



Bisdom Willemstad

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Advent Message 2018

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I invite you to begin the Advent season with the words of angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary: "*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God*" (Lk 1,30).

This is the motto of the World Youth Day (WYD) that will take place next January in Panama, where a group of young people and animators of our Diocese, will participate. At the same time, I would like to remind you of the other event dedicated to the young people in last October, which was the Synod of Bishops with the theme of "Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment". May this message guide us during the Advent season and throughout the liturgical year so that we may pay special attention to our youth.

Pope Francis has commented on the words addressed to Mary with some questions to the young people: "What fear do you have? What worries you most deeply?" And he goes on saying: "An 'underlying' fear that many of you have is that of not being loved, well-liked or accepted for who you are" ... "That is why many young people feel the need to be different from who they really are, in an attempt to adapt to an often artificial and unattainable standard. They continuously "photo-shop" their images to get the largest amount of 'likes'.

Pope Francis says that in the Bible, many of those called by God for a mission have also experienced fear: Abraham, Moses, the prophets, the Virgin Mary, the Apostles themselves. Jesus asks them: "Why are you afraid, do you still have no faith?" (Mk 4,40). The Holy Father concludes by saying that the obstacle to faith is often not *skepticism* but *fear*. Then we have to react and know that the Lord is with us and repeats in our hearts: "Do not be afraid" (see *Message for the WYD, February 11, 2018*).

Mary is the way to reach Jesus.

Advent makes us walk the path of the people of God who were expecting the Messiah Savior. The Word of God offers us the message of the prophet Isaiah that nourishes the hope for the arrival of the "Emmanuel", God with us (Is 7,14). And Mary is the path that leads us to the encounter with Jesus, she is the Morning Star that heralds the coming of the of sun of righteousness (Mal 4,2). The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, which the Church celebrates on December 8, is like the door that opens to the contemplation of the Birth of her Son Jesus. The liturgy of the Church sings: "Hail, Queen of the Heaven and Lady of Angels, Hail, thou root, Hail, thou gate, through which the Light has risen, Rejoice glorious Virgin, lovely beyond all women, pray for us to Jesus Christ." (Marian antiphon *Ave Regina Caelorum*).

Brothers and Sisters, I invite you to celebrate the novena and feast of the Immaculate Virgin Mary with special fervor and devotion, aware that she is the Patroness of our Diocese!

A pastoral year dedicated to the family, youth and life.

Our priests' meeting in Aruba, last October, once again emphasized the "unity in diversity" of our Diocese and the task that all of us have of being missionary disciples. At the same time, we renew the mandate of the Church through the person of Pope Francis to preach the Joy of the Gospel and to practice love and mercy through the works of mercy. And we want to dedicate special attention to the three realities: *family, youth and life*.

As the Synod of Bishops says: "Family remains the main point of reference for the young people. The children appreciate the love and attention of their parents; they are concerned about family ties hoping to be successful in forming a family one day (# 32). Our parishes must be a "family of families", because so many young people live in families that are fragile, and lack of resources. It is then important that they see the Church as a true family that "adopts" them as her own children.

In our annual pastoral program, we have suggested different pastoral activities for each month to help family, school and parish to be able to take active participation in the liturgical celebrations and parish activities.

Brothers and Sisters, I conclude with the thought about the Holy Eucharist, that it may be an encounter of faith with expressions of signs that help children and young people to understand the beauty of the mystery we celebrate. During the dawn masses novena and throughout the liturgical year, we, the priests and the laity, wish to enliven the liturgy, and accompany the youth for them to discover the value of the Holy Eucharist in its various parts.

Let us now implore God's blessing on all of us, at the end of this year that we celebrate the 60 years of existence of our Diocese. Let us continue to live the motto: "Encounter with Christ, Encounter with others". We now ask Mary, Immaculate Mother for her protection over our families and youth and in a particular way over all the expectant mothers that they may feel the joy of bringing a new life to the world. Let us continue to recite the prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel at the end of the celebration of every mass.

Your servant in Jesus and Mary,

+ Luis A. Secco, SDB
Bishop of Willemstad