared to go forth “to the ends of the earth”!

Thank you, Holy Father!