



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 27 August 1997

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. With great joy I was able to take part in the [12th World Youth Day in Paris](#) a few days ago. I am deeply grateful to the Lord who granted me this extraordinary experience of faith and hope.

I willingly express my gratitude to the President of the French Republic and to all the authorities for the kind welcome they gave me. I likewise thank all those who at various levels effectively contributed to the orderly and peaceful course of the whole event.

My gratitude is extended with fraternal warmth to Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, to Archbishop Michel Dubost, President of the Organizing Committee, and to the entire French Bishops' Conference for the great care with which the various phases of the world meeting were prepared and executed. Lastly, I address a cordial thought to all the volunteers, as well as to the families who with their generous hospitality enabled so many people to take part in such an important ecclesial event.

2. The [12th World Youth Day](#) saw the gathering, far beyond all expectation, of young people *from about 160 countries across the world*. They met in the French capital to express the joy of their faith in Christ and to experience the beauty of being together as members of the one Church of Christ. On their arrival in France they encountered the generous hospitality of their French peers, who gave them a fraternal and cordial welcome, first throughout the country, then in the Île-de-France.

It was a particularly happy opportunity for them to discover *the cultural and spiritual patrimony of France*, whose place in the Church's history is well known. Thus they could meet a living Church and a dynamic and open society.

The memory of the wonderful liturgies that marked the most significant moments of the "Triduum", culminating in the solemn celebration on Sunday, 24 August, will certainly remain impressed on

everyone's mind. Whether in the evocative setting of Notre-Dame, where the beatification of Frédéric Ozanam took place, or in the cathedral of lights created at Longchamp for the baptismal vigil, the rites were carried out *in a religious atmosphere of intense devotion*, aided by the music and songs inspired by different cultures and performed in the appropriate style.

3. The central theme, which guided their reflection during the various stages of the meeting, was the question the two disciples asked Jesus one day: "Teacher, where are you staying?", receiving the answer: "Come and see" (Jn 1:38f.). With these words, the Lord invited them to enter into a direct relationship with him in order to share his journey ("come") and to know him deeply ("see").

The message was clear: to understand Christ it is not enough to listen to his teaching: *we must share his life* and somehow experience his living presence. Therefore the World Youth Day theme fitted into the preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which is meant to represent to contemporary man Jesus Christ, *the one Saviour of the world, yesterday, today and for ever*.

This World Youth Day intended to offer the answer to young people, who are seeking the ultimate meaning of their life: the discovery of Christ, the Word made flesh for man's salvation, in addition to shedding light on the human mystery *beyond death*, makes it possible *in time* to build a society where human dignity is respected and brotherhood is real.

4. The recurring theme that inspired their reflection and prayer and linked the great meetings was the reference *to the Church's celebration of the paschal mystery in the Sacred Triduum*.

My first meeting with the young people took place in the grandiose setting of the Champ-de-Mars, dominated by the massive structure of the Eiffel Tower: we listened again *to the great lesson of service to our neighbour*, which Jesus offered with the washing of the feet. At the various evening vigils the young people were invited to mediate *on the sacrament of the Eucharist*, the inexhaustible source of all genuine love.

Richly significant in this context was the *beatification of Frédéric Ozanam*, apostle of charity and founder of the St Vincent de Paul Conferences, as well as the distinguished figure of a profound Catholic intellectual. The topic on love was further developed in the *"Via Crucis" on Friday*, in which attention was focused on the supreme gift which Christ the Servant made of himself for the world's salvation.

The *baptismal vigil* on Saturday, which took place at the Longchamp Racecourse, made it possible to pause and reflect on the Christian's new birth and on his call to live a relationship of personal communion with the Redeemer.

Lastly, on Sunday the 24th, *the great Eucharistic celebration* took place, during which we returned to the central theme: it is necessary to go to Christ ("come"), to discover ever more deeply his true

identity ("see"). In him, the believer, through the *"folly" of the Cross*, reaches the *supreme wisdom of love*, and, round the Eucharistic table, discovers the profound unity that makes persons from every corner of the earth *a single Mystical Body*.

The spectacle offered by the young people on the immense esplanade of Longchamp was an eloquent confirmation of this truth: despite the diversity of language, culture, nationality and skin colour, young men and women from the five continents shook one another's hand, exchanged smiles and greetings, and prayed and sang together. It was obvious that they felt at home as members of one great family. To a world fraught with divisions of every kind, frozen in mutual indifference, exposed to the anguish of global alienation, the young people proclaimed a message from Paris: faith in the crucified and risen Christ can establish a new brotherhood in which we accept one another because we love one another.

5. During the *Angelus* prayer at the end of the great concelebration, I had the joy of announcing that *St Theresa of Lisieux* would soon be proclaimed a *doctor of the Church*. Young herself, like the participants in the World Day, Theresa had a marvellous understanding of the overwhelming message of God's love, received as a gift and lived with the humble trust and simplicity of children who in Jesus Christ totally entrust themselves to the Father. And she has become its authoritative teacher for the present and future of the Church.

What we experienced together in Paris in the past few days was *an extraordinary event of hope*, a hope that re-echoed in the world from the hearts of young people. Let us pray that the zeal of these many young men and women from the four corners of the earth may continue to bear abundant fruit in the ever-young Church of the new millennium.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I am pleased to extend a special greeting to the Koyasan Shingon Buddhist delegation from Japan on their way to Rimini for the "Meeting for Friendship among People": I express the hope that your visit will serve to increase understanding and respect among the followers of different religious traditions. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from England, Cyprus, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, Canada and the United States, I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

