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The Solemnity of Christ the King. World Day of Prayer for the Youth 2023 “Come and See”

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King, our hearts are in reverent adoration of Jesus, our loving Lord and King. Today is the final Sunday in the Church's Liturgical Year. The Solemnity of Christ the King is intentionally placed here to show that all creation and all authority find their fulfilment in Christ Jesus who is King of all that exists. Jesus reigns by the authority of love and service. If we wish to have true authority, we too must love and serve.

Today is also the World Day of Prayer for Youth. We acknowledge and seek to nurture the vibrant spirit of our young people. In every age the Church is called to pass on all that She is to the next generation. Our young parishioners must always be a priority in our prayer and in the life and mission of our diocesan family. We pray for our young sisters and brothers. We pray they will open their hearts to the love of the Lord and that they will discern their calling in life.

We are inspired by the words of Pope Francis to young people at the World Youth Day celebrations in Lisbon this year, “in the Church, there is room for everyone. Everyone. In the Church, no one is left out or left over. There is room for everyone. Just the way we are...” “Jesus never closes the door, never, but invites you to enter, come and see.”

“Come and see” is a gentle and loving invitation, echoing Jesus in the Gospel of John (1:39) as he called His first disciples. “Come and see” flows through our celebration today and provides us all with a principle of ministry with the young: “Come and see” the Lord present in our parish communities.

In our First Reading from the Prophet Ezekiel, we see the image of the Lord as a good shepherd, seeking the lost, bringing back the strayed, and bandaging the injured. Ezekiel ministered to the People of God when they were in exile in Babylon. The people were far from home, lost and despairing of their future. They felt abandoned by God. Through his ministry Ezekiel consoled the people with the truth, that God never abandons us. God is always with His people; God will bring His People home.

This theme continues in today's Gospel according to Matthew, but Jesus provides a change in emphasis. Jesus identifies Himself with those who hunger, who thirst, those who are the strangers in society, those who go without the necessities of life, the sick, those who are in prison. Jesus identifies Himself with those who society sadly forgets and often rejects. Whatever we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to Jesus. The consolation of the Lord's presence is also a stark call to minister to those in need.

This call to see and serve Christ in one another, especially in those who are in need, resonates deeply, especially as we recognise the needs of our young people today. Our young people, growing up witnessing and experiencing the challenges of today's world, will often grapple with mental health issues, anxiety, feelings of isolation, and loss. Their hearts, although young, bear heavy and profound burdens. They seek solace, understanding, and a welcoming refuge. Despite a deep

spiritual hunger, many young people feel far from the love of the Lord, they feel far from the care of the Lord's Church. Jesus identifies Himself with our young people and Jesus calls us to serve Him in those who struggle.

In addition to the excellent ministry of our family of Catholic schools who minister with our young people day in and day out, and all the volunteer ministry with young people in our parishes, including the SVP summer camps on Holy Island, our diocesan family is blessed to have the presence and ministry of its Youth Service, the Youth Ministry Team (YMT). Its mission is to help create environments and experiences where our youth may "come and see" the Lord. To find peace, understanding, and prayerful experiences of God's love for them. The YMT seeks to be a beacon of God's love and mercy. This ministry can only happen with young people offering their talents as Interns to serve their sisters and brothers.

Our YMT interns come from our local parishes and schools, from across the country and indeed from across the world. Our vibrant young adults aged 18-30, embark upon a journey where they explore, engage with, and immerse themselves in their faith, nurturing their professional skills and pastoral ministry. They become more confident heralds of the Gospel, helping others to "come and see" Jesus, who calls them by name. We pray that young people will continue to be generous in seeking to minister as YMT interns. Anyone who is interested in working with YMT are invited to contact them directly to find out more about this inspiring ministry.

Through its numerous programs, activities, and especially through their Internship Program, YMT works to be the hands and feet of Jesus, reaching out to the youth who seek to be listened to, valued and loved, so reflecting the compassionate Shepherd we find in Ezekiel and being faithful to the Lord's call to serve, found in today's Gospel.

Your generous support, both through your prayers and your financial assistance, is not merely a charitable act but an active participation in the pastoral care of our youth. Today's Youth Sunday collection is indispensable for ensuring that the valued work of the YMT, especially the Internship Program, continues to flourish, inspiring and transforming lives. Thank you for whatever you can offer.

The Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage in the summer is another ministry where the YMT, energised by a spirit of service, is keen to extend their support, caring for and supervising the youth pilgrims. Lourdes is a blessed place where Mary invites us all including the youth to "come and see" the love of the Lord made present in worship and service. Gradually and appropriately, with the welfare of the vulnerable as the paramount concern, we seek to re-introduce the youth pilgrimage to Lourdes.

May the Lord inspire us all to be ministers who care for the needy. Let our support of the YMT, through prayer and if we can, by financial contribution, be our way of enabling our youth to "come and see" the Lord who loves them deeply. May our generosity pave the pathways for them to not only encounter Christ but to become vibrant witnesses of His love to others.

May the Lord bless the ministry of the YMT, bless the ministry of our schools and bless all who work with our young people in our parishes.

With assurances of prayers



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