

**Opening Mass for SEEK Conference
January 3, 2017**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Merry Christmas! I would like to welcome you to San Antonio, and offer my thanks to all of the FOCUS Missionaries, staff members, affiliates, and organizations that have made this conference possible. Thank you all for coming together in this beautiful season in which we marvel at the mystery of the Word-made-flesh, God-with-us. It is the profound mystery that gives hope to the world. “The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. To those who accepted him he gave power to become the children of God” (John). As we start this conference together, we should take some time to take the amazing meaning of that mystery to heart.

We are certainly familiar with Jesus being the Son of the Father. John the Baptist proclaims as much in the Gospel passage for today. He makes his testimony of Jesus Christ, “that he is the Son of God... the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” The very Son of God, true God and true man, has come into the world. As Pope Francis put it in his Christmas homily: “The infinite and eternal God is God with us: he is not far off.” We are comfortable with this part of the mystery. It is truly comforting to rejoice in God’s presence among us. We are gratified by his love, healed and uplifted by his sacraments, and enlightened by his teaching. Praised be Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through whom “all the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God” (Psalm).

But this mystery has other implications, sisters and brothers. “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are” (1 John). We have become God’s children, his own, members of his household. This is where the mystery of the incarnation comes home for us. In this Christmas season, and here at this conference, the challenge comes to us. If we are indeed God’s children, are we living like it? There are many ways to examine this question, but I’d like to keep it relevant to this conference. On the website for SEEK 2017 you were presented with a simple question: “What moves you?”

As sons and daughters of the most high God, what moves you? Are you people of God dedicated to the family business? St. John speaks about righteousness in his letter. This means right relationships with God, with our fellow humans, and with all of creation. This is what it means to be a child of God. As you receive everything this conference has to offer, ask yourself if you are truly motivated by this righteousness. Think about your motivation when confronted with Church teaching that you struggle with. Think about your motivation when you think about someone you haven't been able to forgive. Think about what moves you when you come face to face with people who are hurting, or angry, or who have no hope in their hearts. Think about what moves you when dealing with people who disagree with the gospel, who hate you, who hate the Church. In these situations, are you truly children of God living in righteousness? What moves you?

Learn well this week during your time here in the city of St. Anthony. All of the speakers and sessions you will experience can help you grow deeper in your motivation as children of God. Make the most of your time here, and draw deeply on the grace of the Holy Spirit. I would like to commend to you the wisdom of Pope Francis. He has not been bringing new teachings to the Church really, but has been challenging us to be more full Spirit-filled missionary disciples of the Lord. May we accept his challenge with joyful hearts. Our Holy Father has clearly given his answer to the question of what moves us as God's children. In a homily in May last year, he said: "The Holy Spirit is the one who moves the Church, the one who works in the Church and in our hearts... The Holy Spirit makes real Christians. The Spirit takes life as it is and prophetically reads the signs of the times pushing us forward" (9 May 2016).

May the Holy Spirit move you, sisters and brothers. You are children of God, missionary disciples of Christ, members of a Church united in righteousness. May Mary, the Mother of God, intercede for you during these blessed days. May she teach you by her example to be in right relationship with God and your brothers and sisters, no matter the cost, no matter the situation. "Beloved, we are God's children now!" (1 John). Praised be God who has made us his very own. Come, Holy Spirit, source of all righteousness, make us children worthy of the name.