

Epiphany, 2008
St. Raphael, Springdale, AR

This past Christmas, I hope you watched the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life." That always makes it feel more like Christmas for me. There's one really funny scene I'll never forget. Jimmy Stewart, who plays George Bailey, and Donna Reed, playing Mary Hatch, have just left the high school dance and are walking and talking, it's a very romantic evening. At one point they stop and look at each other and George is nervous and stumbling over his words. Just then, from behind the bushes comes the voice of a grumpy old man who says: "Well, what are you waiting for? Go ahead and kiss her!" And George very surprised says: "What did you say?" And the old man replies, "Are you going to kiss her or not? Ah, youth is wasted on the young!" But George fires back: "I'll show you some kissing, old timer, that'll put hair on your head!" You know, I wouldn't mind seeing a little kissing like that myself, maybe put some hair on my head!

But have you ever felt like that old man, and thought, "youth is wasted on the young"? Sometimes we look at the next generation and shake our heads. We think the young people today are irresponsible, they are lazy, and they are selfish. They play far too many video games and they eat far too few vegetables. And we're absolutely sure we behaved much better when we were young. Ah, the advantages of a fading memory! But in the movie, as often in life, George and Mary do very well: they save Bedford Falls, they provide affordable housing to hundreds, and they

raise a loving family. You see, the grumpy old man was wrong: youth is not wasted on the young. As Mike Huckabee said after winning the Iowa caucuses: "The greatest generation may not be behind us; it may be the one yet to come."

In the gospel today we see this same suspicion and doubt about the next generation. King Herod hears of a child that will be the next king of Israel. And how does he react? Well, much like the grumpy old man in the movie: youth is wasted on the young, I can do a much better job as the king, I will kill the baby trying to take my place. But notice how different is the attitude and the actions of the 3 Magi who come from the East (I'm sure one of them was from India!). They *rejoice* at the birth of a new King, they bring Him *gifts* of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and they humbly *bow down* before Him. You see, the 3 Magi believed that this Baby, the future generation, would not be a disappointment, but would actually be a blessing. Herod was wrong to doubt and try to destroy the next King of Israel, while the Magi were wise to adore Him.

Do you know who in recent history has shown tremendous hope and faith in the young? Pope John Paul II. Back in 1984, he organized the first World Youth Day. Since then, every 4 years, millions of young people from all over the world gather to celebrate their Catholic faith and spend time with their spiritual father. Now, why did Pope John Paul make the time and spend the energy to do this?

Because he had great hope in the future generations of Catholics. He wanted to spend time with these young people, listening to them, sharing their journey, joking with them, teaching them the gospel. John Paul II wanted to tell the youth that they were important, and he wanted to tell us, grumpy old adults, that the youth are important.

Folks, we've all felt like that grumpy old man sitting on his front porch and we've doubted and despaired of the next generation. Sometimes we feel this when a baby cries in church and we want to glare at the mom. Believe me, no one wants that baby to stop crying more than that mother! Archbishop Fulton Sheen was preaching one day and a baby was crying. The mother got up to take the baby out. After Mass the bishop kindly said: "Madam, you don't need to take that baby out, he was not bothering me." The lady politely replied, "No, but you were bothering the baby." At least Bishop Sheen had the right attitude toward the next generation. Sometimes, we feel this way when there is an unexpected pregnancy. We feel this baby is going to ruin our lives, and we contemplate getting an abortion. We forget that the baby is a blessing, not a curse. We feel this way when our teens become rebellious and retreat from the family. Heck, I feel this way when altar servers fall asleep and talk during Mass! (I'm not going to look.) At such times, we've felt like shouting out: "Ah, youth is wasted on the young!" But, my friends, it isn't, and I want to tell you why.

Friday night, while I was finishing this homily, I received the following email from a 7 year-old in our parish. He wrote: "Dear Father FJ: I have a bicycle I won in Cub Scouts. I would like to give this bike to a needy family. Please help me find some kids that need a late present. It's a 20 inch boy's bike. Your friend, Brett." So, the next time you're tempted to give up on the next generation, remember that email: the greatest generation may indeed be yet to come.

Praised be Jesus Christ!