

My Dear Young People

I welcome you to this special occasion for the launch of Youth Alive within our region. I welcome you on behalf of my brother bishops some of whom would have loved to be here but due to other pastoral commitments could not make it. I bring you their special Greetings and Blessings.

Our coming together this evening is a clear expression of a people who have been on a journey – young people who have encountered life in all its attractiveness, joys, beauty, charms, in all its hardships, its sufferings, its struggles and temptations. Young people who have encountered life - for all of us have a story to tell.

In the life of the church we have examples of people who have lived lives that were not worthy of the children of God and through the help of the Holy Spirit in prayer they were able to make choices that brought life not only to themselves but to others for generations.

We have the story of the brave and great soldier St Ignatius of Loyola - a man who while at battle was wounded and had his leg severely injured. While he was recovering he read novels on love and war which were his pleasure. At the place where he was recovering they ran out of novels of his liking and offered him books about saints – the lives of the saints, great people who lived their lives in imitation of Jesus Christ. Ignatius did not like reading these books but he read them as he had nothing else to read. After sometime while reflecting

on what he was reading about the saints and how he felt about what he read he came to the realization that when ever he read about the saints he felt a deep sense of inner meaning and what he felt when reading novels; the thoughts that came after that were pleasurable only for a short while and left him feeling spiritually empty.

Ignatius noticed that when he day-dreamed about doing great things with his life in imitation of the saints and the daydreaming he had about winning wars for the women of his dreams; it was the former one that gave him greatest inspiration and renewed life. As a result of Ignatius' reflection on his daydreams he gave the church a wonderful gift known as the discernment of spirits. The need to reflect on the choices we make, to decide between good and evil, right and wrong, life and death!

Another great saint in our church is St Augustine, born in Hippo, North Africa. As a young man before his conversion, Augustine had many girl friends and slept with them in sexual, lustful and sinful ways. His mother Saint Monica loved her son with a deep passion and she grieved daily about his irresponsible and sinful life style. She entrusted herself to God believing he would hear her endless and ceaseless prayers for her son's conversion and change of behaviour. The Lord heard her and answered her prayer.

We have more examples such as these in the church and even in our communities were people began to realize in prayer and reflection that all life belongs to God and as people responsible for this life we

have to take good care of it. The great revelation of the saints was that God created everything and everyone in freedom and goodness but through life this gift of freedom and goodness gets tarnished, hence the ongoing call for each one of us to acknowledge this goodness within us and return that gift to God.

At every moment of one's day prayer has to be at the centre; a continuous communication with God the creator of us all. Through this encounter, this communion with God, through prayer, Saints such as Ignatius, Therese of Avila, and Augustine were brought closer to God and began to find meaningful answers to their questions in life. These people lived in their own times, with their own struggles and difficulties. We also are people of our own time, with our own struggles and difficulties. We are also searching for true meaning in our lives.

Our families, guardians, teachers, communities and church, as formators' of our faith were and are people of faith. They received the gift of faith passed down to them through generations of prayerful elders who led and guided them through life's experiences and they were able to find God in their journeys of life. We are here tonight because that very same gift of faith has been handed down to us. We are in a fortunate position to be able to receive this wonderful gift of Education For Life when faced with the crisis of HIV/AIDS.

Those moments of grace are still with us and will never part from us as long as we allow ourselves to experience them. It is our responsibility dear young people, therefore, to continue to integrate and give expression to this very faith in our daily lives.

In this light therefore, our coming together this evening is not by chance. It is not of our own making rather it is by the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Father and through his Son Jesus Christ. We haven't called a rally, a camp, or conference to launch this movement but it is launched in prayer before the Blessed Eucharist which is the presence of Christ who in baptism commissions, sends and drives us in the spirit to participate in the renewal of our society with our sound values, attitudes and behaviors. We are called to set the world on fire with our witness. Our witness to abstaining from sex before marriage and being faithful in marriage can bring a halt to the spread of HIV.

At the beginning of his ministry as Pope; John Paul II reminded himself of the words that Christ said a number times in scripture **“Do not be afraid...”** My dear young people; I say to you this evening and indeed remind myself that we are **not to be afraid**. For we have been given something very special and have just had an experience of it during the great feast of Easter. I read from the Ephesians: 1:18-21.

“May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, what rich glories he has promised the saints will inherit and how infinitely

*great is the power he has exercised for us believers.
This you can tell from the strength of his power at
work in Christ, when he used it to raise him from the
dead and to make him seat at his right hand, in heaven,
far above every sovereignty , authority, power, all
domination, or any other name that can be named.”*

My children, this is the **POWER** that has been given to each and everyone of us, the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. The **POWER** of the **HOLY SPIRIT**. The decisions that you have to make and are currently making against drugs, premarital sex, abortion, committing crime and such like life styles are not easy in the face of so many opposing values, attitudes and beliefs. I do not guarantee that you will not face challenges and difficulties but I want to give you this guarantee that if your decisions are done in prayer, with the guidance of the spirit and in truth they will bring greater good to your lives. Having experienced Easter you will recall how Jesus because of his values, attitudes and beliefs felt tested, forsaken, alone, betrayed, misunderstood, and these things will not be far from your reality because you are witnessing to the values of the Gospel. Be strong and trust in the Lord our God who has always given us the grace to overcome all challenges and difficulties.

In conclusion, my dear young people, I pray that you take this moment of grace very seriously. Embrace it as a mother embraces her child. Consider yourselves privileged that at this moment of the HIV/AIDS pandemic you are being offered tools that are going to help

to you make good, sound, well informed and life giving choices. Take the advantage of your weekly/monthly gatherings to reflect upon the material in the new Youth Alive Workbook. Reflect and explore the given topics, use it to widen your horizons and truly understand the purpose of your life and make major strides to live it to the fullest.....I implore you to hold yourselves with the dignity that is worthy of the children of God, “the children of God who are the hope of all creation.” Pope John Paul II.

May the good Lord inspire you to use this workbook, May he bless and keep you safe in his hands.

As I began let me conclude. You have the support of the bishops of South Africa, Swaziland and Botswana with you.

God bless you all.