



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VISIT TO TORONTO,
TO CIUDAD DE GUATEMALA AND TO CIUDAD DE MÉXICO

17th WORLD YOUTH DAY

EVENING VIGIL WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

ADDRESS BY THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Toronto, Downsview Park, Saturday July 27, 2002

Dear Young People,

When, back in 1985, I wanted to start the World Youth Days, I was thinking of the words of the Apostle John that we have listened to this evening: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life... we proclaim also to you" (1 Jn 1:1.3). And I imagined the World Youth Days as *a powerful moment* in which the young people of the world could meet Christ, who is eternally young, and could learn from him how to be *bearers of the Gospel to other young people*.

This evening, together with you, I praise God and give thanks to him for the gift bestowed on the Church through the World Youth Days. Millions of young people have taken part, and as a result have become better and more committed Christian witnesses. I am especially thankful to you, who have responded to my invitation to come here to Toronto in order to "tell the world of the happiness you have found in meeting Jesus Christ, of your desire to know him better, of how you are committed to proclaiming the Gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth!" (*Message for the 17th World Youth Day*, No. 5).

2. The new millennium opened with *two contrasting scenarios*: one, the sight of multitudes of

pilgrims coming to Rome during the Great Jubilee to pass through the Holy Door which is Christ, our Savior and Redeemer; and the other, the terrible terrorist attack on New York, an image that is a sort of icon of a world in which hostility and hatred seem to prevail.

The question that arises is dramatic: *on what foundations* must we build the new historical era that is emerging from the great transformations of the twentieth century? Is it enough to rely on the technological revolution now taking place, which seems to respond only to criteria of productivity and efficiency, without reference to the individual's spiritual dimension or to any universally shared ethical values? Is it right to be content with provisional answers to the ultimate questions, and to abandon life to the impulses of instinct, to short-lived sensations or passing fads?

The question will not go away: on what foundations, on what certainties should we build our lives and the life of the community to which we belong?

3. Dear Friends, spontaneously in your hearts, in the enthusiasm of your young years you know the answer, and you are saying it through your presence here this evening: *Christ alone is the cornerstone* on which it is possible solidly to build one's existence. Only Christ – known, contemplated and loved – is the faithful friend who never lets us down, who becomes our travelling companion, and whose words warm our hearts (cf. *Lk 24:13-35*).

The twentieth century often tried to do without that cornerstone, and attempted to build the city of man without reference to Him. It ended by actually building that city *against* man! Christians know that it is not possible to reject or ignore God without *demeaning man*.

4. The aspiration that humanity nurtures, amid countless injustices and sufferings, is the hope of a new civilization marked by freedom and peace. But for such an undertaking, *a new generation of builders* is needed. Moved not by fear or violence but by the urgency of genuine love, they must learn to build, brick by brick, the city of God within the city of man.

Allow me, dear young people, to consign this hope of mine to you: *you must be those "builders"*! You are the men and women of tomorrow. The future is in your hearts and in your hands. God is entrusting to you the task, at once difficult and uplifting, of working with him in the building of the *civilization of love*.

5. From the Letter of John – the youngest of the apostles, and maybe for that very reason the most loved by the Lord – we have listened to these words: "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all" (*1 Jn 1:5*). But, John observes, no one has ever seen God. It is Jesus, the only Son of the Father, who has revealed him to us (cf. *Jn 1:18*). And if Jesus has revealed God, *he has revealed the light*. With Christ in fact "the true light that enlightens every man" (*Jn 1:9*) has come into the world.

Dear young people, let yourselves be taken over by the light of Christ, and spread that light wherever you are. "The light of the countenance of Jesus – says the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* – illumines the eyes of our heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all" (No. 2715).

If your friendship with Christ, your knowledge of his mystery, your giving of yourselves to him, are genuine and deep, you will be "children of the light", and you will become "the light of the world". For this reason I repeat to you the Gospel words: "Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

6. This evening the Pope, along with all of you, young people from every continent, *reaffirms before the world the faith that sustains the life of the Church*. Christ is the light of the nations. He died and rose again in order to give back to those who journey through time the hope of eternity. *Nothing human is hurt by the Gospel*: every authentic value, in whatever culture it appears, is accepted and raised up by Christ. Knowing this, Christians cannot fail to feel in their hearts the pride and responsibility of their call to be witnesses to the light of the Gospel.

Precisely for this reason I say to you this evening: let the light of Christ shine in your lives! *Do not wait until you are older in order to set out on the path of holiness!* Holiness is always youthful, just as eternal is the youthfulness of God.

Communicate to everyone the beauty of the contact with God that gives meaning to your lives. In the quest for justice, in the promotion of peace, in your commitment to brotherhood and solidarity, *let no one surpass you!*

How beautiful the song that we have been hearing during these days:

"Light of the world! Salt of the earth!
Be for the world the face of love!
Be for the earth the reflection of his light!"

That is the most beautiful and precious gift that you can give to the Church and the world. You know that the Pope is with you, with his prayer and fond blessing.

7. I would like to greet once again the Polish young people.

Dear young people, I thank you for your presence in Toronto, in Wadowice and wherever you are spiritually united with the world's young people taking part in the 17th World Youth Day. I wish to assure you that in my heart and in my prayer I never cease to embrace each and every one of you, asking God that you may be the salt and the light of the earth, now and in your adult lives. God bless you!

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