



Dear Young Friends,

I send affectionate greetings to you on the occasion of the National Catholic Youth Festival which has brought so many of you together at the Abbey of Mariënkroon in Nieuwkuijk. I also greet and thank your Pastors, who have planned this meeting centred on the theme: *New, Pure and Intense*.

As you know, each year I write a Message to young people throughout the world for the next World Youth Day. As we look forward to WYD 2016 in Krakow, I have proposed a three-year journey of spiritual preparation based on the Beatitudes. In this outstanding text from Matthew's Gospel (*Mt 5:3-12*) you can find a concrete programme of life that can serve as a guide on the path to true happiness.

The three Beatitudes that I propose for your reflection are:

2014:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”
(*Mt 5:3*);

2015:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (*Mt 5:8*);

2016:

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (*Mt 5:7*).

As you can see, the message of Jesus' Beatitudes is *new*. In fact, the Beatitudes are revolutionary. They present a model of happiness contrary to the logic of this world. Those whom Jesus proclaims "blessed" are regarded by the world as useless, "losers". What the world glorifies is success at any cost, wealth, power for its own sake and self-affirmation at the expense of others. Jesus offers a very different definition of what it means to be blessed; he shows us the way to authentic life and happiness, the way that he himself has taken. In fact, Jesus himself *is* the way! Throughout his life he showed us concretely how to live each of the Beatitudes.

Jesus loves each one of you, each one of us, with an infinite love! By his death on the cross and his resurrection, he proved his boundless mercy, offered us salvation and opened the way to a new life. Once we accept his love and salvation, once we contemplate Jesus in his *poverty*, his *purity of heart*, and his *mercy*, we will realize the beauty of our Christian vocation and we will not hesitate to set out on the way that leads to true happiness. I invite you, then, to set out on the exciting journey of true discipleship. "Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything" (*Benedict XVI*).

Dear brothers and sisters, when Saint John wrote to young people, he told them: "You are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (*1 Jn 2:14*). Young people want to live *intense* experiences! I challenge you to take God at his word. Say no to

an ephemeral, superficial and throwaway culture, a culture that assumes that you are not strong, that you are not capable of facing great challenges in your life. Think big! As Blessed Piergiorgio Frassati once said: “To live without faith, to have no heritage to uphold, to fail to struggle constantly to defend the truth: this is not living. It is scraping by. We should never just scrape by, but really live”.

May the Virgin Mary, whom all generations call “blessed” (cf. *Lk* 1:48), intercede for you, so that you can experience a joy which is *new*, *pure* and *intense*, a joy you can find only in Jesus. To each of you and your families, and to all the young people of the Netherlands, I gladly impart my blessing as a pledge of joy and peace.

From the Vatican, 25 June 2014

Francis