

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
VIGIL OF THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, JANUARY 26, 2019
“PANAMÁ IN THE CAPITAL” – WORLD YOUTH DAY 2019
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, DC

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father’s representative to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis! He wishes to be close to you, and he offers his prayers and best wishes as we, who were not fortunate enough to make the journey to Panamá, celebrate “Panamá in the Capital” on the occasion of World Youth Day. The theme of this year’s World Youth Day is “I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

These words, of course, are those of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who responded courageously to the Lord’s call to be the Mother of the Redeemer. In his video message for World Youth Day, Pope Francis said:

“Her words are a brave and generous ‘yes’. It is the positive reply of one who understands the secret of vocation – to go beyond oneself and place oneself at the service of others. Our lives only find meaning in service to God and other people.”
(POPE FRANCIS, VIDEO MESSAGE FOR WORLD YOUTH DAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2019)

Mary gave her consent and was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, and so, she conceived the Savior of the World. This same Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove at His baptism in the Jordan, when the voice of the Father was heard: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him.” The Spirit too led Jesus into the desert where he was tempted by the devil, over whom He triumphed. In our Gospel today, Jesus begins his public ministry, returning to Galilee *in the power of the Spirit*, coming to Nazareth, where he had grown up and spent his youth.

There in the synagogue, He stood up to read the scroll of the prophet Isaiah that explains His mission, which begins: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.*” The Spirit had “anointed” Jesus at His baptism. Jesus was to be a Spirit-filled Messiah, born of the House of David, who had been anointed by Samuel and upon whom “*the Spirit of the Lord had rushed.*” (cf. 1 Sam 16:13)

The rest of the passage that Jesus reads refers to his mission. They involve both His words and deeds. He has been sent by the Father to bring glad tidings to the poor; to proclaim liberty to captives; to give sight to the blind; liberty to the oppressed; and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. The privileged hearers of His message will be the poor, and the content of Jesus’ proclamation is liberty. During a Jubilee Year, debts were forgiven; those who were “in debt” because of their sins would be freed through his ministry.

Jesus’ words, which must have made a profound impact on those who heard Him, will be accompanied by His deeds. He will cure the sick, restore sight to the blind, will forgive the paralytic his sins and help him to walk again, and will cast out demons as He proclaims the Kingdom.

What is most startling about today's Gospel is what Jesus says when He rolls up the scroll and sits down. Sitting was the position of teaching, and here Jesus gives His first teaching when He says, "*Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.*" He is claiming that the time of waiting for the Messiah is over. The Messianic Jubilee foretold by Isaiah is here. It has arrived in His very person! Thus, those who hear Him and His words should feel blessed.

Are we not blessed to have heard His words? To have been called by name to be His disciples? To be part of God's family the Church? While we have been given the gift of faith, there are many challenges to living that faith, to responding courageously to His Word. Sometimes our faith is even mocked and ridiculed.

Jesus knew what this was like. At first, his hearers are all pleased. *The eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.* But immediately they begin to question, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" They refuse to recognize his Divine authority, and He will say, "*No prophet is accepted in his native place.*" He will point out the examples of foreigners – the widow of Zarephath and Namaan the Syrian – as those who received God's prophets, and when He challenges his own people, they drive Jesus from his own town. Just as at His birth, there is still no room for Him.

At times, we can feel like that. Whether we are from this country, or Europe, or Latin America, where Christianity has deep roots, often we find that no one will listen to us. The message of faith is rejected as something superstitious – something to be set aside in favor of science or political revolution. This is our challenge: to receive His Word and to be so convicted by it that despite the pressure, we remain faithful. That is, we truly believe that He is the Messiah and the fulfillment of our hopes and dreams.

It is at these critical moments, when our faith is challenged, that our Holy Father gives us good advice:

"Dear young people, take courage. Enter within yourselves and say to God, 'What do you want from me?' Allow God to answer you. Then you will see how your life is transformed and filled with joy." (POPE FRANCIS, VIDEO MESSAGE FOR WORLD YOUTH DAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2019)

But the strength that comes from the life of faith – a strength which you possess as young people is, as our Holy Father says, "a strength that can change the world. It is a revolution that can overthrow the powerful forces at work in our world. It is the 'revolution' of service."

It is true that sometimes our best efforts are rejected, even by those close to us. Nevertheless, we learn something from Jesus. Although his own people reject Him, He does not stop. He does not give up. He goes to Capernaum and there performs many miracles and shows in action that His words are true. This true requires courage, but this courage does not only come from within. It is also a gift that comes from on high. One of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit is fortitude.

The *Catechism* teaches us that "Fortitude is a moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death and to face trials and persecution ..." (CCC, 1808)

Jesus was overshadowed by the Spirit at His baptism; was driven by the Spirit to the desert where he overcame the temptations of the Evil One; and, returned in the Spirit to the

synagogue to proclaim the Good News. You too received the Spirit of God in your baptism. You were sealed with the Holy Spirit in your confirmation, so that you might be strong and courageous – that you might exercise fortitude – in giving witness to Christ. It is the same Spirit who consoles us when we are feeling dejected and who fills our hearts with joy.

It is remarkable what openness to the Spirit can accomplish! Indeed, the Virgin Mary was courageous enough to be open to God and open to a future of possibilities and promises, when she said, “Let it be done to me according to your word.” She was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, and so began a revolution which has not ceased – the Revolution of Love, which comes to us in Her Son, Jesus, the Savior of the World!

Con mucho gusto y afecto, en nombre del Papa Francisco y mío personal saludo muy cordialmente a todos ustedes. El Santo Padre ofrece sus oraciones en la celebración de la Jornada Mundial de la Juventud en Washington. El tema de la XXXIV Jornada Mundial de la Juventud “He aquí la sierva del Señor; hágase en mi según tu palabra.” (Lc 1, 38)

Estas palabras son, por supuesto, las de la Santísima Virgen María, que respondieron con valor al llamado a ser la Madre del Redentor. En su videomensaje, el Santo Padre dijo: “Sus palabras son un ‘sí’ valiente y generoso. El sí de quien ha comprendido el secreto de la vocación: salir de uno mismo y ponerse al servicio de los demás.”

En el evangelio de este domingo oímos hablar de la vocación de Jesús. Jesús volvió *con el poder del Espíritu* a la sinagoga de Nazaret y leyó el rollo del profeta Isaías que explica su misión: “*El Espíritu del Señor está sobre mí. Él me ha ungido. El resto del pasaje se refiere a las palabras y hechos de Jesús. Él ha sido enviado por el Padre para llevar buenas noticias a los pobres, para anunciar la libertad a los cautivos y a los ciegos que pronto van a ver, para poner en libertad a los oprimidos y proclama el año de gracia del Señor.*”

Las palabras de Jesús deben haber tenido un profundo impacto en sus oyentes. Lo más sorprendente es lo que Jesús dice cuando se sienta y comienza a enseñar: “*Hoy se cumplen estas palabras proféticas y a ustedes les llegan noticias de ello.*” Afirma que el tiempo de esperar al Mesías ha terminado. El tiempo del jubileo mesiánico está aquí. He llegado en Su misma Persona. Aquellos que lo escuchan son verdaderamente bendecidos.

¿No somos bendecidos al escuchar Sus palabras y al haber sido llamado a ser Sus discípulos? Aunque hemos sido bendecidos, hay muchos desafíos para vivir nuestra fe. Nosotros y la fe somos rechazados a veces. Jesús también experimentó esto. Al principio, sus oyentes están contentos. *Todos lo aprobaban y se quedaban maravillados*, pero luego dicen: *¡Pensar que es el hijo de José!* Cuando Jesús desafia proféticamente a los nazarenos, lo expulsan de su propia ciudad.

A veces nos sentimos así. El mensaje de fe es rechazado como algo supersticioso, algo que se debe dejar de lado en favor de la revolución política o la ciencia. Este es nuestro reto: ser fieles, creer que Él es el cumplimiento de nuestras esperanzas y sueños. En estos momentos, cuando nuestra fe es argumentada, nuestro Santo Padre ofrece buenos consejos:

“Queridos jóvenes, Anímense a entrar cada uno en su interior y decirle a Dios: ¿Qué es lo que quieres de mí? Dejen que el Señor les hable; ya verán vuestra vida transformada y colmada de alegría.”

La fuerza que proviene de la vida de fe, que ustedes poseen como jóvenes, es la fuerza “que puede cambiar el mundo; esta es la revolución que puede desbaratar los grandes poderes de este mundo: la ‘revolución’ del servicio.”

Es cierto que a veces nuestros mejores esfuerzos son rechazados, incluso por aquellos que están cerca de nosotros; sin embargo, debemos aprender de Jesús. Aunque su propia gente lo rechaza, Él no renuncia. Él no abandona su misión. Él bajó a Cafarnaúm y hace milagros, sana a los enfermos, expulsa demonios y proclama las buenas noticias. Perseverar requiere coraje y fortaleza, un don del Espíritu Santo.

El *Catecismo* enseña que “la fortaleza es la virtud moral que asegura en las dificultades la firmeza y la constancia en la búsqueda del bien. Reafirma la resolución de resistir a las tentaciones y de superar los obstáculos en la vida moral. La virtud de fortaleza hace capaz de vencer el temor, incluso a la muerte, y de hacer frente a las pruebas y a las persecuciones...” (CCC, 1808)

Así como Jesús volvió a Galilea con el poder del Espíritu, todos ustedes también recibieron el Espíritu de Dios en el Bautismo. Todos ustedes fueron sellados con el Espíritu Santo en el sacramento de la Confirmación – para ejercer fortaleza en la confesión de la fe de Cristo públicamente. Es el mismo Espíritu que consuela cuando estamos abatidos y que nos llena de alegría.

¡Es increíble lo que puede hacer la apertura al Espíritu! La Virgen María estaba abierta a Dios cuando dijo: *Hágase en mí según tu palabra*. El Espíritu Santo descendió sobre ella. ¡Así comenzó una revolución – la Revolución del Amor, que viene a nosotros en Jesucristo, el Salvador del mundo!