

Message to the Vincentian Marian Youth (VMY)
Santiago de Compostela
July 31, 2022

It is truly a joy to be with you today, to get to know you a little and to be able to enrich each other. Being from the same family, we inevitably have things in common that we can share: our joys, our questions, our plans for the future.

"*He chose me to walk*" is the theme of the day. I imagine that you have already had the opportunity to reflect on this as Christians, as young people of VMY. God has called you and invites you to walk with Him in the world.

At your age, you are living the experiences that are the foundations upon which you will continue your journey with the same intensity and enthusiasm.

I have no lesson to give you because I think that your formation, your studies, and personal experiences must have already shaped you. Moreover, if you are of the same generation, it is possible that your situations are different from one another.

I simply want to pass on two convictions and a call.

Two Convictions

Commitment is a strength.
Decisions are made under certain conditions.

A call

A journey to take together

Commitment is a strength

The Lord takes the initiative in our lives. You all know the different calls in the Bible, that long history of the people of God: Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and then Mary... "*Come follow me,*" "*Here I am Lord.*" This dialogue expresses the covenant between God and humanity. To recognize this covenant is an act of faith.

God comes to us and awaits our response. I hope you are aware that you have already had the opportunity to respond! Visit again the roads you have taken in recent years. There are those that you took thanks to your parents, your educators, your friends perhaps. This is a natural and positive course in a human being's growth.

Gradually, you will be led to make your own choices in life through an educational or professional preparation, an apprenticeship or other guidance... The choice of your entertainment, of a group... to continue what you are now doing in VMY which probably no one has obliged you to do.

Life is made of choices and the experience you will have will show you more and more the extraordinary richness of a "no" or a "yes" decided in full knowledge of the facts for a better life, for a deeper love because God only wants what is good for you.

What does He want for each and every one of you? It is up to you to ask Him, to listen, to respond and to choose!

To decide is to commit oneself, which is the opposite of following a path that has already been laid out, without asking why and how. This is what gives intensity to the present life and what I call strength but which should also be translated as: maturity, balance, joy and inner peace. This does not mean, of course, that difficulties will disappear, for there will inevitably come moments of pain and times of failure but you will gradually acquire the ability to live through them without being torn to pieces because faith gives you the certainty that you are never alone.

God is there but not only Him.

Commitment will broaden your knowledge. Most of the time, it is made with others and you will have the support and friendship of those who are walking with you.

For commitment to be this source of life, a few conditions are necessary so that the decisions made are based on your reality and not on dreams, however beautiful they may be.

Conditions in Decision-Making

Making a decision to commit requires discernment. I dare to suggest some tools. I believe that, until the end of life, most of these tools remain the same but it is the manner of using them, depending on the stages of life, that changes. So, I'm sharing with you a few that may help you decide before making any kind of commitment.

- Knowing yourself is essential, in particular identifying your gifts and vulnerabilities. It is important to recognize both. Know yourself and you will be able to build your life on real foundations and not on an image that you would like to give and that will, in fact, give less justice to and therefore less beautiful than who you are!
- Don't skip the steps! There are necessary stages and nothing can be built on one go. Your family and the adults around you are normally there to help you progressively enter into what you have chosen to live in order to reach mature autonomy.
- Get help from a competent person you trust and you can talk to in order to understand what is happening to you, with others... It is difficult to do it on your own.
- Be accompanied as you reread events in the light of the Gospel. Human development is essential but so is spiritual growth. "Everything is connected," says our Pope Francis.
- Educate yourself on the Word of God as well as on the wide range of issues in society, on ethics, on the environment... I know that in your association there are many possibilities. It is a chance to go beyond the level of a child's faith and to acquire the capacity to reflect on the current stakes while avoiding being influenced, and I would even say, manipulated, by simplistic and extremist ideas from all sides.
- Pray! I conclude with the most important thing, the personal encounter with the Lord, the One who is faithful. It is a relationship to be deepened over time. It seems to me that each one of us has his or her own story with Christ which is lived day after day and strengthens our life.

So, if you want, you can take these tools and adapt them to who you are today. It must be recognized that these are conditions that require effort, perseverance and a great deal of inner freedom, but they will help you to continue along the path that is yours as a person.

As a person but, of course, as a person with others!

A journey taken together

"Together!" Faith cannot be lived alone and like all baptized persons, you have been invited by the Church to enter the path of synodality. I think that the Lord is giving you a beautiful gift when you are just at the age when everything is possible and you are encouraged to move forward.

What does journeying together mean, in concrete terms?

It seems to me that the most interesting thing would be what you think about it. Really, I'd like to know. So, I'm going to be brief to give you time to think about it.

As young people in the Vincentian Family, I see a few calls in it:

- A call to help each other and to live something beautiful together by caring for each other.
- A call to open your eyes to those outside your groups and not to leave anyone by the wayside. It is about reaching out to those who are different, who are suffering and isolated, because together does not mean choosing comfort and shutting oneself in.
- A call to participate in the life of the Church where you live. Parishes are missionary places. Evangelization is a challenge, especially in Europe, and I dream that your generation will be more involved in it, along with the others, naturally.
- A call to take an interest in the life of society. Among the commitments to make, perhaps some will do so in the field of social or political life and that would be very good. St. Vincent and St. Louise were fully engaged in their time, it is up to us, to you, to continue this path.

That each and every one of us personally say "yes" is to do as Mary did at the Annunciation and throughout her life. With each "yes," she committed herself to take the road with confidence, with perseverance, and by drawing strength from prayer to continue the mission.

This is my wish for you and I will pray for you at the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal at the foot of the altar.

Thank you.

Sister Françoise