

Dear Family of Guardian Angels,

As you are reading this our pilgrims to World Youth Day are praying with about three million young Catholics and the Holy Father in Madrid Spain! We hope all of you are praying with these young people for their safety, and I assure you they are praying with you, especially those of you who helped sponsor them and pay their way to Europe. Your generosity is a huge part of this pilgrimage, and those of you who participated in their fundraisers and with your sponsor ships, certainly are a huge part of the pilgrimage.

As we have journeyed together we have spent some time each day praying for our Benefactors. Benefactor is a word we don't hear to often in our culture. Yet it is a word that describes a very important role in our Christian lives. To be a benefactor means that someone had "benefited" by our lives! We must live our lives always aware that others are benefiting from our lives, our generosity and our talents and gifts. When we live as benefactors, we live as Christians. One of the great parts of a pilgrimage is to learn to be dependant on other people. Our young people had to learn to beg, in order to earn the money they needed. In learning to beg, they also learned a wonderful lesson in being dependant on others. In our world today, it is difficult to understand our dependency on others, without becoming a person who believes they are entitled to the generosity of others. We are not entitled to any of the gives, or the generosity of other people, however we are dependent on it. There is a great difference in these two ideas. To be entitled means that we believe that someone "has" to help us. They owe it to us. To be dependant on their generosity means that we feel unworthy of it, or that we believe it some how undeserving of it. If we have an attitude of entitlement then we forget our gratitude and usually become selfish and ungrateful. If we have a profound awareness of the gift that others are to us, we are overwhelmed with gratitude and wish to return the favors! I am sure that on this pilgrimage our young people do not feel entitled, they have prayed in the great Churches of Rome for those of you who remained at home. They have interceded for you before God, for your needs and petitions, and they have worked hard to grow in faith to be better Catholics and holier people. This is not an attitude of entitlement; it is an attitude of gratitude!

In our lives as Catholic people all of us must remember to be pilgrims and people of gratitude. We do so when we seek a deeper relationship with God and we become more and more aware of His mercy and forgiveness. The great sin of our Christian lives is that we so often become complacent and lazy in our journey of faith. We somehow feel "entitled" we feel like God owes us something and he expects nothing in return. I think this attitude will destroy a person. God does not owe any of us anything. However He promises us that if we make an effort in faith, if we practice our faith and if we love generously and engage ourselves in the life of the Church and one another, then His love will be complete. Our pilgrims are teaching me that if a person works hard to be a good pilgrim, if they accept the struggles and difficulties of long walks on hot days, strange meals and a foreign bed, early mornings and late nights, and incredible stresses on the way, they will be transformed! There are no casual observers at World Youth Day! Instead there are millions of young people who expect more out of life, who share their lives and faith with great generosity, who have the courage to become engaged in their lives of faith and the Church and who are falling in love with Jesus! Surrounded by this energy and love we all feel more deeply human and more deeply aware of the abundance of God's mercy and generous love! I am sure that our young pilgrims will return with a newfound faith, an attitude of genuine gratitude, and the fire of the Holy Spirit! They will be tired when they get home, but it is a far different tiredness then what most young people experience. They are not tired of life, they are tired of living it to a fullness that is beyond imagination. Thank you for your continued prayers on our journey.

In Jesus, From Madrid Spain,

Fr. Greg and Pilgrims