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Vatican City, 2 April 2012 (VIS) - The Holy Father today received in audience 5,000 young people from the archdiocese of Madrid, Spain, accompanied by their archbishop Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco Varela. They are currently on a pilgrimage to Rome to thank the Pope for his trip to Spain during last August's World Youth Day. Extracts from Benedict XVI's words to them are given below.

"Whenever I recall the twenty-sixth World Youth Day in Madrid, my heart is filled with gratitude to God for those unforgettable days. ... That marvellous encounter can only be understood in the light of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, which never ceases to infuse hearts with encouragement, and continually leads us out into the public square of history, as happened at Pentecost, to bear witness to God's wonders. You are called to cooperate in this edifying task. ... Christ needs you at His side to extend and build His Kingdom of charity".

"No one is superfluous to such an undertaking. Therefore, never cease to ask yourselves what the Lord is calling you to do, and how you can help Him. Each of you has a personal vocation which He has given you for your own joy and sanctity. When a person is conquered by the fire of His gaze, no sacrifice seems too great to follow Him and give Him the best of ourselves. This is what the saints have always done, spreading the light of the Lord ... and transforming the world into a welcoming home for everyone".

"Like the first Apostles, you too must be missionaries of Christ among your relatives, friends and acquaintances, in the places where you study and work, among the poor and the sick. Speak of His love and goodness with simplicity, without fear. Christ Himself will give you the strength to do so. For your part, listen to Him, interact with Him often and sincerely. Trustingly tell Him of your desires and aspirations, of your own sufferings and those of people you perceive without consolation or hope".

"Yesterday we began Holy Week, in which we will follow the footsteps of Christ. ... We will contemplate His passion and humiliation unto death. ... I encourage you to take up your own cross, the cross of the pain and sin of the world, so as to gain a better understanding of Christ's love for humanity. Thus you will feel impelled to proclaim the God Who loves men and women, and Who sent His Son, not to condemn them, but for them to achieve a life of fullness and meaning".

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