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# **World Youth Day Rio 2013: “A journey of two Popes”**

World Youth Day Rio 2013, the gift of Benedict XVI to the youth carried out by Francis, was indeed a journey of two Popes. Yet, it was in Cologne in 2005, when, for the first time in history not one, but two popes contributed to the organization of WYD. The efforts of John Paul II who prepared and gathered the young people, and Benedict XVI who held the meeting, resulted in one of the most joyful and beautiful church events of all time. In 2013, the connection between the heads of the church was even more visible. There were two Popes in the Vatican. Francis – actively exercising the Petrine ministry and Benedict XVI – as Emeritus, supporting the Church through prayers. The theme “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28.19) was announced by Pope Benedict XVI during a general audience. The Pope revealed the itinerary and the spiritual legacy to the catholic youth. After inviting young people to Rio, in Madrid 2011, and encouraging them to keep their faith rooted in Christ, he sent them to preach and proclaim the same experience in 2013.

With an act of great humility and courage, Pope Benedict XVI renounced the Petrine ministry and, in response to supplications, the Holy

Spirit raised Francis, the first Pope from Latin America. It was up to him to guide WYD Rio 2013, The Second World Youth Day held in South America. Indeed, it was the birthplace of the Holy Father, Buenos Aires, Argentina, where the WYD was held for the first time outside of Rome. And Rio de Janeiro had the honor and joy to receive the 28th edition of the meeting.

In a large country like Brazil, with great ethnic and cultural diversity, the pilgrimage with the symbols of WYD – the cross and the Icon of Our Lady – took almost two years. We could feel the move of God’s Spirit over hundreds of cities, in over 200 dioceses, passing through prisons, hospitals, schools, *favelas*, on the road, or by rivers, among the natives, in the midst of the people, or among the neediest.

We faithfully did what John Paul II asked for during a meeting in Rome, in 1984, when he gave young people the Pilgrim Cross, which later would be known as The Cross of the Journey: “Carry it throughout the world as a symbol of Christ’s love for humanity, and announce to everyone that only in the death and resurrection of Christ can we find salvation and redemption.”<sup>1</sup>

On the 22nd July 2013, the city of Rio de Janeiro began its transformation. The atmosphere was that of crowded streets with joy and anxiety that could be felt in the air. Pope Francis arrived in a common car already surrounded by a crowd. There was total coverage through the means of mass communication, allowing the participation and propagation of the Christian message to millions of people, regardless their culture and religion. And, at the same time, it reminded Brazil and the world to behold the “young face” of Christ. In the period between July 23rd and July 28th 2013, the WYD was the main focus of Brazil and the Christian world. Besides the attraction of being based in the *Cidade Maravilhosa* (Rio de Janeiro is known as *Cidade Maravilhosa* that means Wonderful City), Rio 2013 was also the first international apostolic journey of Pope Francis, who had just been elected a few months before.

Arriving in our city, the Pope quickly demonstrated his desire for closeness: “I have learned that, to gain access to the Brazilian people, it is

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1 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1984/april/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19840422\\_cross-youth.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1984/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19840422_cross-youth.html) (25.06.2018).

necessary to pass through its great heart; so let me knock gently at this door. I ask permission to come in and spend this week with you. I have neither silver nor gold, but I bring with me the most precious thing given to me: Jesus Christ! I have come in his name, to feed the flame of fraternal love that burns in every heart; and I wish my greeting to reach one and all: The peace of Christ be with you!"

A remarkable moment of the Holy Father's journey, soon after his arrival in our country, was the visit to the National Shrine of Our Lady Aparecida, dedicated to the Patron Saint of Brazil, and located just over 250 km from Rio de Janeiro, in the state of São Paulo. At that site, 300 years ago, the image of Nossa Senhora da Conceição was found in extraordinary circumstances. For this reason the site won the name of Aparecida. For the Brazilians, Aparecida is more than a destination of pilgrimage; it is a meeting point, it is the "Mother's House", where she expects and welcomes everyone. Pope Francis made a point to make this visit and placed in the hands of Our Lady of his life, youth and the WYD:

"I come to knock on the door of the house of Mary – who loved and raised Jesus – that she may help all of us, pastors of God's people, parents and educators, to pass on to our young people the values that can help them build a nation and a world which are more just, united and fraternal. For this reason I would like to speak of three simple attitudes: hopefulness, openness to being surprised by God, and living in joy."<sup>2</sup>

Another point to be highlighted in the WYD RIO 2013 was the Pope's meeting with the Brazil's leaders of society when he gave a speech that can be considered as a cardinal initiative of his pontificate. On that occasion, he invited all those who held a role of leadership to face the future with the "calm gaze of one who knows how to see the truth."<sup>3</sup> He highlighted three aspects: "First, the distinctiveness of your cultural tradition; second, joint responsibility for building the future; and third, constructive dialogue in facing the present moment."<sup>4</sup>

2 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130724\\_gmg-omelia-aparecida.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130724_gmg-omelia-aparecida.html) (25.06.2018).

3 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130727\\_gmg-classe-dirigente-rio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-classe-dirigente-rio.html) (25.06.2018).

4 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130727\\_gmg-classe-dirigente-rio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-classe-dirigente-rio.html) (25.06.2018).

The pope has stressed the huge importance of the dialogue in shaping society: “When leaders in various fields ask me for advice, my response is always the same: dialogue, dialogue, dialogue. The only way for individuals, families and societies to grow, the only way for the life of peoples to progress, is via the culture of encounter, a culture in which all have something good to give and all can receive something good in return.”<sup>5</sup>

The WYD was, without a doubt, an action of God in all of our lives. Not only for those who organized it, but also for those who participated and for those who watched everything through the news broadcast and social networks. In this space, where they spoke all languages, the “language of love” prevailed. Although all of the security measures that were taken beforehand to shield the Holy Father in those great crowds, the only threat the people constituted was due to their “great love” to him.

We had the joy of receiving among us, young people who were willing to take their belief to the streets, as asked by the Pope, to testify that a new world, without violence, without wars, without divisions is possible. We, who welcomed them, we were also transformed by an experience that needs to continue into the various areas of life, such as openness to others, the acceptance of the brother, the joy in the presence of people in our lives, the role of the young, the concern with peace and fraternity, the fight for a fairer world, the dialogue with society as a whole and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, our Lord, the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Oj 14.6).

A sea of faith took over Rio de Janeiro, causing amazement and a contagious joy to those who participated for the first time. The pilgrims took over the streets of the city. They could be found in the most diverse places. They formed groups with their flags and songs. Rio had become the heart of the Church, as the Pope said, and a map of the world that could live in harmony. For us, it was the realization of a dream coming from the Heart of God: the Gospel was proclaimed and witnessed in every face, in every prayer, in the bonds of unity which marked Brazil and the world.

More than 3.7 million people from 175 countries gathered at the Copacabana Beach, the largest public ever gathered there. It was a true pic-

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5 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/pa-pa-francesco\\_20130727\\_gmg-classe-dirigente-rio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20130727_gmg-classe-dirigente-rio.html) (25.06.2018).

ture of the Church of all peoples, languages, and nations. We will never know how many millions of people have been affected in those days, how many felt invited to the construction of a more just and humane world. I had the opportunity to speak to young people and to summon them: "There is a revolution of love in this moment: the other is Christ for us! The other is our brother! That resounds throughout the world! We are called to live in building a world of brothers! We want each and every one to feel welcome into the embrace of Christ, who calls all to be with him in building the kingdom of God. Let's do it together!"<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the city about 300 local authorities hosted the Catecheses that happened during the journey in various languages. These meetings brought personal contacts; a mentality of sharing, meditation, and prayer. It was an opportunity to speak in depth about the motto of WYD and to have an even closer experience with the Word of God. The experience of the Catecheses in Rio de Janeiro made sure that events are part of the Journey. They are an indispensable part to ensure that journeys/catecheses fulfil their function. Because they are smaller gatherings, the Catecheses retain the possibility of a more intimate and familiar contact between young people, and also between them and the Bishops, in addition to their maintenance of the idiomatic, cultural and, when possible, national perspective.

The Youth Festival brought practices of the Youth into our religious traditions. Among those was the Vocation Fair, which was held in one of Rio's parks during the journey. It was an invitation to thousands of people, a way to get in touch with one's own vocation, to embrace the words of Lord's will in their life. Many priests met people for confession in the seven official languages of the Journey: Portuguese, Spanish, English, Italian, French, German, and Polish. The pilgrims approached the sacrament of Reconciliation with tranquility and every single person received their blessings by the priests. Despite of bad weather, the people were not discouraged of arriving in great crowds to receive this Sacrament.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.lastampa.it/2013/07/24/vaticaninsider/the-official-start-of-world-youth-day-organized-by-benedict-and-led-by-francis-b4D8TGZ5psk0aFJHEB2ThP/pagina.html> (25.06.2018).

The Youth Festival included cultural expressions such as dance, theater, cinema, music, exhibitions, and many mores. There were more than 600 activities, coming from 50 countries, which involved the pilgrims and also the residents of the city in an explosion of art, joy, and a diversity. People bonded over the unique cultural wealth the festival provided. One of the goals of a WYD should always be to convey the journey as an event which, in addition to the religious nature, has a strong cultural and social aspect.

It is especially important here to remember the exhibition *The Heritage of the Sacred: Masterpieces of the Vatican and Italian Museums*. Considered as the most important cultural event of the journey, it presented rare works of big names in the art world such as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Caravaggio etc. It was an important feature to attend, especially for those who did not participate in any other Central Act or Cultural Act of WYD due to the specifically religious aspects of ourselves. Many visitors to the shows were not even of strong Catholic faith, but went to visit it due to the artistic and historical aspect; to solely get in contact with the religious experiences of the artists. The exhibition successfully created a dialogue between Faith and the world outside the church.

Current issues involving youth gained prominence during the Stations of the Cross, on the edge of Copacabana. With 13 of the 14 stations along the 900 meters from the central part of the Atlantic Avenue, and the final station on the central stage, the Cross was presented by 280 volunteers and storytellers. At the time of worship, the silence of millions of people made us feel like time had stopped before Jesus became alive and rose. In the encounter between the heaven and the earth, many were able to hear His voice and could speak with him about what is happening in their hearts. That cold night on the seafront, one could feel His presence.

For those who still think of the WYD as a meeting which is solely festivity and joy without challenging, here are the words from the Pope: “Dear brothers, nobody can touch the Cross of Jesus without leaving something of himself in it and without bringing something from the Cross of Jesus for his own life. This afternoon, following the Lord wanted that resounded three questions in their hearts: what you have left at the Cross, dear young Brazilians, in these two years in which she crossed his immense country?

And what will be left to the Cross of Jesus in each one of you? And, finally, what this Cross teaches to our lives? Dear brothers and sisters, no one can approach and touch the Cross of Jesus without leaving something of himself or herself there, and without bringing something of the Cross of Jesus into his or her own life. I have three questions that I hope will echo in your hearts this evening as you walk beside Jesus: What have you left on the Cross, dear young people of Brazil, during these two years that it has been crisscrossing your great country? What has the Cross of Jesus left for you, in each one of you? Finally, what does this Cross teach us?"<sup>7</sup>

Since the beginning of the preparation of the WYD RIO 2013, the need to leave some legacies, besides the undeniable legacy evangelization for Youth was clear. A reality such as the Brazilians, marked by poverty and, in the specific case of youth, by involvement with drugs and those arising situations of violence, we opted for a legacy in the area of prevention and recovery of drug addicts. The construction of this legacy consisted of two phases. In the first, through partnership with sectors of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil and agencies of the federal and state governments, we constructed a project of call centers for young victims of drug dependence or in danger of succumbing to drug dependence. Although the agreements were signed, the partnership with the public power has proved unsatisfactory in the sense that the commitments were not honored. With this, we moved on to a new stage of reconfiguration of the legacy of human promotion of WYD.

A new partnership, this time with a religious community of Franciscan strand, elaborated on *Integrated Service Plan*. This is a first location where the drug addicts are assisted by a multidisciplinary group, with care for them and their families. Especially noteworthy is the hospital for the care of the consequences brought about by drugs, including acute medical conditions, that require immediate treatment, a response which is not always readily available from the network of public health in Brazil. The site chosen for the construction of the first 'Father' was visited by Pope Francis, where he also heard two testimonies of young recovered addicts.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/pa-pa-francesco\\_20130726\\_gmg-via-crucis-rio.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20130726_gmg-via-crucis-rio.html) (25.06.2018).

In addition to this medical center for emergency care, the legacy of human promotion established ties of connection between various groups which are active in the recovery of drug addicts. This link ensured that the lack of an institution is supplied by the resources of another, as the contexts of drug addicts might require.

One must not fail to mention here the work of thousands of volunteers. They were not only the arms and hands of the journey, but the heart of the Rio 2013, the achievement of a great dream. Each one of those who devoted themselves to this great encounter donated more than hours of work, sleepless nights, competence and passion for what they did. They gave themselves, in a work that Pope Francis thus defined: “this is the most beautiful service we can give as missionary disciples. To prepare the way so that all people may know, meet and love the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>

Making an overall assessment of the journey, we can say that it left a big positive mark on the youth, on the Church and on the carioca society as a whole. It fulfilled its essential purpose as an opportunity to meet and reunite with Jesus Christ and with the Church. This meeting occurred among the youth. It occurred among young people, the Pope, and the civil society. The WYD has provided an effective revival of faith and leveraged the responsibility of evangelization, inspiring youth to follow the discipleship of Jesus Christ and the Church life.

The city of Rio de Janeiro had often been affected by violence that created fear and closing in on oneself. But that week, the city experienced a different and unforgettable life with the presence of young people from all over the world in the streets. Some were singing, others praying. Some brought hymns and songs from their own countries, others lived their small adventures on the beaches by night. The path of a great meeting was marked. Most might not know yet, but they were all part of the same big group. They walked through the sand, shared their emotions and shared the bread. So many in those days opened their homes and their hearts. They welcomed and were welcomed. Christ was seen in every face and brought love.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/pa-pa-francesco\\_20130728\\_gmg-rio-volontari.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20130728_gmg-rio-volontari.html) (25.06.2018).

This journey cumulated in a shared hope for new beginnings. The last day of the WYD RIO 2013 was not dominated by sadness. Instead, each young person who walked the sands of Copacabana beach at this early Sunday afternoon kept the words of the Holy Father close to his heart: "The Church counts on you." The forces that drove them were in same parts a dream and a goal to go without fear to speak of who lives and witnesses the wonders of God everyday. "Three ideas: *Go, do not be afraid, and serve*. If you follow these three ideas, you will experience that the one who evangelizes is evangelized, the one who transmits the joy of faith receives more joy. Dear young friends, as you return to your homes, do not be afraid to be generous with Christ, to bear witness to his Gospel."<sup>9</sup>

In spite of all the unforeseen, the overall experience of the Journey was a positive one. This conclusion follows not only from the observation of how the city and the country reacted to the event, but also from the great capacities of the team responsible (COL-RIO), together with the local authorities, to overcome all problems even at the shortest notice. I want to stress the immensely positive feedback that reached us from every sphere involved, from every corner of the world.

Another highlight of this journey is undeniably the charisma of the Holy Father and his closeness to all the people from the most different spheres. His words still echo in many hearts, but their personal testimony and his personality left open large paths that provided an opportunity for evangelization. The Pope has paved the way, so that we can now show that the success of the journey is not only before and during the event, but also in a post-generation journey, who learned from Jesus Christ to deliver a better world for all.

The time to say "goodbye", came about at the airport. The truth was that nobody wanted to say goodbye. It was not only the closure of a large event, it was the nostalgia of new friends, the presence of Pope Francis, the crowds, and the nostalgia that made realise how time really flies when we are very happy. But, above all, it was a reminder that we are united forever in the Eucharist.

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<sup>9</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130728\\_celebrazione-xxviii-gmg.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_celebrazione-xxviii-gmg.html) (25.06.2018).

The journey was an important event for our lives and our country. Here in this city we have seen the hand of God act. One of the motivating messages that Francis left for the young in those days, applies to each World Youth Day, and each step of the day of our walk and our mission as a Church, seeking to realize so many dreams and so many wishes expressed in those days: “Show, by your life, that it is worth giving your time and talents in order to attain high ideals, it is worth recognizing the dignity of each human person, and it is worth taking risks for Christ and his Gospel. It is he that we have come to seek because he first sought us. It is he who has inflamed our hearts with the desire to take the Good News to the large cities and to the small communities, to the countryside and to all the corners of this vast planet.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/pa-pa-francesco\\_20130728\\_gmg-cerimonia-congedo-rio.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20130728_gmg-cerimonia-congedo-rio.pdf) (25.06.2018).