

Teens: Make Everyday a WYD

By Bishop Victor Galeone

On Saturday July 19 th I offered Mass at our local World Youth Day celebration on the Shrine Grounds in St. Augustine. I had just quoted the theme that Pope Benedict chose for World Youth Day, when I noticed a group of teenagers all wearing the same psychedelic orange and yellow T-shirts, emblazoned with the words, "WITNESS - Acts 1:8."

"What a coincidence!" I remarked. "Here we have a group of teens wearing a visual aid of the WYD theme. Yes, it's the verse from the Book of Acts: You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you - and you will be my witnesses."

For this year's teen issue I'd like to comment on the WYD theme. It has two parts. Let's take the second part first: "You will be my witnesses."

Jesus is about to return to his Father in heaven. In effect, he's also about to leave his disciples, even though they're unaware of it. Jesus gives them his final instructions: "Be my witnesses!"

What's a witness? And why is that important? A witness is someone who has personal experience of an event, and attempts to convince others of the truth of that experience.

We've never seen Jesus with our own eyes. Yet we still believe in him. Why? Because of the witness of those who did see Jesus and experience all his miracles and especially his rising from the dead. As Simon Peter told the household of Cornelius:

"We are witnesses of everything Jesus did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day...He was seen not by all the people, but only by those witnesses whom God had chosen beforehand - by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead..."

Mind you, the night that Jesus was arrested, Peter was a lying witness. Three times he denied that he ever knew Jesus! But after he repented, he gave his own life as proof of the message he was preaching. No one will die for an imposter. So if Peter wasn't convinced that Jesus had truly risen from the dead, he would never have laid down his life for him. What brought about that change in Peter? It was the Holy Spirit!

Now let's consider the first part of the WYD theme: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." The Holy Spirit - the third person of the Godhead - is the love union between the Father and the Son. It was the Holy Spirit who turned those cowardly apostles into courageous heroes who died for Jesus. It's the same Holy Spirit who gives us the grace to surrender our hearts to the Lord - and to be his witnesses .

Teens, I'd like to challenge you to take action on the following pointers:

- Surrender your life to Jesus. If someone died to save your life, could you ever forget that person? Well, Jesus died for us.
- Start off each day with a short prayer. Something as simple as: "Jesus I love you. Come into my heart and stay with me all day long." And mean it!
- Jesus wants you at Mass on weekends. That's where you receive the spiritual energy to carry on. Sometimes I'm asked, "Why do I have to go to Mass on Sundays?" How would a young lady react if her boyfriend asked her, "Do I have to take you on a date this Saturday?"

- The Bible is God's love letter to us. So try to spend at least ten minutes a day reading that marvelous love letter. I suggest that you start with St. John's Gospel. Mark your place each day with a card when you've finished.

I recall a radio preacher once saying: "Our problem in America today is that we've forgotten how to spell love. How do you spell it? T-I-M-E, that's how. When you love someone, you want to spend time with that person. The greater the love, the more time we want to spend with them. And we avoid those people who mean nothing to us. So if we don't want to spend any time with God, that means he doesn't rate in our lives." The preacher was right, of course.

So, teens, let's all ask the Holy Spirit to flood us with his power. Let's surrender our hearts to Jesus. Let's fall more in love with him each day by spending time with him in prayer. And then, empowered by his Holy Spirit, we can go out to be his witnesses to a world that desperately needs him.