



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

15th WORLD YOUTH DAY

***THE HOLY FATHER'S ADDRESS
AT THE WELCOMING CEREMONY***

St. John Lateran, Tuesday, 15 August 2000

1. *O Roma felix!*" "O happy Rome!".

With this exclamation, countless throngs of pilgrims before you, dear young people who are gathered for the 15th World Youth Day, traveled down the centuries to the city of Rome to kneel at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

"O happy Rome!". Happy because it was consecrated by the witness and blood of the Apostles Peter and Paul who still today, like two "verdant olive trees" and two "lamps lit", together with all the other saints and martyrs, show us the One whom we are here to celebrate: the Word who "become flesh and dwelt among us" (*Jn* 1: 14), Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the living testimony of the Father's eternal love for us.

"O happy Rome!", happy too because today this testimony which you preserve is alive and is offered to the world, in particular to the world of the young generations!

2. I greet you all affectionately, young people who belong to the Diocese of Rome and to the Church in Italy. I greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Vicar of Rome and President of the Italian Episcopal Conference, and am grateful to him for his words to me. I also thank the two young Romans who have greeted me on behalf of you all.

I am pleased to see so many of you and I congratulate all those who have helped young men and

women from other countries to take part in this exceptional meeting as well. I know how much the young people of the various Italian Dioceses have done to prepare for this moment of an "exchange of happiness". In this city, which preserves the tombs and memorials of those who witnessed to the Saviour of the world, may every young person meet Jesus, the One who knows the secret of true happiness and promised it to his friends with these words: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (*Jn 15: 11*).

Dear friends, at this moment, so longed-for and so significant, I naturally think back to the First World Youth meeting which took place precisely here, in front of the cathedral of Rome. Today we are setting out from here to have a new experience at a global level: *it is the meeting which opens a new century and a new millennium*. My hope is that it will allow the hearts of all to encounter the eternally living Christ.

3. Young people, children of the Church whose Bishop is the Successor of Peter and who, as St Ignatius of Antioch said, is called to "preside in charity" (*Ad Romanos*, Introd.), be committed in these days to welcoming the other young people who have gathered here from all the regions of the world. *Form heartfelt friendships with them*. Make their stay here in Rome enjoyable, competing in the spirit of service and friendly welcome in the style of Jesus' friends - Lazarus, Martha and Mary - who often gave him hospitality at their house. Together with the young people from the 12 Dioceses on the borders of Rome, open the doors of your homes to the pilgrims of this World Youth Day, becoming a hospitable city, a friendly home, so that here too there may be a meeting today among friends: among us all and our great Friend, Jesus!

4. Live this World Day intensely, dear young pilgrims of the third millennium. Through your contact with your many peers who, like you, want to follow Christ, *treasure the words that the Bishops will say to you*, accepting the Lord's voice to strengthen your faith and to witness to it without fear, knowing you are heirs of a great past.

In opening your Jubilee, dear young people, I would like to repeat the words with which I began my ministry as Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the universal Church; I would like them to guide your days in Rome: "Do not be afraid! Open, indeed, open wide the doors to Christ!". Open your hearts, your lives, your doubts, your difficulties, your joys and your affections to his saving power, and let him enter your hearts. "Do not be afraid! Christ knows what is in man. He alone knows it". I said this on 22 October 1978. I repeat it with the same conviction, with the same force today, seeing the hope of the Church and of the world shining in your eyes. *Yes, let Christ govern your young lives; serve him with love. To serve Christ is freedom!*

5. We are opening these days under the gaze of Mary Most Holy, whom we contemplate today assumed into heaven: may the example of the young Virgin of Nazareth help you to say "yes" to the Lord who is knocking at your door and wants to enter and make his dwelling within you.

Responding to the young people's cry, "Long live the Pope!", the Holy Father said extemporaneously:

He is alive, the Pope has been alive for 80 years and the young people want him young for ever. How can I do it? Thank you for your catechesis. I hope that you are enjoying your stay in Rome, that you feel ever close to the *Salus Populi Romani* and feel her motherly closeness.

This is my last wish, because I have to go to St Peter's to welcome, in your name too, all those who have come to Rome from every part of the world to celebrate and live the Jubilee of Young People with you.

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