



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE YOUTH OF THE WORLD
ON THE OCCASION OF THE XII
WORLD YOUTH DAY**

«Teacher, where are you staying? Come and see» (cf. Jn 1:38.39)

Dear Young People!

1. I come to you with joy to continue the dialogue, already long, whose fabric we are weaving together on the occasion of the World Youth Day. In communion with the whole people of God on the journey towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I want to invite you this year to fix your eyes on Jesus, Teacher and Lord of life, with the help of the words recalled in John's Gospel: «Teacher, where are you staying? Come and see» (cf. 1:38-39).

In all the local Churches, during the coming months, you will be meeting together to reflect, with your Pastors, on these words of the Gospel. Then, in August 1997, together with many of you, we will have the experience of the XII World Youth Day, celebrated at international level in Paris, at the heart of the continent of Europe. In that metropolis, for centuries a crossroads for peoples, for art and culture, the young people of France are already preparing, enthusiastically, to welcome their young contemporaries from every corner of the planet. Following the Holy Year Cross, the people of the younger generations who believe in Christ will, once again, become a living icon of the Church in her pilgrimage along the roads of the world. Meeting in prayer and reflection, in the dialogue that unites beyond all difference of language and race, in the sharing of ideals, problems and hopes, these young people will experience living the reality promised by Jesus: «Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them» (Mt 18:20).

2. Youth of the whole world, it is along the paths of daily life that you can meet the Lord! Do you remember how the disciples, hurrying to the banks of the Jordan to listen to the last of the great prophets, John the Baptist, saw Jesus of Nazareth pointed out to them as the Messiah, the Lamb

of God? Out of curiosity they decided to follow Him at a distance. They were shy almost and embarrassed, until, turning round, He asked them: «What do you seek?» So began the dialogue that would give rise to the adventure of John, Andrew, Simon «Peter» and the other apostles (cf. Jn 1:29-51).

In this concrete and surprising encounter, described in a few, essential words, we find the origin of every journey in faith. It is Jesus who takes the initiative. When we have to do with Him, the question is always turned upside down: from questioners, we become questioned; «searchers», we discover that we are «sought»; He, indeed, has always loved us first (cf. 1Jn 4:10). This is the fundamental dimension of the encounter: we are not dealing with something, but with Someone, with the «Living One». Christians are not the disciples of a system of philosophy: they are men and women who, in faith, have experienced the encounter with Christ (cf. 1Jn 1:1-4).

We are living in an era of great changes: the rapid decline of ideologies that seemed to promise a long resistance to the wear and tear of time; the tracing out on the planet of new confines and frontiers. Humanity often finds itself uncertain, bewildered and anxious (cf. Mt 9:36). But the word of God knows no decline; throughout history and among changing events, it remains firm and gives light (cf. Mt 24:35). *The faith of the Church is founded on Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the world, yesterday and today and for ever* (cf. Heb 13:8). It gives Christ as reference for an answer to the questions rising up from the human heart in face of the mystery of life and death. Only from Christ, indeed, can there be answers that do not deceive nor disappoint.

When my thoughts go back to your words, spoken during the unforgettable encounters I have had the joy of experiencing with you on my apostolic journeys to every part of the world, I seem to read in them, with vital urgency, the very question of the disciples: «Teacher, where are you staying?» See that you are able to listen again, in the silence of prayer, to Jesus' answer: «Come and see».

3. Dear young people, like the first disciples, *follow Jesus!* Do not be afraid to draw near to Him, to cross the threshold of his dwelling, to speak with Him, face to face, as you talk with a friend (cf. Ex 33:11). Do not be afraid of the «new life» He is offering. He Himself makes it possible for you to receive that life and practise it, with the help of his grace and the gift of his Spirit.

It is true: *Jesus is a demanding friend*. He points to lofty goals; he asks us to go out of ourselves in order to meet Him, entrusting to Him our whole life : «Whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it» (Mk 8:35). The proposal may seem difficult, and, in some cases, frightening. But – I ask you – is it better to be resigned to a life without ideals, to a world made in our image and likeness, or rather, generously to seek truth, goodness, justice, working for a world that reflects the beauty of God, even at the cost of facing the trials it may involve?

Break down the barriers of superficiality and fear! Recognizing that you are «new» men and women, regenerated by the grace of Baptism, talk with Jesus in prayer and while listening to the

Word; experience the joy of reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance; receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist; welcome and serve Him in your brothers and sisters. You will discover the truth about yourselves and your inner unity, and you will find a «Thou» who gives the cure for anxieties, for nightmares and for the unbridled subjectivism that leaves you no peace.

4. «Come and see». *You will meet Jesus where men and women are suffering and hoping*: in the little villages, scattered across the continents and seemingly on the fringe of history, as Nazareth was when God sent his Angel to Mary; in the huge metropolises, where millions of human beings live often as strangers. In reality, every human being is a «fellow citizen» of Christ.

Jesus is living next to you, in the brothers and sisters with whom you share your daily existence. His visage is that of the *poorest*, of the marginalized who, not infrequently, are victims of an unjust model of development, in which profit is given first place and the human being is made a means rather than an end. Jesus' dwelling is wherever a human person is suffering because rights are denied, hopes betrayed, anxieties ignored. There, in the midst of humankind, is the dwelling of Christ, who asks you to dry every tear in his name, and to remind whoever feels lonely that no one whose hope is placed in Him is ever alone (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

5. *Jesus dwells among those who call on Him without having known Him*; among those who, after beginning to know Him, have lost Him through no fault of their own; among those who *seek Him in sincerity of heart*, while coming from different cultural and religious contexts (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 16). As disciples and friends of Jesus, become agents of dialogue and collaboration with those who believe in a God who rules the universe with infinite love; be ambassadors of the Messiah you have found and known in his «dwelling», the Church, so that many more young people of your age may be able to follow in his footsteps; their way lighted by your fraternal charity and by the joy in your eyes that have contemplated Christ.

Jesus dwells among the men and women «honoured with the name of Christian» (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 15). All are able to meet Him in the Scriptures, in prayer and in service of their neighbours. On the eve of the third millennium, it is becoming every day a more urgent duty *to repair the scandal of the division among Christians*, strengthening unity through dialogue, prayer in common and witness. It is not a matter of ignoring differences and problems in the detachment of a lukewarm relativism; that would be like covering the wound without healing it, with the risk of interrupting the journey before reaching the goal of full communion. On the contrary, it is a matter of working – under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – with a view *to effective reconciliation*, trusting in the efficacy of Jesus' prayer on the eve of his passion : «Father, that they may be one even as we are one» (cf. Jn 17:22). The more you cling to Jesus the more capable you will become of being close to one another; and insofar as you make concrete gestures of reconciliation you will enter into the intimacy of his love.

Jesus dwells especially in your parishes, in the communities in which you live, in the associations

and ecclesial movements to which you belong, as well as in many contemporary forms of grouping and apostolate at the service of the new evangelization. This rich variety of charisms is a benefit for the whole Church, and an encouragement for every believer to place his or her capacities at the service of the one Lord, fount of salvation for all humankind.

6. Jesus is «the Word of the Father» (cf. Jn 1:1), gift to humankind, to reveal the face of God, and to give a meaning and goal to their uncertain steps. God who «spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets in many and various ways, has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world» (Heb 1:1-2). His word is not an imposition, unhinging the doors of conscience; it is a persuasive voice, a free gift that, if it is to have a saving effect in each one's concrete existence, calls for an attitude of readiness and responsibility, a pure heart and a free mind.

In your groups, dear young people, multiply the occasions for hearing and studying the word of the Lord, especially through the *lectio divina*. You will discover the secrets of the Heart of God and will derive profit for discerning situations and transforming reality. Guided by Holy Scripture, you will be able to recognize the Lord's presence in your daily life; and even the «desert» can then become a «garden», where it is possible for the creature to talk familiarly with the Creator: «When I am reading divine Scripture, God walks again in the earthly Paradise» (St. Ambrose, *Epistle* 49,3).

7. *Jesus lives among us in the Eucharist*, the supreme fulfilment of his real presence, a presence that is contemporary with the history of humankind. Amidst the uncertainties and distractions of daily life, imitate the disciples on their way to Emmaus; like them, say to the Risen One, revealed in the act of breaking the bread: «Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent» (Lk 24:29). Call out to Jesus to remain with you always along the many roads to Emmaus of our time. May He be your strength, your point of reference, your enduring hope. May the Eucharistic Bread, dear young people, never be lacking on the tables of your existence. And may you draw from this Bread the strength to bear witness to the faith!

Around the Eucharistic table the harmonious unity of the Church is realized and made manifest; the mystery of missionary communion, in which *all feel that they are children, sisters and brothers*, without any exclusion or difference from race, language, age, social situation or culture. Dear young people, make your generous and responsible contribution to the constant building up of the Church as a family, a place of dialogue and mutual acceptance, a space of peace, mercy and pardon.

8. Enlightened by the Word and strengthened by the Bread of the Eucharist, dear young people, *you are called to be credible witnesses* to the Gospel of Christ, who makes all things new.

But how are you to be recognized as true disciples of Christ? By the fact that you have «love for

one another» (Jn 13:35) after the example of his love: a love that is freely given, infinitely patient and denied to no one (cf. 1Cor 13:4-7). *Fidelity to the new commandment* will be the guarantee that you are consistent with respect to what you are proclaiming. This is the great «novelty» which can amaze a world that, unfortunately, is still torn and divided by violent conflicts that at times are clearly evident, at times subtle and hidden. In this world you are called *to live fraternally*, not as a utopia but as a real possibility; in this society you are called, as true missionaries of Christ, to build the civilization of love.

9. On 30 September 1997 will occur the centenary of the death of St. *Thérèse of Lisieux*. Hers is a figure that, in her own country, cannot fail to draw the attention of a great many young pilgrims; Thérèse, precisely, is a young Saint, and her message today is simple and suggestive, brimming over with amazement and gratitude: God is Love; every person is loved by God, who expects to be welcomed and loved by each one. This is a message, young people of today, that you are called to receive and to shout aloud to those of your own age : «Man is loved by God! This very simple yet profound proclamation is owed to humanity by the Church» (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 34).

From the youth of Theresa of the Child Jesus spring forth her enthusiasm for the Lord, the intensity of her love, the realistic daring of her great projects. The charm of her holiness is confirmation that God grants in abundance, even to the young, the treasures of his wisdom.

Walk with her the humble and simple way of Christian maturity, at the school of the Gospel. Stay with her in the «heart» of the Church, living radically the option for Christ.

10. Dear young people, in the house where Jesus dwells meet *the most sweet presence of the Mother*. It is in Mary's womb that the Word was made flesh. Accepting the role assigned to her in the plan of salvation, the Virgin became a model for every disciple of Christ.

I entrust to Her the preparation and the celebration of the XII World Youth Day, together with the hopes and expectations of the young people who, with Her, are repeating in every corner of the planet: «Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word» (cf. Lk 1:38); and who are going to meet Jesus, to stay with Him, ready then to proclaim to their contemporaries, as did the Apostles: «We have found the Messiah!» (Jn 1:41).

With this message I cordially greet each one of you and, accompanying you with my prayer, I bless you.

From Castel Gandolfo, 15 August 1996, Solemnity of the Assumption into Heaven of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

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