

## **OUR YOUTH**

As you read this, the 20<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day has concluded or is in the process of concluding in Cologne, Germany. I have attended two of them in the past, one in Denver and the other in Toronto. They are a marvelous testimony to the faith of our youth. One comes away encouraged, filled with hope, and strengthened.

Our current Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, is scheduled to join the young pilgrims from all over the world on the last two days of their gathering. But, it is our former Holy Father, Pope John Paul II (who intended to be present), that wrote the usual message to the youth of the world for the occasion. He wrote it on August 6, 2004.

In his letter, the Pope uses the words of the Magi, "We have come to worship him," as the theme for the 2005 World Youth Day. The Pope invited the participants to come in the same spirit to Cologne, where (according to tradition) the remains of the Magi are venerated.

I have witnessed gatherings of youth a good number of times. What I have observed is that they do have the spirit of worship. Whether it is at a World Youth Day or at one of our own diocesan gatherings of young people, I have always come away impressed.

Recently, I visited our annual Camp Zacchaeus. The young people there were as alive and active as any that age would be. However, when they gathered in the hall for Mass, a transformation occurred. They sat on the floor and exhibited great devotion and respect for what was happening on the altar. The silence that followed Holy Communion was absolutely awesome and inspiring. I told them that they were a great example to us adults and I promised them that I would tell their parents. (This is my way of keeping that promise.)

True worship of the Lord our God ought to lead to an authentic witness. There is an element of conversion involved.

I have to believe that our young people do experience a change in themselves after attending Camp Zacchaeus. No doubt, the same can be said for those who participate in any one of our other gatherings of youth in the Diocese. I know that it is true in the case of most who attended any one of the World Youth Days.

"Listening to Christ and worshipping Him leads us to make courageous choices, to make what are sometimes heroic decisions," the Holy Father wrote. And, then, he added, "Jesus is demanding, because He wishes our genuine happiness."

In concluding his letter, Pope John Paul II again reminds his readers of the Magi. He speaks of them as "passionate seekers" after the truth. "They had no hesitation," he writes, "in placing their intellectual abilities at the service of the faith, thereby demonstrating that faith and reason are linked and seek each other."

Total worship involves not only the time that we spend at Mass. It is a way of life. Our young people are being challenged to that. I have reason to be encouraged by their response.