Catholic Review Column: Unlocking the Pope's World Youth Day Message

If last week's World Youth Day is any indicator then the future of the Catholic Church looks bright, very bright indeed!

In spite of security concerns that kept many nations from sending their typical delegations, an estimated 3 million people attended the World Youth Day Mass celebrated by Pope Francis on the beach at Copacabana in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. Two million of those young people slept on the beach the night before (it's winter in Brazil, by the way) so as to ensure themselves a place for the next day's liturgy and a chance to see, if only for some via video monitor, Pope Francis.

The unbridled enthusiasm on display at World Youth Day is a stark contrast to the gloomy picture of the Catholic Church often depicted in the media, something we find ourselves falling prey to from time to time. World Youth Day also helped those present, as well as those watching from afar, discover that hope which is found in Christ Jesus.

The Mass was, perhaps, the highlight of the Pope's five-day visit to the South American nation, his first foreign trip since becoming Pope earlier this year. And his message dovetailed perfectly with the theme of World Youth Day, "Go and make disciples of all nations." The Pope sent forth those present for the closing Mass with these three marching orders: "Go, do not be afraid, and serve."

"The experience of the encounter must not remain locked up in your life or in the small group of your parish, your movement, or your community," the Pope told the young people. "That would be like withholding oxygen from a flame that was burning strongly. Faith is a flame that grows stronger the more it is shared … so that everyone may know … Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and history.

"Do not be afraid to go and to bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of

society, even to those who seem farthest away, most indifferent. The Lord seeks all. He wants everyone to feel the warmth of His mercy and His love." In likening their fear to that of Jeremiah, called by God at a young age to be a prophet, the Pope reassured those present: "Be aware of the companionship of the whole Church … when we face challenges together, then we are strong."

"Allowing our life to be identified with that of Jesus, it is sharing His sentiments, His thoughts, His actions. And the life of Jesus is a life for others. It is a life of service … Evangelizing means bearing personal witness to the love of God, it is overcoming our selfishness, it is serving by bending down to wash the feet of our brethren, as Jesus did," the Pope told them.

Of course, the Pope's comments apply not just to those young people who seemed to hang on his every word, but to all the Church, including our Archdiocese and each of our parishes. "Jesus did not say, 'One of you go,' but 'All of you go," the Pope said. His words give fresh meaning to the New Evangelization that we are called over and over again as Catholics to realize, a call more critical now than ever before. They must affect how we think about what we do in our professional life, our family life, how we bear witness to the Gospel, and how we think about the mission of our local Church, including each of our parishes.

Each of us is called to seek Jesus, to be Jesus, and to share Jesus with others. As we bear witness here in our own Archdiocese to the missionary zeal so evident in many of our young people, let us not only applaud and encourage it but adopt it for ourselves. Locking it up would only extinguish the flame of faith that burns brightly within each of us.