



The Family Lifeline

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Missionaries of Joy!

Our young people are called to carry joy into our homes, says Nicholas Gabriel Lim.

Earlier this year, we marked the 27th World Youth Day (WYD) since the inaugural celebration in 1986. Once every three years since that first celebration, youths from all over the world continue to gather for a week of prayer, catechesis, and a celebration of the Eucharist with the Pope. The last International gathering was held in Madrid, Spain last year, while the upcoming one in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, will take place in 2013. Every other year, though, the Vatican has marked out a day to celebrate our youth, even if it's not held as an International gathering.

Having participated in the 2008 International gathering in Sydney, Australia, I can attest to the awe-inspiring testimonies that many other WYD participants have shared.

A CALL TO SHARE

The fire of that experience continues to burn in my life; it was an experience that has helped make me strive to share Jesus, as Pope Benedict XVI has described in his message for this year's WYD as he encouraged all young people to be "missionaries of joy": "If we are to keep [the experience of God], we must give it away". We cannot keep the experience of God to ourselves, the Pope says! Perhaps this is why I constantly find myself wanting to share my experience of God from WYD 2008 with the people around me – my family, my colleagues, my friends, the poor and the disadvantaged.

What happened at WYD 2008 that made such an impact on me? I experienced the greater Church coming together for

one purpose – to be with the Pope, the Vicar of Christ! I experienced the greater Church standing up to persecution amidst the celebration – protestors condemning the Church and bearing false witness, and Catholics standing united in prayer, defending the Faith and Church compassionately and intelligently. I experienced the power of the Eucharist as a binding power of unity regardless of believers' various languages and cultural backgrounds. I experienced believers coming in wheelchairs and clutches, those who are blind and deaf, to crowded places of prayer and worship, fervently calling on the name of our Lord Jesus, desiring him so much in their lives and walking away changed and converted. All these experiences allowed me to see Scripture play out right before my eyes. It was as real as it could get! I was convinced from that point that God is real! And He continues to touch and change hearts each day, whether we know it or not.

MAKING SPACE FOR GOD

It's no wonder Pope Benedict XVI made it a point in his message this year to urge young people to "not be afraid to risk our lives by making space for Jesus Christ and his Gospel" – it is in so doing that we are able to "find inner peace and true happiness. It is the way to live fully as children of God, created in his image and likeness", he said.

Interestingly, in his writings on the family, Blessed Pope John Paul II said that if a family was to live entirely accordingly to how God plans for it to live – "an intimate community of life and love," and if we start

making space for Jesus Christ and his Gospel in our lives, family life would consequently become a beautiful experience like how God intended for it to be, where everyone is involved in the "real sharing of God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride".

Indeed, once I was convinced that God is real and started to make the space for Him in my life, my outlook of life changed. The constant awareness of the deep love of God for me helped me see in my life daily the blessings he gives me. From the simple meal he places before me to the very person I married and the kind of businesses I venture into, I can see God's hand working in my life. Recognising the many gifts and blessings he has given me, I find myself overjoyed and happy beyond the expression of words.

As a result, I started to look out more for the least of my brethren living in my community and neighborhood. I started to be more discerning in my decision-making, and compassionate towards my business counterparts. Most importantly, I became more patient and understanding towards my parents, wife and family members.

AUTHENTIC JOY IS POSSIBLE!

It is possible to attain joy and to share this joy! Pope Benedict XVI says that "joy is the sign of God's presence and action within us". The question then, is how we should go about achieving this joy, particularly as youth, as a young person living within a family, in communities and in the "marketplace". The Pope proposed a few ways that I find useful and practical to

share: First, we should encounter Jesus in Scripture, as He is the true Source of our joy. Then, we should participate in the liturgy, as it is the special place where we as the Church expresses the joy which she receives from the Lord and transmits to the world. Thirdly, we must learn to love authentically, since joy is intimately linked to love. Fourth, Pope Benedict encourages frequent recourse to the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, for it is the sacrament of joy rediscovered. Lastly, we should live as "missionaries of joy". We cannot be happy if others are not. Joy has to be shared. We must go and tell our families and peers about the joy at finding the precious treasure which is Jesus himself.

BEGINNING AT HOME

Blessed John Paul II always pointed to the family as the place where everything begins. This is true even for our search for authentic and lasting joy, and the late pontiff proposed four meaningful ways we can discover joy.

First, we should use our God-given gifts and talent to patiently build the family as "a communion of persons", making the home "a school of deeper humanity": this happens where there is care and love for the little ones, the sick and the aged, where there is mutual service every day, and where there is a sharing of goods, of joys and of sorrows. Secondly, we should serve life, in order to actualize the original blessing of God our Creator – that of transmitting life and the divine image from person to person. Third, we should live in a manner that fosters authentic and mature communion between persons in the family. The family is the first and irreplaceable school of social life, and example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love. Therefore, practicing authentic love at home is not only essential to experiencing joy, but it is our very calling! Fourthly, as Christians called to carry joy, love and truth to the world, we should work to build up God's Kingdom by participating in the life and mission of the Church.

Youths have plenty to offer to the family. Becoming missionaries of love, self-less giving and joy, they can add an invaluable spark to life by remaining in close communion with God, growing with the Church in her mission to share the Good News, and becoming a witness to the joy that God promises through the school of humanity, the family.



Family Life Society

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If you have a personal story to share on family matters and values, email susie@familylife.sg.

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