

Feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, Mass at Mercy Centre for World Youth Day K of C Volunteers and Sisters of Life

I. Introduction: A Word of Thanks

As we bless the Mercy Centre, this magnificent arena, we look forward to welcoming literally thousands of young English-speaking pilgrims from many parts of the world. On behalf of our Worthy Supreme Knight, Carl Anderson, I want to thank you for the preparations you have made for our young pilgrims and for what you will do for them in the coming days. I especially want to thank Father Kalisch for his leadership and hard work together with my brother Knights of Columbus and the Sisters of Life as well as many other volunteers . . . You've created a spectacular spiritual home away from home for many young people; thank you for your imagination, hard work, and generosity!

II. The Role of Grandparents

A. It is fitting that we open this Mercy Center arena on this feast day of St. Joachim and Anne - the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary - and, we might say, the "grandparents" of all those who claim Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, not only as Lord and Savior but also as our brother.

B. At first, you may not see how our "spiritual" grandparents fit in to World Youth Day. After all, World Youth Day is for young people and grandparents are not young. Yet in everyday life grandparents should play an important role not only in their adult children's lives but also in the lives of their grandchildren. Growing up, I liked to talk things over with my grandma - not to do an end run around my Mom and Dad but more because she had a nice smile and an understanding heart and, as I later learned, a lot of wisdom. So, what can our "spiritual" grandparents, Joachim and

Anne, teach us as we immerse ourselves in the events of World Youth Day? I will try to answer that question both for the volunteers who are present here and also for the young people who have joined in this Mass by taking a look at the relationship of the Blessed Mother to her parents.

III. Who Were Joachim and Anne?

A. Well, let's start with the fact that St. Joachim and Anne were special people. Naturally they didn't think of themselves that way but they were part of a small group within the Jewish people who really looked forward to the fulfillment of God's promises. They didn't see their faith as merely a bunch of rules and regulations, like the Scribes and Pharisees we often meet in the pages of the Gospel. Nor did they pin their hopes in some kind of a military or political victory over the Roman Empire which was the latest world power to conquer and oppress the people of Israel.

B. No, Joachim and Anne - and others like them - were looking for a different kind of deliverance. They wanted to be holy and righteous in the sight of God so that they would be free to worship him without fear. They were looking for the dawn of God's loving kindness, the Messiah who would be "the face of the Father's mercy". They were seeking the Christ of the Beatitudes so that, at the final harvest, they would be the "wheat" and not the "weeds".

C. You can imagine that parents like that created a very special home. Mary grew up in a home where the Word of God, the Torah, came first. She absorbed from her parents not only the teaching of the Law and the Prophets but also their deep spirit of faith and their unshakeable hope in God's promises. Mary learned from them how to reflect deeply on the Word of God and she absorbed that Word — body, mind, and soul. Destined to be the Mother of the Savior, God kept her from original sin and engaged Joachim and Anne to help shape the woman who would give the world its Savior.

IV. What Volunteers Can Learn from Joachim and Anne

A. So what can those of us who are volunteers learn from Joachim and Anne? What

can they teach us as we interact with the young people who will join us at this Mercy Centre? Perhaps the best way to answer that question is to reflect further on the wonderful, loving home Joachim and Anne created for their daughter, Mary. They created an atmosphere of love and trust where Mary felt free to open her heart to the Lord and to accept the vocation God had in mind for her from all eternity. It is highly unlikely that Joachim and Anne had to lecture Mary about the teaching of the Jewish faith and force her to obey the rules. Instead, they prayed with her, taught her by their example, and walked with her right up to the moment when the angel Gabriel appeared to her. In a word, Joachim and Anne accompanied Mary, listened to her, answered her questions, and encouraged her along the way. That seems to me a pretty good description of what our role is as leaders and volunteers at the Mercy Centre in the coming days: to listen to our young fellow pilgrims, to share the Word of God with them, to pray with them, to encourage them along the way, and help them to find the freedom to accept whatever vocation God is calling them to.

B. But what is your role as young people? Oh, well-informed people tell us lots of things about millennials and whatever it is we are calling those coming up behind you. We hear you pay more attention to stories than lectures and that you value an experience of faith more than an analysis of faith. We are told you are skeptical about big institutions, even church institutions, and prefer to see the faith lived out, especially in service to the poor. And I often find these things to be true in my own relationships with young people.

C. But we need to dig a little deeper than what the experts tell us about ourselves. ...I would say that during World Youth Day you have a great opportunity to soak up Jesus' love with your young mind, heart, and spirit. Like Mary you are called to open your heart to Jesus and to his People, the Church. And if that seems a bit difficult or confusing or unnecessary, I would invite you to talk it over with your spiritual grandparents - Joachim and Anne. They will help you understand and accept whatever God is asking of you and help you see the central of the Church's faith in your life. They will help you take your rightful role in the Church as young, joyful, committed followers of Jesus.

V. Conclusion

At World Youth Day in Toronto in 2002, Pope John Paul II was clearly getting older and more infirm. At one point in his homily he said, “The Pope is old but you are young” - and with that nearly a million young people responded, “No, the Pope is young!” Really good and holy people might grow old chronologically and physically but inwardly, in the depth of the hearts, they remain young. Maybe that’s why young people like to talk to their grandparents so much ... they can see that their grandparents are still young at heart. After more than 2000 years, Joachim and Anne have not grown old. Let us turn to them and ask them to pray for the success of World Youth Day 2016 that we might respond to the presence and message of Pope Francis and share ever more fully in the joy of the Gospel!

May God bless you and keep you always in his love.