

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, JULY 23, 2017
BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA NATIONAL JAMBOREE
SUMMIT BETCHEL RESERVE, GLEN JEAN, WEST VIRGINIA

My dear friends in Christ, I am very happy to be with you this Sunday to celebrate this Mass as you gather for this National Jamboree. I am grateful to Bishop Michael J. Bransfield, Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston, for hosting us. I also wish to acknowledge the presence of Bishop Robert Guglielmone, Bishop of Charleston and Episcopal Liaison for the National Catholic Committee on Scouting, my brother bishops, and the priest chaplains. As the Pope's representative to the United States, I want to express the Holy Father's personal closeness to all gathered here and to assure you of his prayers.

I am particularly happy to be here as this jamboree brings back a flood of memories from my youth. I was a scout for five years, right up until I entered the seminary. I know the value of scouting in my own life as I have traveled all over the world serving as a diplomat, and I have seen the real fruits of scouting in my own family, especially in the lives of my nephews and nieces. Scouting develops those values which our world sorely needs: generosity, service, and fraternity. These values are the antidote to the selfishness and individualism of our society. Scouting also encourages you to work together as a team, to share adventures, and to have a greater vision of life and creation.

Amid the beauty of creation, scouts ponder the God who made all things and who invites us to a relationship with Him. Scouting demands that we do our duty toward God, including worshipping Him. The first reading from the Book of Wisdom declares that "*There is no god besides you who have the care of all.*" Yes, we have a God who cares for us. He is a mighty God, but his *might is the source of justice* and His *mastery over all things makes him merciful to all*. God the Father has revealed Himself not only in creation, but also by sending His Son to be born, not in power and majesty, but in poverty and weakness – as a child.

Jesus, the Son of God, wanted to be close to the people and to teach them about the kingdom of His Father. It was not a kingdom of power or violence, but one of justice, love, and truth. To teach the crowds, Jesus told parables – stories – just like we share stories in scouting. Jesus' stories point us to something new, something beyond this world. In our Gospel, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to three things: a field with wheat and weeds; a mustard seed; and, finally, yeast. Before considering these, let us first consider that kingdom of heaven itself points to the lordship of God Himself and His will as the guiding principle of our lives. With Him, our lives are filled with joy, blessing, and fruitfulness.

Before we can make known to others this joyful message of the kingdom, we must first attend to the "field" of our hearts. Jesus uses the image of the field of wheat to speak about the kingdom to show us that something small, even hidden, has been sown within us – the seed of faith and the power of the Holy Spirit whose temple we became in baptism. However, Jesus warns us that there is an enemy who has sown weeds among the wheat *while the men were sleeping*. Jesus reminds us of the need to be vigilant – to stay awake, to be vigilant and keep watch, to be ready to preserve the grace we first received in baptism. Scouts know about staying awake and

keeping vigil by the camp fire; about being ready and alert; about watching for danger. We need to do the same with our souls, guarding them from the enemy.

After keeping watch over our souls, we can look to the needs of others, as a Church that goes forth. We need to keep watch but not only for our sake but for the sake of those around us. Our own commitment to holiness, to our neighbor, to the environment, and to being honest and decent can be an antidote for our culture and world. We all know people who do not know the Lord or who have fallen away from Him or the Church. How has this happened? Who has done this? *An enemy has done this*. Even though there are weeds among the wheat, we cannot lose heart. Pope Francis tells us:

An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear. (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24)

The Holy Father is asking you, the scouts, to be vigilant – to look out for your brothers and sisters *and* to be patient. The important thing is to persevere, to not give up in your mission and to not give up on others, hoping that they might have new life.

Jesus next uses the example of the mustard seed, which grows from the tiniest seed into a large tree, so that even the birds can rest in its branches. This is one of the great values of scouting. Early in life, your scoutmasters and leaders plant the seeds of virtue within you and nurture those seeds, pushing you to work harder, to work together, to develop certain skills. Each day you strive to be better and better, refusing to settle for mediocrity. Gradually, just like the tree, you grow in maturity and become strong.

Consider then the seed of faith that Jesus planted in your hearts and that the Church has sown in the world. The seed is good; it always has the potential to bear fruit and to provide others with rest. The Lord says elsewhere: *Every good tree bears good fruit*. In thinking about this, Saint Anthony of Padua says that a tree must have deep roots – the roots of humility, which help it support its trunk – the trunk of obedience. From the trunk shoot forth the branches, which he calls the branches of charity. The branches of charity give birth to the leaves of holy preaching – the word of God which must go forth, and finally, the tree bears fruit – the fruit of contemplation, leading us to God. The tree does not grow immediately, but gradually. Just as your scoutmasters help you grow gradually, educating you for life, so too does the Lord Jesus nurture your faith, so that you can be firm – like a tree – in giving witness to that which is true, good and beautiful.

Even when you struggle in faith or in prayer, trust in the Holy Spirit, who is showered down upon you and who not only *intercedes with inexpressible groanings* but who also *intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will*. Confident in the Spirit, we can go forth on our mission. The Holy Father constantly refers to all the baptized as missionary disciples. A disciple is one who learns. We are taught about heavenly things by Jesus, the Divine Teacher, and by the Holy Spirit.

Only after learning from God, we can go forth on a mission. Scouts cultivates in young people a real spirit of adventure, a zeal for exploration and for mission. The Lord is counting on you. Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven like yeast mixed with flour which makes the whole batch of dough rise. You are the leaven which gradually ferments the dough – all those around

us in society. We live in the midst of the world, described as wheat flour in the parable. By our word and example, trying to be holy and just right where God has planted us, we can make the whole batch – all those around us – rise! Our world today is plagued by isolation, selfishness and individualism. In contrast, scouts know something about being together, including others, and teamwork. Everyone must contribute something. What is the Lord asking you to contribute to the mission?

Your presence here gives me confidence in the success of our mission. As I said, the scouts have been a blessing in my life and in the lives of so many others. The values I learned in scouts have supported my faith and supported me in my mission. I imagine all the adults here would say the same. One of the things that I found most impressive about scouts is their spirit of commitment and generosity. I would like to conclude with a prayer for generosity – the Scout Prayer – which I learned many years ago and invite you to make this prayer your own.

*Seigneur Jésus,
Apprenez-nous à être généreux
À vous servir comme vous le méritez
À donner sans compter
À combattre sans souci des blessures
À travailler sans chercher le repos
À nous dépenser sans attendre d'autre récompense
Que celle de savoir que nous faisons votre sainte Volonté.*

*O Lord,
Teach me to be generous
To serve You as You deserve
To give and not to count the cost
To fight and not to heed the wounds
To labor and not to seek for rest
To toil and not to seek any reward
Except that of knowing that I am doing your holy Will.*