



The Holy See

PENITENTIAL CELEBRATION WITH THE YOUTH OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME
IN PREPARATION FOR THE 22nd WORLD YOUTH DAY

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*St Peter's Basilica
Thursday, 29 March 2007*

Dear Friends,

We are meeting this evening just before the 22nd World Youth Day whose theme, as you know, is the new commandment that Jesus bequeathed to us on the night he was betrayed: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (*Jn* 13: 34).

I cordially greet all of you who have come from the various Roman parishes. I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishops and the priests present here, with a special thought for the confessors who will be available to you shortly. Today's event, as your spokesperson, whom I thank for her greeting at the beginning of this celebration, has already announced, has a profound and lofty significance. It is in fact a meeting around the Cross, a celebration of the mercy of God which each one of you will be able to experience personally in the Sacrament of Confession.

In the heart of every man, begging for love, there is a thirst for love. My beloved Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, wrote formerly in his first Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it" (n. 10).

Even more so, the Christian cannot live without love. Indeed, if he does not encounter true love he cannot even claim to be fully Christian because, as I pointed out in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas*

Est, "[b]eing Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (n. 1).

God's love for us, which began with creation, became visible in the mystery of the Cross, in that *kenosis* of God, in that self-emptying, that abasement of the Son of God which we heard proclaimed by the Apostle Paul in the First Reading, in the magnificent hymn to Christ in the Letter to the Philippians.

Yes, the Cross reveals the fullness of God's love for us. It is a crucified love which does not stop at the scandal of Good Friday but culminates in the joy of the Resurrection and the Ascension into Heaven and in the gift of the Holy Spirit, a Spirit of love through which, this evening too, sins will be forgiven and pardon and peace granted.

God's love for man which is expressed in its fullness on the Cross can be described with the term *agape*, that is, "the self-giving love of one who looks exclusively for the good of the other", but also with the term *eros*.

In fact, while it is love that offers man all that God is, as I observed in the *Message for this Lent*, it is also a love where "God's very Heart, the Almighty, awaits the 'yes' of his creatures as a young bridegroom that of his bride". *Unfortunately, "from its very origins, mankind, seduced by the lies of the Evil One, rejected God's love in the illusion of a self-sufficiency that is impossible (cf. Gn 3: 1-7)" (ibid.)*.

However, in the sacrifice of the Cross, God continues to present his love, his passion for man, that force which, as Pseudo-Dionysius expresses it, "does not allow the lover to remain in himself but moves him to become one with the beloved" (*De Divinis Nominibus*, IV, 13; PG 3, 712; *Message for Lent 2007, L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 21 February 2007, pp. 6, 7), coming to "beg" for his creature's love.

This evening, in receiving the Sacrament of Confession, you will be able to experience the "gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1999), so that, united to Christ, we may become new creatures (cf. II Cor 5: 17-18).

Dear Young People of the Diocese of Rome, with Baptism you are already born to new life in virtue of God's grace. Nonetheless, since this new life has not eliminated either the weakness of human nature or the inclination to sin, we are given the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Confession. Every time that you do so with faith and devotion, after an attentive examination of conscience, God's love and mercy open your heart to Christ's minister. To him, and thereby to Christ himself, you express your sorrow for the sins you have committed with the firm determination to sin no more in the future and the readiness to accept joyfully the acts of penance

to which he will direct you, to make reparation for the damage caused by the sin.

Thus, you will experience "the forgiveness of sins; reconciliation with the Church; recovery, if it has been lost, of the state of grace; remission of the eternal punishment merited by mortal sins, and remission, at least in part, of the temporal punishment which is the consequence of sin; peace, serenity of conscience and spiritual consolation; and an increase of spiritual strength for the struggle of Christian living" for every day (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 310).

With the penitential cleansing of this Sacrament, we are readmitted to full communion with God and the Church, a trustworthy companion because she is the "universal sacrament of salvation" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 48). In the second part of his new commandment, the Lord says: "you also love one another" (Jn 13: 34).

Of course, he waits for us to let ourselves be attracted by his love and to experience all its grandeur and beauty, but that is not enough! Christ draws us to him to unite himself with each one of us so that, in our turn, we may learn to love our brothers and sisters with this same love, as he has loved us.

Today, as always, a renewed ability to love our brethren is very necessary. As you leave this celebration, your hearts filled with the experience of God's love, be prepared "to dare" to love in your families, in your relationships with your friends and also with those who have offended you. Be prepared to make an impact with an authentically Christian witness in the contexts of study and work, to be committed to the parish community, to groups, movements, associations and every social milieu.

Young engaged couples, live your engagement in true love which always entails reciprocal, chaste and responsible respect. If the Lord calls some of you, dear young people of Rome, to a life of special consecration, be prepared to respond with a generous "yes" without compromise. In giving yourselves to God and to your brothers and sisters, you will experience the joy that does not withdraw into itself into an all too often asphyxiating selfishness.

However, all this certainly comes at a price, that price which Christ paid first and which every one of his disciples must also pay, although at a far cheaper price than the one paid by the Teacher. It is the price of sacrifice and self-denial, of faithfulness and perseverance, without which there is not and cannot be true love, which is entirely free and a source of joy.

Dear young men and women, the world is waiting for your contribution to building the "civilization of love". "The horizon of love is truly boundless: it is the whole world!" (*Message for the 22nd World Youth Day*). The priests who look after you and your teachers are certain that with the grace of God and the constant help of his divine mercy you will be at the height of the demanding task

that the Lord is asking of you.

Do not lose heart and always trust in Christ and his Church! The Pope is close to you and assures you of his daily remembrance in prayer, entrusting you in particular to the Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy, so that she may accompany and sustain you always. Amen!

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