

**ARCHBISHOP AUGUSTINE O AKUBEZE REFLECTION AT WORLD YOUTH
DAY CELEBRATION 2019 IN PANAMA**

**Theme: “I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me
according to your word.” (Lk 1:38)**

1. INTRODUCTION: My heart is filled with joy to see so many youths from all of the world gathered in Panama to celebrate the gift of God to us. Each one of us is a gift from God to humanity. The Holy Father like his predecessors has been emphasising the need for youths to know that God is in love with them. The Youths are the future of any society. Any society that ignores the aspirations, needs, desires, and spiritual welfare of her youths is preparing for its own funeral. The Catholic Church does not want her own funeral, that is why we give the Youths top priority. You, the Youths, are the only ones that we celebrate World Youth Day for. Every three or two years since 1985 when Saint John Paul II started it, World Youth Day has always been celebrated. We want the faith to continue and we want the message of salvation to continue. The care for the Youth is at the heart of the mission of the Church.

The theme for the 34th World Youth Day, 2019 is, **“I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” (Lk 1:38)** Pope Francis speaking to Youths at the Closing Mass of World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow Poland, told the Youths that they should imitate Mary. The Pope said and I quote: “She tells us to do what she did: not to squander the gift you have received, but to treasure it in your heart so it can grow and bear fruit, with the help of the Holy Spirit.” This teaching of the Holy Father is based on the theme of the World Youth Day (WYD) 2019 to be held in Panama. The theme is taken from the Gospel of Luke 1:38. In this passage, the Blessed Virgin Mary’s responds to the invitation of God to accept the role as the mother of the saviour of

the world. In this few words of Mary recorded in the Gospel of Luke we come to understand Mary's total dependence on God.

2. YOUTHS AVAILABILITY TO GOD: "Here am I," is a statement of availability. Mary is available to God. She is Ready to accept whatever the future has to offer as long as she is with God. Our dear Youths, you all must say with Mary, "here am I". You must make yourself available for God to use you. This answer means that you know who you are and you know who is speaking to you and you know where He wants you to be. The use of the word "Here" points to the fact that as adopted sons and daughters of God, we live in the here and now of God. God speaks to us in the present situation. Sometimes you may read the Bible and think that God is the powerful God of the past. The God who could lead the minority Israelites out of Egypt without an organized military formation; God who invited Mary to embrace the vocation of being the mother of God is the same One inviting you our dear Youths. God does not force His Will upon us. He speaks to us gently. God wants us to move away from addictions and from the many things that take us away from his presence. Many things entice the Youths and make it difficult for our Youths to answer 'Here Am I'.

I encourage you today, to embrace God's invitation to you to be Holy. Do not be afraid to be Holy. Holiness is possible for people of every age. Holiness comes from accepting the will of God. It is always an invitation that requires immediate response. You cannot postpone your response. It has to be 'Here am I'. It is a vocation that can only be answered in the present tense. You do not answer God's word by saying; 'I will be there'. No, you answer by saying 'Here am I'. 'Lord am Here for you right now'.

3. CONCLUSION: As I conclude this reflection, let me remind you that holiness of life is much easier if you allow Mary to lead you. Mary wants

to teach you how to love her Son. She wants to teach you how to follow her Son. She wants to teach you how to reject sin and be happy. Too often, we buy the idea that to be holy is to be boring. I come here to tell you today, that, you can have fun and still be holy. Holiness is fun. Holiness is not boring. Everyone who genuinely seek authentic life lives a holy life. Whenever you learn to choose what pleases God, it is then you can truly say you are having fun. Every enjoyment that exclude Christ cannot be true enjoyment. Remember, the words of St. Augustine: “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.” My dear beloved Youths, you will find no rest in money, sex, popularity, or fame. It is only in God that you will find rest. You have been made for God and God is the source of your true rest and it is only in God that you can have true fun. Therefore, with Mary, continue to enjoy the favour that comes from God; a favour that brings peace and calmness to us. Continue to enjoy the favour of God that dispels all fear.