

Religious Education Congress 2015 — Youth Dayⁱ

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It's great to be with all of you today! I hope that you are having a good time!

I imagine that you got here early this morning, and I hope traffic was not too bad — well, that's the way it is, isn't it?

It is beautiful to see all of you here and gathered as the family of God in Southern California today, especially for the celebration of Holy Mass.

I love the theme you have been considering today, “Talk Jesus With Me.” So, I hope that you are doing that and let's keep doing it! Let's “talk Jesus.”

The way I see it, it's like this: Jesus is still with us. And the work Jesus came to do — his mission — is still continuing.

In the Gospel that we just heard, we see Jesus working. We heard how he was driving out demons, healing people. Showing them the power of God and telling them about the Kingdom of God.

The truth is that Jesus is still doing this same work today. This work continues through the work of his Church.

Jesus, as we know, gave his Church a beautiful mission. And the mission is this: To spread the good news about him, the good news about God. To show his mercy and love and charity to every person. In every country, in every corner of the world.

Now, each one of you — whether you know it or not — was made part of that mission, that beautiful mission, on the day you were baptized. What a great blessing, what an adventure! That is what it means to be a Christian. That means the work of Jesus' words continues *through you and through me*.

Some of the greatest saints in the Church were young men and women the same age as you.

St. Maria Goretti was 11 years old. St. Agnes was 13. St. Dominic Xavier was 14. St. Pedro Calungsod was 18. And one of my favorite saints Blessed José Sanchez del Rio was 14 years old.

I have a special devotion to him because he was young and strong and he gave his life for Jesus. Let me tell you a little bit about him.

When he was thirteen years old, there was a persecution of the Church in Mexico — he was originally from Mexico — and the Church was persecuted at that time in Mexico.

So, Blessed José joined a movement to defend his faith — it was the “Cristeros” movement. And two years after that, the government captured him, they tortured him, and they demanded that he renounce Jesus and his Catholic faith.

Blessed José refused and they killed him. They tortured him and they killed him.

Now, it is sad. It is also hard to believe, but my point is this: you, each one of you — all of us — can do great things for Jesus, no matter how young you are.

It doesn't mean necessarily suffering death, or pain, or sorrow. Blessed José was a happy person. He used to say, “Always follow the smallest wish of God.”ⁱⁱ And, my brothers and sisters, that's the secret of life! To live as God wishes us to live.

So, yes, you can be a hero for Jesus, you can do great things for God— by just living your Christian faith with joy and love and confidence. By just walking with Jesus, living the way that Jesus teaches us to live.

But still, you may think that in order to do that, you have to be super strong or have some special personality. You may think that those young saints were different, that they had something else that we don't have.

Well, today, I wanted to share with you, the ordinary but beautiful life of a young man that I know really well.

His name is Malachi. He was born in 1995, so, 19 years old, almost twenty. And I had the blessing of celebrating his baptism, then his first Holy Communion, and then his Confirmation just a couple of years ago. He was a normal, young man.

But he had cystic fibrosis, so he suffered a lot. He had to go to the hospital frequently. But, he was very strong and had a lot of fun., just doing normal things. He was a happy young man. He liked video games, sports, just normal things.

But he was especially passionate about his faith and happily shared his love of God with his family and friends. He was a good student, he finished high school. And last time that I talked to him, he told me that he wanted to be a priest.

This past week, he got very sick — ended up in a hospital. And on Sunday morning, he went to Heaven. He died.

The night before, he was talking to his mother in the hospital and as you can imagine, she was very emotional. She knew that there was nothing else that they could do for Malachi. He also knew that the end was coming, so he told her, “Mom, just trust in God. Do not worry about anything, I’ll be fine. But please, trust in God.”

So, my dear brothers and sisters, let us trust in God. Today is Malachi’s funeral Mass, the Mass of Resurrection.

So, in the same way, just be normal. Having fun, enjoy life — you can be a saint. Because Jesus wants to be your friend.

And Jesus wants you to reach out to people who are suffering, people who are lonely, people who are sick, people who are poor. He wants you to serve other people, to help other people — just like he did.

It is a beautiful life that we are called to live. It is a beautiful journey of joy and happiness and fun.

Let me suggest to you three things that can be helpful to you to strengthen your friendship with Jesus and make a difference in the world and in our Catholic Church.

Three things. First, take time to talk to Jesus every day, just whatever is in your heart. Early in the morning when you wake up. During the day when something good happens: *thank you, Jesus*. When you are in a difficult situation, *Jesus, help me*. Whatever it is, just talk to him.

Even just praying for, I don’t know, the Lakers. They need a lot of prayers, don’t they? I’m not sure. Actually, I don’t know what to pray for — they win games or they end up in the last place? Or maybe we should pray for the Clippers. Well, that’s good. We are making progress.

So, first thing, talk to Jesus. Your prayer is so important. Then the second thing, read about Jesus’ life in the Gospels.

You know, Pope Francis — do you like Pope Francis? — He’s a great Pope. We had a great blessing with Pope Francis to be with us and his ministry for the universal Church. We invited him to come today, but he said he couldn’t make it. Maybe next year, that would be great.

You probably know that he’s coming to the United States in September. So let’s pray for his Apostolic trip in September and let’s pray for next year.

So anyway, he says that we should carry around little copies of the Gospels in our backpacks, in our pockets. And when we have a minute, instead of texting or checking Facebook and Instagram — you do that, don’t you? — the Pope says we should read a little about Jesus. That’s a pretty idea, isn’t it? You could even download a copy of the

Gospels to your mobile device. So you always have the life of Jesus on your phone to carry with you. I was saying this morning that I'm not sure I can do it because I still have the iPhone 4 — so, maybe we can do a second collection and I get the iPhone 5? That's a joke, please.

So, seriously, second thing, read the Gospels.

And then the third thing, deeds of love and mercy every day. Love one another, support one another. And show your love in concrete ways — trying to make life easier for those around you. Reaching out to help people, especially the poor, the sick and the lonely.

So it is a beautiful adventure of following Jesus, helping people to discover the beauty of Jesus' life, our faith. Keep in mind those three things — it just takes a few minutes every day but it makes a big difference.

I promise you, it will change your life and you will change the world.

So today let us ask Mary our Blessed Mother for her intercession. That we can really become friends with Jesus, with her son.

Because Jesus really wants to be our friend and he's walking with us every single second of our lives. And that way, then we can really be missionary disciples and really we can live the theme of our meeting today: "talk Jesus with me."

ⁱ Readings (Thursday of the Third Week of Lent): Jer. 7:23–28; Luke 11:14–23.

ⁱⁱ Cruz, *Saintly Youth of Modern Times* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2006), 118.