



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO LORETO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE AGORÀ
OF ITALIAN YOUTH

PRAYER VIGIL WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

*Plain of Montorso
Saturday, 1 September 2007*

**RESPONSES OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO QUESTIONS POSED BY YOUNG PEOPLE**

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Question posed by Piero Tisti and Giovanna Di Mucci:

"Many of us young people in the suburbs do not have a centre, a place or people with whom we can identify. Often we are without a history, a perspective or even a future. It seems that what we really wait for never happens. From this come the experience of solitude and at times, an improper dependence on others. Your Holiness, is there someone or something by means of which we can become important? How is it possible to hope when reality negates every dream of happiness, every project of life?"

Response of the Holy Father:

Thank you for this question and for your very realistic presentation of the situation. It is not always easy to respond concerning the peripheries of this world with great problems and we do not want to live an easy optimism; but on the other hand, we must have the courage to go forwards.

I will therefore anticipate the essence of my answer: Yes, there is hope today too; each one of you is important because each is known and desired by God and God has his plan for each one. It is our task to discover and respond to it, so that despite these precarious and marginalized situations, we will be able to put into practice God's plan for us.

However, to go into detail, you have realistically presented to us the situation of a society: in the outskirts it seems hard to move ahead, to change the world for the better. Everything seems concentrated in the great centres of economic and political power, the great bureaucracies dominate, and those in the outskirts truly seem excluded from this life.

Then, one aspect of this situation of marginalization that affects so many people is that the important cells of social life that can also build centres on the fringes are fragmented: the family, which should be the place where generations meet - from great grandfather to grandchild -, should not only be a place where generations meet but also where they learn to live, learn the essential virtues, and this is in danger.

Thus, all the more should we do our utmost to ensure that the family survives, that today too, it is the vital cell, the centre in the periphery.

Therefore, the parish, the living cell of the Church, must also really be a place of inspiration, life and solidarity which helps people build together centres in the periphery. And I must say here, there is often talk about the Church in the suburbs and in the centre, which would be Rome, but in fact in the Church there are no suburbs because where Christ is, the whole centre is there.

Wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, wherever the Tabernacle stands, there is Christ; hence, there is the centre and we must do all we can to ensure that these living centres are effective, present and truly a force that counters this marginalization.

The living Church, the Church of the little communities, the parish Church, the movements, must form as many centres in the outskirts and thus help to overcome the difficulties that the leading politics obviously cannot manage to resolve, and at the same time, we must also think that despite the great focuses of power, contemporary society itself is in need of solidarity, of a sense of lawfulness, of the initiative and creativity of all.

I know that this is easier said than done, but I see here people who are working to increase the number of centres in the peripheries, to increase hope, and thus it seems to me that we should take up the initiative. The Church must be present precisely in the suburbs; Christ must be

present, the centre of the world must be present.

We have seen and we see today in the Gospel that for God there are no peripheries. In the vast context of the Roman Empire, the Holy Land was situated on the fringe; Nazareth was on the margins, an unknown town. Yet that very situation was, de facto, to become the centre that changed the world!

And thus, we must form centres of faith, hope, love and solidarity, centres of a sense of justice and lawfulness and of cooperation. Only in this way will modern society be able to survive. It needs this courage, it needs to create centres even if, obviously, hope does not seem to exist. We must counter this desperation, we must collaborate with great solidarity in doing our best to increase hope, so that men and women may collaborate and live.

The world - we see it - must be changed, but it is precisely the mission of young people to change it! We cannot change it with our own strength alone but in communion of faith and in journeying on together. In communion with Mary, with all the Saints, in communion with Christ, we can do something essential, and I encourage you and invite you to trust in Christ, to trust in God.

Being in the great company of the Saints and moving forward with them can change the world, creating centres in the outskirts, so that the company of Saints may truly become visible and thus the hope of all may become realistic, and every one may say: "I am important in the totality of history. The Lord will help us". Thank you.

Question posed by Sara Simonetta :

"I believe in the God who has touched my heart, but I have many insecurities, questions and fears that I carry within. It is not easy to speak about God with my friends; many of them see the Church as a reality that judges youth, that opposes their desire for happiness and love. Faced with this refusal, I feel all of my solitude as human and I want to feel near God. Your Holiness, in this silence, where is God?".

Response of the Holy Father:

Yes, even though we are believers, we all know God's silence. In the Psalm we have just recited, there is this almost despairing cry: "Make haste to answer me, O Lord... Do not hide your face!", and a little while ago a book of the spiritual experiences of Mother Teresa was published and what we already all knew was a little more clearly shown: with all her charity and the power of her faith, Mother Teresa suffered from God's silence.

On the one hand, we must also bear God's silence in order to understand our brothers who do not know God.

On the other, with the Psalm we can always cry to God once again: "Answer us, show your face!". And without a doubt, in our life, if our hearts are open, we can find the important moments when God's presence really becomes tangible even for us.

I now remember a little story that John Paul II told at the Spiritual Exercises he preached in the Vatican when he was not yet Pope. He recounted that after the war he was visited by a Russian official who was a scientist and who said to him as a scientist: "I am certain that God does not exist. Yet, if I am in the mountains, surrounded by his majestic beauty, by his grandeur, I am equally sure that the Creator does exist and that God exists".

The beauty of creation is one of the sources where we can truly touch God's beauty, we can see that the Creator exists and is good, which is true as Sacred Scripture says in the Creation Narrative, that is, that God conceived of this world and made it with his heart, his will and his reason, and he found it good.

We too must be good in order to have an open heart and to perceive God's true presence. Then, hearing the Word of God in the solemn liturgical celebrations, in celebrations of faith, in the great music of faith, we feel this presence. I remember at this moment another little story which a Bishop on his *ad limina* visit told me a little while ago.

There was a very intelligent woman who was not a Christian. She began to listen to the great music of Bach, Handel and Mozart. She was fascinated and said one day: "I must find the source of this beauty", and the woman converted to Christianity, to the Catholic faith, because she had discovered that this beauty has a source, and the source is the presence of Christ in hearts, it is the revelation of Christ in this world.

Hence, great feasts of faith, of liturgical celebration, but also personal dialogue with Christ: he does not always respond, but there are times when he really responds. Then there is the friendship, the company of faith.

Now, gathered here in Loreto, we see that faith unites, friendship creates a company of travelling companions. And we sense that all this does not derive from nothing but truly has a source, that the silent God is also a God who speaks, that he reveals himself and above all, that we ourselves can be witnesses of his presence, and from our faith a light truly shines also for others.

Thus, I would say on the one hand, we must accept that God is silent in this world, but we must not be deaf to his words or blind to his appearance on so many occasions. We see the Lord's presence, especially in creation, in the beautiful liturgy, in friendship within the Church, and full of his presence, we can also give light to others.

Thus, I come to the second part, or rather, the first part of your question: it is difficult to speak to

friends today about God and perhaps even more difficult to talk about the Church, because they see in God only the limit of our freedom, a God of commandments, of prohibitions, and the Church as an institution that limits our freedom, that imposes prohibitions upon us.

Nonetheless, we must try to make the living Church visible to them, not this idea of a centre of power in the Church with these labels, but the community of companions where, in spite of all life's problems that exist for everyone, is born our joy of living.

Here, a third memory springs to mind. I was in Brazil, in Fazenda da Esperança, this great community where drug addicts are treated and rediscover hope, the joy of living in this world; and they witnessed what the actual discovery that God exists meant for their recovery from despair. They thus understood that their life has meaning and they rediscovered the joy of being in this world, the joy of facing the problems of human life.

Therefore, in every human heart, despite all the problems that exist, is a thirst for God, and when God disappears, the sun that gives light and joy also disappears.

This thirst for the infinite that is in our hearts is also demonstrated even in the reality of drugs: the human being wants to extend the quality of life, to have more than life, to have the infinite, but drugs are a lie, they are a fraud, because they do not extend life but destroy it.

The great thirst that speaks to us of God and sets us on the path that leads to him is true, but we must help one another. Christ came to create a network of communion in the world, where all together we might carry one another, and thus help one another together to find the ways that lead to life and to understand that the Commandments of God are not limits to our freedom but the paths that guide us to the other, towards the fullness of life.

Let us pray to the Lord to help us understand his presence, to be full of his Revelation, his joy, to help one another to go forward in the company of faith and with Christ to increasingly find the true Face of God, and hence, true life.

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Dear young people who are the hope of the Church in Italy! I am happy to meet you in this remarkable place, on this special evening, rich in prayer, song, periods of silence, full of hope and profound emotion. This valley, where in the past also my beloved Predecessor John Paul II met many of you, has henceforth become your *agora*, your square without walls and barriers, where a thousand streets converge and from which they branch out.

I listened with attention to those who have spoken on behalf of you all. You have come to this peaceful, authentic and joyful place of encounter for thousands of different reasons: some of you

because you belong to a group or were invited by some friend, some by deep conviction, some with several doubts in your heart and some merely out of curiosity... Whatever the reason that drew you here, I can tell you, although it requires courage to say it, that it was the Holy Spirit who has brought us together. Yes, that is exactly the case; the Spirit has led you here; you have come here with your doubts and certainties, with your joys and your anxieties. It is now up to all of us, to all of you, to open your hearts and offer everything to Jesus.

Say to him: here I am; of course, I am not yet as you would like me to be, I cannot even manage to understand myself fully but with your help I am ready to follow you. Lord Jesus, this evening I would like to speak to you, making my own the inner attitude and trusting abandonment of that young woman who, 2,000 years ago, said her "yes" to the Father who chose her to be your Mother. The Father chose her because she was docile and obedient to his will. Like her, like little Mary, each one of you, dear young friends, should say to God with faith: "Here I am; let it be done to me according to your word".

What an amazing spectacle of young and stirring faith we are experiencing this evening! And this evening, thanks to you, Loreto has become the spiritual capital of youth; the centre towards which multitudes of the young people who populate the five Continents converge in spirit.

At this moment, we feel as though we were surrounded by the expectations and hopes of millions of young people across the world: at this very minute there are some who are watching, others who are asleep, yet others who are studying or working; some are hoping and some despairing, some believe and others are not able to believe, some love life and others, instead, are throwing it away.

I would like my words to reach them all: the Pope is close to you, he shares your joys and your pain, and he especially shares in the most intimate hopes that are in your soul. For each one of you he asks the Lord for the gift of a full and happy life, a life filled with meaning, a true life.

Today, unfortunately, all too often a full and happy existence is seen by many young people as a difficult dream - we heard so many testimonies - sometimes almost impossible to accomplish. So many of your peers are looking to the future with apprehension and ask many questions. Worried, they ask: How is it possible to be integrated in a society marked by a multitude of grave injustices and suffering? How should I react to the selfishness and violence that sometimes seem to prevail? How can I give life full meaning?

With love and conviction, I repeat to you young people present here, and through you to your peers throughout the world: Do not be afraid, Christ can fill your heart's deepest aspirations! Are there dreams that cannot come true when it is God's Spirit who inspires and nourishes them in your heart? Can anything block our enthusiasm when we are united with Christ? Nothing and no one, the Apostle Paul would say, will ever separate us from God's love, in Christ Jesus Our Lord (cf. Rom 8: 35-39).

Let me tell you again this evening: if you stay united with Christ, each one of you will be able to do great things. This is why, dear friends, you must not be afraid to dream with your eyes open of important projects of good and you must not let yourselves be discouraged by difficulties. Christ has confidence in you and wants you to be able to realize all your most noble and lofty dreams of genuine happiness. Nothing is impossible for those who trust in God and entrust themselves to him.

Look at the young Mary; the Angel proposed something truly inconceivable to her: participation, in the most involving way possible, in the greatest of God's plans, the salvation of humanity. Facing this proposal, Mary, as we heard in the Gospel, was distressed for she realized the smallness of her being before the omnipotence of God; and she asked herself: "How is it possible? Why should it be me?". Yet, ready to do the divine will, she promptly said her "yes" which changed her life and the history of all humanity. It is also thanks to her "yes" that we are meeting here this evening.

I ask myself and I ask you: can God's requests to us, however demanding they may seem, ever compare with what God asked the young Mary? Dear young men and women, since Mary truly knows what it means to respond generously to the Lord's requests, let us learn from her to say our own "yes".

Mary, dear young people, knows your noblest and deepest aspirations. Above all, she well knows your great desire for love, with your need to love and to be loved. By looking at her, by following her docilely, you will discover the beauty of love; not a "disposable" love that is transient and deceptive, imprisoned in a selfish and materialistic mindset, but true, deep love.

In the very depths of their hearts, every young man, every young woman who are looking out on life, cherish the dream of a love that will give full meaning to their futures. For many, this is fulfilled in the choice of marriage and in the formation of a family in which the love between a man and a woman is lived as a definitive gift, sealed by the "yes" spoken before God on their wedding day, a "yes" for their whole life.

I know well that today this dream is always less easy to realize. How many failures of love surround us! How many couples bow their heads, give up and separate! How many families fall to pieces! How many young people, even among you, have witnessed the separation and divorce of their parents!

I would like to say to those in such sensitive and complex situations: the Mother of God, the Community of believers and the Pope are beside you and are praying that the crisis that marks today's families may not become an irreversible failure. May Christian families, with the support of divine Grace, stay faithful to that solemn commitment of love joyfully assumed before the priest and the Christian community on the solemn day of their marriage.

In the face of so many failures these questions are often asked: Am I any better than my friends and my parents who have tried and failed? Why should I myself succeed where so many have given up? This human fear can be daunting to even the more courageous spirits but in this night that awaits us, in front of her Holy House, Mary will repeat to each one of you, dear young friends, the words that she herself heard the Angel say to her: Do not be afraid, do not fear!

The Holy Spirit is with you and will never leave you. Nothing is impossible to those who trust in God. This applies for those who are destined to married life and still more for those to whom God proposes a life of total detachment from earthly goods, to be dedicated full time to his Kingdom. Some of you have set out towards the priesthood, towards the consecrated life; some of you aspire to be missionaries, knowing how many and what risks this entails.

I am thinking of the missionaries, priests, women religious and lay people, who have fallen in the trenches of love at the service of the Gospel. Fr Giancarlo Bossi, for whom we prayed when he was kidnapped in the Philippines, will have much to tell us about this and today we rejoice to have him with us. Through him, I would like to greet and thank all those who spend their lives for Christ on the frontiers of evangelization.

Dear young people, if the Lord calls you to live more intimately at his service, respond generously. You may be certain: life dedicated to God is never spent in vain.

Dear young people, I shall end my talk here, not without first having embraced you with a father's heart. I embrace you one by one and greet you warmly. I greet the Bishops present, starting with Archbishop Angelo Bagnasco, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, and Archbishop Gianni Danzi who has welcomed us into his Ecclesial Community. I greet the priests, the Religious and the animators who have accompanied you. I greet the Civil Authorities and all who organized this Meeting. We will be "virtually" united later and we will see one another again tomorrow morning, at the end of this night of Vigil, for the crowning point of our Meeting when Jesus makes himself truly present in his Word and in the mystery of the Eucharist.

From this moment, I would like to make an appointment with you young people in Sydney where, in a year's time, the next [World Youth Day](#) will be held. I know Australia is far away and for young Italians it is literally at the other end of the world.... Let us pray that the Lord who works every miracle will grant that many of you may be there. May he grant it to me, may he grant it to you. This is one of our many dreams which tonight, as we pray together, we entrust to Mary. Amen.

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