

Faced with many choices, youth urged to choose wisely, honor Father and Son

INDIANAPOLIS (CNS) – The National Catholic Youth Conference had barely begun by mid-afternoon Nov. 18, but already the hallways of the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis were coming to life with excited, silly-hat-wearing teens from around the country.

Not so in one conference hall. There, about 900 youths from all over central and southern Indiana chose to start their NCYC experience by worshipping together at an opening archdiocesan Mass with Archbishop Charles C. Thompson.

The large hall went from silence to song as the archbishop, about 13 priests and more than 25 seminarians processed toward the altar located atop a stage.

“Life, as they say, is full of choices,” Archbishop Thompson said during his homily. “Choices of course have consequences. On a regular basis, confronted with opportunity and challenge, we make choices.

“Sometimes we make choices between good and evil. Other times we make choices between seemingly equally good options, or so-called lesser of evils.”

The archbishop noted that each of those present made an intentional choice to be at NCYC.

“The consequences of this choice hopefully include strengthening our Catholic identity, deepening our faith, meeting new friends and having a memorable experience,” he said. “The ultimate consequence, however, will be a personal and even deeper personal encounter with Jesus Christ in the

various ways that are made available during this NCYC.”

Archbishop Thompson acknowledged that youths today are faced with many sources “wanting your loyalty, wanting you to sacrifice to false gods rather than the true God we worship here at this altar. ... The overwhelming array of voices vying for our attention and dedication can be deafening at times.”

He cautioned the teens to resist such messages. Instead, he said, “We need to be grounded in prayer, in the word of God, reflection, sacraments, discernment and service.

“These ways of discerning and praying allow us to encounter the person of Jesus Christ in our lives, in our relationships, in our families and in our communities.”

He said the choices Catholics make should reflect and honor “the choice God made for our salvation, and Jesus freely choosing “to accept the Father’s will, entering into his passion and death, trusting in the ultimate outcome of the Resurrection.”

“Choices have consequences,” he reminded the youths. “Many consequences can be long-lasting, some even eternal.

“Let us not squander the opportunity to draw closer to the Lord during these special days at NCYC. May the choices we make here lead us to an ever-deepening encounter with the person of Jesus Christ our Savior, and continue to have lasting consequences of peace, joy, faith, hope and blessings despite the burdens and crosses we must carry in this life. ... We have chosen to be here. Let the consequences begin.”

During Archbishop Thompson’s closing remarks, a long, loud cheer erupted after he shared with those present the news that the Indianapolis Archdiocese is hosting the National Eucharistic Congress in 2024.

The congress will be the culmination of a three-year National

Eucharistic Revival approved by the U.S. bishops during their fall general assembly Nov. 15-18 in Baltimore. The revival will officially start on the feast of Corpus Christi June 16, 2022.

After he shared the news on the congress, Archbishop Thompson prepared the youth for the eucharistic procession taking place after Mass through and outside of the Indiana Convention Center.

“We talk about the Indy 500 and how it’s the greatest spectacle in racing,” he said. “Well, it doesn’t compare to the Eucharist. What a great message it is, what a great spectacle, as we begin this eucharistic procession. The witness we give in our reverence and our adoration and great respect to the Eucharist – but not only to the Eucharist, but how we live out this eucharistic experience in our lives.”

Evan Sahlstrom of the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska, took part in the eucharistic procession.

The 17-year-old found it “really touching to see everyone drop what they were doing and kneel. I really enjoyed seeing the Knights of Columbus out (along the street) with their swords raised to reverence the Eucharist.”

After the procession and adoration, 18-year-old Hanna Helt of St. Joseph University Parish in Terre Haute, Indiana, reflected on the Mass.

“It was honestly amazing, especially with getting to be with all the other teenagers that were there, and hearing (the archbishop) speak,” she told *The Criterion*, newspaper of the Indianapolis Archdiocese. “It was such an amazing and warming experience.”

Hoefer is a staff writer at The Criterion, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.