



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA MEETING WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF NEW ORLEANS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

"Louisiana Superdome" Stadium

Saturday, 12 September 1987

Part I

Dear Young People of New Orleans,

Dear Young People of America,

1. Listening to what you are telling me by your presence and through your representatives, I know that you are *very much conscious of having a special mission in this world*, of being partners in the mission of the Church.

I also know that in fulfilling your mission you are willing to give, you are willing to share, and you are willing to serve. And you are willing to do all this, *together*, not alone! In this you are like Jesus: Jesus *gave* and he *served* and he was never alone. He tells us: "The one who sent me is which me. He has not left me alone" (*Jo. 8, 29*).

Yes, dear young people, I too want *to speak about your mission*, the reason for your life on earth, *the truth of your lives*. It is extremely vital for you to have a clear idea of your mission, to avoid being confused or deceived. In speaking to the Christians of his time, Saint Paul explicitly urged them: "Let no one deceive you in any way" (*2 Thess. 2,3*). And today I say the same to you, young people of America: "Let no one deceive you in any way" – about your mission, about the truth, about where you are going. *Let no one deceive you about the truth of your lives*.

2. But what is the opposite of deception? Where can you turn to find answers that satisfy, answers that will last? The opposite of deception is truth – the person who tells the truth, the person who is

the truth. Yes, *the opposite of deception is Jesus Christ*, who tells us: "I am the way, and *the truth*, and the life" (Jo. 14, 6). Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He reveals the truth of God. But he is also man. He shares in our humanity and came into the world to teach us about ourselves, to help us discover ourselves.

You young people are proud to live in a free country and you should be grateful to God for *your freedom*. But even though you can come and go as you like, and do what you want, you are not really free if you are living under the power of error or falsehood, or deceit or sin. Only Jesus Christ can make you fully free through his truth. And that is why he said: "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (*Ibid.* 8, 32. 36). And that is why he added: "if the Son frees you, you will really be free". Dear young people: the whole message of Jesus in the Gospels and through his Church helps you to discover who you really are, to discover all the dimensions of your lives.

3. Each of us is *an individual*, a person, a creature of God, one of his children, someone very special whom God loves and for whom Christ died. This identity of ours determines the way we must live, the way we must act, the way we must view our mission in the world. We come from God, we depend on God, *God has a plan for us* – a plan for our lives, for our bodies, for our souls, for our future. This plan for us is extremely important – so important that God became man to explain it to us.

In God's plan we are individuals, yes, but we are also part of a *community*. The Second Vatican Council emphasized the fact that God did not call us to share his life merely as unrelated individuals. Rather he wanted to mould us into a people as his sons and daughters (Cfr. *Ad Gentes*, 2). This aspect of our being a community, of our sharing God's life as a people is part of our identity – who we are, what we are, where we are going.

Right away we can see that as persons we have responsibilities and that *these responsibilities are part of our freedom*. The Vatican Council went so far as to say that "man is defined first of all by his responsibilities towards his brothers and sisters and towards history" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 55).

To understand ourselves as members of a community, as individuals linked together to make up the People of God, *as persons with responsibility for others* is a great insight – an insight that is necessary for fulfilling our mission properly.

4. As Christians you have these insights and Christ today wants to reinforce them in you. You speak about "being partners", of sharing and serving and working together. And all of this is linked to God's plan, according to which we are brothers and sisters in Christ – brothers and sisters who belong to the People of God and who are made to live in community, to think about others, to help others. Dear young people of America: in the Church there are many different gifts. There is room for many different cultures and ways of doing things. *But there is no room in the Church for selfishness*. There is no room in the world for selfishness. It destroys the meaning of life; it

destroys the meaning of love; it reduces the human person to a subhuman level.

When we speak about the need of being open to others, of taking into account the community, of fulfilling our responsibilities to all our brothers and sisters, we are actually talking about *the whole world*. Your mission as young people today is to the whole world. In what sense? You can never forget the interdependence of human beings wherever they are. When Jesus tells us to love our neighbour he does not set a geographical limit. What is needed today is a solidarity between all the young people of the world – a solidarity especially with the poor and all those in need. You young people must change society *by your lives* of justice and fraternal love. It is not just a question of your own country, but of the whole world. This is certainly your mission, dear young people. You are partners with each other, partners with the whole Church, *partners with Christ*.

5. In order, however, to accomplish this great work, to be in a condition to change the world in the name of Jesus, you yourselves must actually be living according to your own identity – *according to God's plan for your lives*. Once again it is the world of Jesus that directs your lives and tells you what that plan is. You remember how much Jesus insisted on the commandment of love, how much he insisted on living according to certain norms called the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the meek... Blessed are the merciful... Blessed are the clean of heart... Blessed are the peacemakers". All of this is part of the plan.

When Saint Paul says, "Let no one deceive you", he is in effect saying: Do not believe anyone who contradicts Jesus or his message which is transmitted to you by the Church, Jesus speaks to you young people and tells you the value of meekness, mercy and humility. Other voices in the world will immediately shout out: "weakness!". In the Gospel Jesus emphasizes the value of honesty, uprightness, justice and fairness. But when you practice these virtues, you are liable to be accused of being "naive". Jesus and his Church hold up to you God's plan for human love, telling you that sex is a great gift of God that is reserved for marriage. At this point the voices of the world will try to deceive you, with powerful slogans, claiming that you are "unrealistic", "out of it", "backward", even "reactionary". But the message of Jesus is clear: purity means true love and it is the total opposite of selfishness and escape.

6. Jesus' message applies to all the areas of life. He reveals to us the truth of our lives and all aspects of this truth. Jesus tells us that *the purpose of our freedom is to say "yes" to God's plan for our lives*. What makes our "yes" so important is that we say it freely; we are able to say "no". Jesus teaches us that we are accountable to God, that we must follow our consciences, but that our consciences must be formed according to God's plan for our lives. In all our relationships to other people and to the world, Jesus teaches us what we must do, how we must live in order not to be deceived, in order to walk in truth. And today, dear young people, I proclaim to you again Jesus Christ: *the way*, and the truth and the life – your way, *your truth* and your life.

What is in accord with the truth of Jesus is fulfilment, joy and peace, even if it means effort and

discipline. What is not in accord with his truth means disorder, and when done deliberately it means sin. Deliberate or not, it eventually means unhappiness and frustration.

7. It is with the truth of Jesus, dear young people, that you must face the great questions in your lives, as well as the practical problems. The world will try to deceive you about many things that matter: about your faith, about pleasure and material things, about the dangers of drugs. And at one stage or another the false voices of the world will try to exploit your human weakness by telling you that life has no meaning at all for you. *The supreme theft in your lives would be if they succeeded in robbing you of hope.* They will try, but not succeed if you hold fast to Jesus and his truth.

The truth of Jesus is capable of reinforcing all your energies. It will unify your lives and consolidate your sense of mission. You may still be vulnerable to attack from the pressures of the world, from the forces of evil, from the power of the devil. *But you will be invincible in hope:* "in Christ Jesus our hope" (1Tim. 1, 1).

Dear young people: the word of Jesus and his truth and his promises of fulfilment and life are the Church's response to the culture of death, to the onslaughts of doubt and to the cancer of despair.

Let me just add two practical thoughts from the Second Vatican Council. The Council tells us that we must avoid thinking that we have at hand the solutions to all the particular problems of life (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 33). But at the same time the Church knows that she possesses the light in which the solutions to the problems of humanity can be discovered (*Ibid.* 12). What is this light? What can it be? Only *the truth of Jesus Christ!*

Part II

Dear Young People,

8. I would like to add something else to what I have already said to you. I would like to speak to you briefly about *prayer*, about communion with God, a communion that is deeply personal between ourselves and God.

In prayer we express to God our feelings, our thoughts, our sentiments. We wish to love and be loved, to be understood and to understand. Only God loves us perfectly, with an everlasting love. In prayer, we open our hearts and our minds to this God of love. And it is prayer that makes us one with the Lord. Through prayer we come to share more deeply in God's life and in his love. 9. One of the most striking things about *Jesus* was *his habit of prayer*. In the midst of an active public ministry, we find him going away by himself to be alone in silence and communion with his Father in heaven. On the Sabbath, he made it a practice to go to the synagogue and pray with others in common. When he was together with his disciples, or when he was by himself, he prayed to the

Father whom he dearly loved. Saint Mark's Gospel describes an evening in Capernaum when Jesus cured many who were sick and expelled many demons. After giving us this description of Christ's generous care for others, Saint Mark adds: "Rising early the next morning, he went off to a lonely place in the desert; there *he was absorbed in prayer*" (*Marc.* 1, 35). And Saint Luke informs us that, before Jesus selected the Twelve to be his Apostles, "*he went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night in communion with God*" (*Luc.* 6, 12). In fact, it seems that it was his example of prayer that *prompted his disciples to want to pray*. "One day he was praying in a certain place", Luke tells us, and "when he had finished, one of his disciples asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray"" (*Ibid.* 11, 1). That was the occasion when Jesus taught them the prayer that we call the "Lord's prayer", or the "Our Father".

10. If you really wish to follow Christ, if you want your love for him to grow and last, then you must be *faithful to prayer*. It is *the key to the vitality of your life in Christ*. Without prayer, your faith and love will die. If you are constant in daily prayer and in the Sunday celebration of Mass, your love for Jesus will increase. And your heart will know deep joy and peace, such as the world could never give. But many young people tell me that they do not know *how to pray* or they wonder if they are praying in a way that is correct. Here again, you must look to the example of Christ. How did Jesus himself pray? First of all, we know that his prayer is marked by a spirit of joy and praise. "*Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said: 'I offer you praise, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth'*" (*Ibid.* 10, 21). In addition, he entrusted to the Church at the Last Supper the celebration of the Eucharist, which remains for all ages the most perfect means of offering to the Father glory and thanksgiving and praise. Yet, there were also times of suffering when, in great pain and struggle, Jesus poured out his heart to God, seeking to find in his Father both comfort and support. For example, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the inner struggle became even more difficult, then "*in his anguish he prayed with all the greater intensity, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground*" (*Luc.* 22, 44). "He prayed with all the greater intensity" – what an example for us when we find life difficult, when we face a painful decision or when we struggle with temptation. At times like these, Jesus prayed with all the greater intensity. We must do the same! When it is difficult therefore to pray, the *most important thing is not to stop praying*, not to give up the effort. At these times, *turn to the Bible* and to *the Church's liturgy*. Meditate on the life and teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. Ponder the wisdom and counsel of the apostles and the challenging messages of the prophets. Try to make your own the beautiful prayers of the Psalms. You will find in the inspired word of God the spiritual] food you need. Above all, your soul will be refreshed when you take part wholeheartedly with the community in the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church's greatest prayer.

11. Do you recall the story of Jesus and his Mother Mary at the wedding feast of Cana? At a certain point in the feast, when they have run out of wine, Mary tells those waiting on table, "*Do whatever he tells you*" (*Jo.* 2, 5). When the waiters follow Mary's advice, Jesus rewards their faith and changes water into wine, a wine that far surpasses the quality of what had been served before. And Mary's advice still holds true today. For the true success of our lives consists in *knowing and doing the will of Jesus*, in doing whatever Jesus tells us. When you pray, you must realize that prayer is not just asking God for something or seeking special help, even though prayers of petition are true ways of praying. But prayer should also be characterized by *thanksgiving and praise, by adoration and*

attentive listening, by *asking God's pardon* and forgiveness. If you follow Jesus' advice, and pray to God constantly, then you will learn to pray well. God himself will teach you. Prayer can truly change your life, for it turns your attention away from yourself and directs your mind and your heart towards the Lord. If we look only at ourselves, with our own limitations and sins, we quickly give way to sadness and discouragement. But if we keep *our eyes fixed on the Lord*, then our hearts are filled with hope, our minds are washed in the light of truth, and we come to know the fullness of the Gospel with all its promise and life. 12. Prayer also helps us to *be open to the Holy Spirit*, the Spirit of truth and love, the Spirit who was given to the Church so that she could fulfil her mission in the world. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the strength to resist evil and do good, to do our part in building up the Kingdom of God. It is significant that the symbol of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was *tongues of fire*. In fact, fire is often the symbol that the Bible uses to speak of the action of God in our lives. For the Holy Spirit truly inflames our hearts, engendering in them enthusiasm for the works of God. And when we pray, the Holy Spirit stirs up within us love of God and love of our neighbour. *The Holy Spirit brings us joy and peace*. The modern technological world can offer us many pleasures, many comforts of life. It can even offer us temporary escapes from life. But what the world can never offer is lasting joy and peace. These are the gifts which only the Holy Spirit can give. And these are the gifts that I ask for you, so that you may be strong in hope and persevering in love. But *the condition for all of this is prayer*, which means contact with Christ, communion with God. Dear young people: my message to you is not new. I have given it before and, with God's grace, I will give it again. And so, as long as the memory of this visit lasts, may it be recorded that I, John Paul II, came to America *to call you to Christ, to invite you to pray!*

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