



# The Holy See

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CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE  
WITH YOUTH OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME IN PREPARATION OF THE  
23rd WORLD YOUTH DAY

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI***

*St Peter's Basilica  
Thursday, 13 March 2008*

*Dear Young People of Rome,*

This year too, as Palm Sunday approaches, we are meeting to prepare for the celebration of the 23rd World Youth Day, which will culminate, as you know, in the meeting of young people from across the world that will take place in Sydney from 15 to 20 this July. You have known the theme of this Day for some time. It is taken from the words just heard in the First Reading: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses*" (Acts 1: 8).

It is not by chance that our gathering today takes the form of a penitential liturgy with the celebration of individual confessions. Why is it "not by chance"? The answer can be deduced from what I wrote in my first Encyclical. In it I pointed out that being Christian is the encounter with an event, a Person, which gives life a new horizon and with it a decisive direction (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 1). Precisely in order to encourage this encounter, you are preparing to open your hearts to God, confessing your sins and receiving pardon and peace through the action of the Holy Spirit and by means of the Church's ministry. In this way room is made within us for the presence of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Most Holy Trinity who is the "soul", the "vital breath" of Christian life: the Spirit enables us "to grow... in an understanding of Jesus that becomes ever deeper and more joyful and at the same time to put the Gospel into practice" (*Message, 23rd World Youth Day*, n. 1).

When I was Archbishop of Munich and Freising, in a meditation on Pentecost, I was inspired by a

film entitled *Seelenwanderung* (Metempsychosis) to explain the Holy Spirit's action in a soul. The film tells of two poor fiends who, because of their goodness, do not manage to make any headway in life. One day one of them had an idea: since he had nothing else to put on sale he would sell his soul. His soul is purchased cheap and enclosed in a box. From that time on, to his great surprise, everything changes in his life. He begins a rapid ascent, becomes richer, obtains great honours and by the time of his death is a consul very well endowed with money and possessions.

From the moment when he freed himself of his soul he no longer had any concern or humanity. He had acted unscrupulously, caring only for profit and success. Man no longer mattered in the least. He himself no longer had a soul. The film, I concluded, shows impressively how the facade of success often conceals an empty life.

Apparently, the man had lost nothing, but he lacked a soul and with it lacked everything. It is obvious, I continued in that meditation, that the human being cannot literally dispose of his own soul since it is his soul that makes him a person. He remained, in fact, a human person, yet he had the frightful possibility of being inhuman, of remaining a person while at the same time selling and losing his own humanity. There is an immense gap between the human person and the inhuman being, yet it cannot be demonstrated; it is the truly essential thing, yet it is apparently unimportant (cf. *Suchen, was droben ist. Meditationem das Jahr hindurch*, LEV, 1985).

The Holy Spirit, who was at the beginning of creation and who, thanks to the Paschal Mystery, was poured out in abundance upon Mary and the Apostles on Pentecost Day, also cannot be proven to external eyes. Whether or not he penetrates a person, he cannot be seen or revealed; but this fact changes and renews the entire perspective of human existence. The Holy Spirit does not change the external but rather the internal situations of life. On the evening of Easter Day, Jesus appeared to the disciples, *"breathed on them, and said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit'"* (Jn 20: 22). On Pentecost Day, in an even more obvious manner, the Spirit descended upon the Apostles as a wind that came with a rush and in the form of tongues of fire. This evening too, the Spirit will descend upon our hearts to forgive our sins and renew us interiorly, clothing us with a strength that will also embolden us, as it did the Apostles, in proclaiming that "Christ has died and is risen!".

Dear friends, let us therefore prepare ourselves with a sincere examination of conscience to present ourselves to those to whom Christ has entrusted the ministry of Reconciliation. Let us confess our sins with contrite hearts, seriously determined to repeat them no more, and above all resolving to always stay on the road of conversion. We will thus experience true joy: the joy that derives from God's mercy, which is poured out in our hearts and reconciles us with him. This joy is contagious! *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you"*, says the Bible verse chosen as the theme of the 23rd World Youth Day, *"and you will be my witnesses"* (Acts 1: 8). Make yourselves heralds of this joy that comes from accepting the gifts of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness in your lives to the fruit of the Spirit: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,*

*goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*"; this is how St Paul lists the fruits of the Holy Spirit in his Letter to the Galatians (Gal 5: 22).

Always remember that you are a "temple of the Spirit"; let him dwell within you and docilely obey his promptings in order to make your contribution to building the Church (cf. I Cor 12: 7) and to discern to what kind of vocation the Lord is calling you. Today, the world needs priests, consecrated men and women and Christian married couples. To respond to your vocation through one of these ways, be generous, help yourselves by having recourse to the Sacrament of Confession and the practice of spiritual direction on your journey as consistent Christians. Seek in particular to sincerely open your heart to the Lord Jesus, to offer him your unconditional "yes".

Dear young people, this city of Rome is in your hands. It is your task to make it spiritually beautiful with your witness of life lived in God's grace and far from sin, adhering to all that the Holy Spirit calls you to be in the Church and in the world. You will thus make visible the grace of Christ's superabundant mercy that flowed from his side pierced for us on the Cross. The Lord Jesus cleanses us from our sins, heals us from faults and fortifies us so that we do not succumb in the fight against sin or in witnessing to his love.

Twenty-five years ago the beloved Servant of God John Paul II inaugurated the San Lorenzo International Youth Centre not far from this Basilica: a spiritual project united with so many others in the Diocese of Rome to encourage hospitality for young people, the exchange of experiences and of the witness of faith, and above all prayer, which lets us discover God's love. On that occasion John Paul II said: "He who lets himself be filled with this love can no longer deny his guilt. The 'loss of the sense of sin' derives in the last analysis from 'the more radical and hidden loss of the sense of God'" (*Homily, Inauguration of the San Lorenzo International Centre*, 13 March 1983, n. 5). And he added, "Where can we go in this world, with sin and guilt, without the Cross? The Cross takes upon itself all the misery of the world, which is born of sin. It reveals itself as a sign of grace. It takes up our solidarity and encourages us to sacrifice for others" (*ibid*).

Dear young people, may this experience be renewed for you today: look at the Cross at this moment and let us welcome God's love, which is given to us from the Cross by the Holy Spirit who comes from the pierced side of the Lord, and, as Pope John Paul II said, may "you too become redeemers for the youth of the world" (*ibid*).

O divine Heart of Jesus, from which Blood and Water flowed as a source of mercy for us, we trust in you. Amen!

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