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He who has ears to hear...

A 16-year-old senior high school student in Jakarta shares her personal transformation story during Pope Francis' Mass at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in September 2024.

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Indifferent.

That was how I regarded the Papal Mass.

I was indifferent when Pope Francis's September 3-6, 2024 visit to Jakarta was announced. I was just slightly less so when I was selected to serve in his September 5 Mass, but indifferent nonetheless.

And could you blame a 16-year-old girl for feeling that way? Sure, being a Holy Communion server for a Papal Mass at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta was an exciting prospect, being a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity after all. But still, with the Pope expected to appear as little more than a dot from afar, I felt at that time that watching that Mass online wouldn't have been much different of an experience.

In a 2024 article for *Vatican News*, writer Deborah Castellano Lubov recalled that "Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, the president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, stated that for the

faithful in Asia, the Pope at times feels like a distant, 'social' presence”.

And that's exactly how I viewed Pope Francis, in much the same way one would any other celebrity with whom one does not feel any personal connection.

I was one of 16 servers selected to represent Saint Peter Canisius International Catholic Parish during the Papal Mass. Our job was simple: to accompany priests during communion. Each server was to hold a candle in one hand and an umbrella in the other which was opened and closed to signal the beginning and the end of communion.

The night before our dry run found my parents and parish coordinators going into overdrive as they prepared for the historic event. We quadruple-checked everything: cash, water, snacks, my electric candle, a

backup in case the main one failed, and even a raincoat and plastic shoe covers in case it rained. It was a little over the top honestly, but who could fault them?

The dry run went like clockwork. We weren't needed much, and so spent most of the time exploring the stadium and stalls as we chatted with friends.

Just as we were called to change into our attire, I received a message that my dad's friends had arrived. They were seated high up in the stadium, and so my brother and I decided to break away from the group to look for them.

The choir was singing hymns, and the air buzzed with anticipation as we climbed flights of stairs to the top row of seats. Before entering, I glanced over the railing to see how high up I was. That quick glance gave way to amazement as my eyes took

in the sheer number of people below me.

When the Pope finally arrived, the crowd erupted in cheers and applause. The moment was electric, even surreal, and everything after that went by like a blur.

In his homily, the Pope paraphrased from the Acts of the Apostles: “On the day of Pentecost there was a great commotion in Jerusalem. And everyone was making a noise in preaching the Gospel.”

The panorama from where I sat was stunning: a multitude of Catholics in an open-air stadium designed to seat 60,000 people, all braving scorching heat and suffocating humidity just to hear the Vicar of Christ impart His message not only to the crowd, but also to each and every one in the stadium that day.

“The human heart is always searching for a truth that can feed and satisfy its desire for happiness,” the Pope said.

My indifference dissolved as I stood transfixed, unable to tear myself away from the scene. The unity and palpable devotion of so many hearts – all gathered in our thirst for the same Truth to satisfy our desire for happiness – moved me to tears.

And what was my key takeaway from this encounter with the Vicar of Christ on earth?

“When we have nothing to give, let us give that nothingness. And remember, even if you reap nothing, never tire of sowing.”

That part of the Pope’s message, quoting from the “saint of the gutters” – St. Teresa of Calcutta whose feast fell on that day of the Papal Mass, resonated in me. It goes

hand in glove with what parents tell their kids as they seek to impart precious life lessons: “Never give up.” Including in giving one’s self to others, as a way of giving one’s self to Our Lord.

For St. Teresa herself had said: “Find your own Calcutta. Find the sick, the suffering, and the lonely right where you are – in your own homes and in your own families, in our workplaces and in your schools. You can find Calcutta all over the world, if you have eyes to see.”

Cardinal Bo said that the Pope may seem distant from one’s personal situation and circumstances. But Pope Francis’s presence alone in that stadium that day electrified thousands, and his words spoke to the heart of anyone in that crowd who had ears to hear.

To me, the Pope’s words were a reminder that, even when we feel we

have little to offer, whatever we give with our whole heart – no matter how small, no matter how seemingly insignificant by world standards – matters the world to Him.

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