



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE GATHERED IN THE VATICAN BASILICA

Wednesday, 29 November 1978

Dear young people, boys and girls,

Thank you for the enthusiastic welcome you gave me in this splendid Vatican Basilica, as I passed your groups resounding with youthful exultation and sincere attachment to the person of the successor of Peter, on whose tomb we are gathered to draw from him inspiration and support.

You come from schools, parishes, clubs, institutes and Catholic associations to manifest to the Pope your Christian ideals and the good will to prepare for your future and your coming responsibilities as Christians and citizens with seriousness and generous dedication. For this, too, or rather above all for this, I repeat to you my hearty thanks, which I wish to extend also to your parents, your educators, your teachers and your parish priests, who have guided you to this meeting.

Before speaking to you of the general subject of this Wednesday, which is centred on Advent (next Sunday, in fact, as you know, the liturgical time of Advent begins), I wish to address, with fatherly benevolence, a special greeting to two groups of young people: the spastic boys of the "Villa Margherita" Spastic Centre at Montefiascone, which is run by the Religious of the Congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Conception; and then the group of deaf-and-dumb from the Gualandi Institute in Rome: I bid you welcome, beloved sons! Your presence and your particular condition deserve a special place in the heart of the Pope, who embraces you and blesses you with heartfelt predilection. May the loving attentions of those dedicated to your assistance and to your instruction be for you a reason of relief and serenity, despite the inevitable sorrows of daily life. Today, with a gesture worthy of mention, they have accompanied you here in a spirit of active solidarity with brothers in greater need.

Now, a few days before Advent, as I mentioned, we wish to examine the meaning of Advent. We are so accustomed to this term that we run the risk of not feeling any longer the need for a further search for its deep meaning.

It means in the first place coming. And even the youngest among you who are listening to me know this and remember well the coming of Jesus in the night of Christmas, in a grotto used as a cowshed. But the older ones among you, who are already engaged in higher studies, ask yourselves questions to study more and more deeply this fascinating reality of Christianity, which is Advent. Summing up, briefly, what I will say at length at the second audience this morning, Advent is the history of the first relations between God and man. As soon as the Christian becomes aware of his supernatural vocation, he receives the mystery of the coming of God to his own soul, and his heart throbs and pulsates constantly with this reality, since it is nothing but the very life of Christianity.

To understand better the role of God and of man in the mystery of Advent, we must go back to the first page of Holy Scripture, that is, to Genesis, where we read the words: "*Beresit bara!* In the beginning God created ... " He, God, creates, that is "gives a beginning" to everything that is not God, that is, to the visible and invisible world (according to Genesis: the heavens and the earth). In this context the verb "creates" manifests the fullness of God's being, which is revealed as Omnipotence which is at once Wisdom and Love.

But the same page of the Bible presents to us another protagonist of Advent, man. We read there, in fact, that God creates him in His image and likeness: "Then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1: 26). I will speak next Wednesday of this second protagonist of Advent, that is man; but I wish to indicate to you now this special relationship, of which the theology of Advent is woven, between God and the image of God, man.

And, as the first commitment of the new liturgical season that is about to open, try to give, on the basis of the short biblical considerations we have made together now, a personal answer to the two questions that have emerged implicitly from our talk, namely: 1) what does Advent mean?; 2) why is Advent an essential part of Christianity?

Returning to your homes, your schools and your associations, tell everyone that the Pope counts a great deal on the young. Tell them that the young are the comfort and the strength of the Pope, who wishes to see them all, to let them hear his voice of encouragement in the midst of all the difficulties that integration in society involves. Tell them, finally, to reflect both individually, and at their meetings, on the meaning of the new liturgical period and on the implications that result in the daily commitment of the necessary spiritual renewal.

May the Apostolic Blessing which I now willingly impart to you and to all your dear ones, be of help and a stimulation to you to carry out your resolutions.

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