



The Holy See

LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

TO CARDINAL ANDRÉ VINGT-TROIS

ARCHBISHOP OF PARIS

PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

ON THE OCCASION OF THE CENTENARY OF THE "FRAT" To Cardinal André Vingt-Trois

Archbishop of Paris

President of the French Bishops' Conference For the young people meeting in Lourdes from 22 to 27 April on the occasion of the Centenary of the "Frat" pilgrimage organized by the Dioceses of the Île-de-France. Dear Young People, By coming to the Marian city of Lourdes in this Jubilee Year that marks the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to young Bernadette, you are taking part in the thanksgiving of the entire Church for the message the Virgin gave to Bernadette. With simple words, the Mother of Christ pointed out the way of spiritual renewal through the call to conversion and love of the Church. It was in this place that the Virgin came to visit Bernadette. During your pilgrimage to Lourdes, receive this visitation of Mary, who entrusts to you today the words the Angel spoke to her on the Lord's behalf: "Hail, full of grace, you have found favour with God!" (Lk 1: 30). Indeed, through his grace Christ makes you worthy of his trust and wants you to be able to make your noblest and loftiest dreams of true happiness come true. Happiness is first of all a gift of God that is received by following the unexpected paths of his will. These ways are demanding but they are also a source of deep joy. Look at Mary: invited to take a surprising and disconcerting path, her willingness makes her enter a joy that all generations will sing. It was the secret she revealed to her cousin Elizabeth when she went to visit and help her: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden... he who is mighty has done great things for me" (Lk 1: 47-48). May you in turn allow yourselves to be led so that the Lord may make something great of your humble life. It is our "yes" to God that makes the source of true happiness flow: this "yes" frees the self of all that closes in on itself. It makes the poverty of our lives enter the riches and power of God's plan but without threatening our freedom and responsibility. He opens our narrow hearts to the dimensions of divine charity which are universal. He configures our lives to the very life of Christ, by which we were marked at the moment of our Baptism. Dear young people, I encourage you during these days to celebrate enthusiastically the joy of believing, loving and hoping in Christ, and of walking confidently on the path of initiation that is proposed to you. I ask you in particular to note with attention the witness of your elders in the faith and to learn to welcome God's Word in silence and

meditation so that it can model your hearts and bear generous fruit within you. Indeed, the Lord has given each one of you something special to say. Do not be afraid to listen to him. In this spirit the "Frat" is also a special time to allow oneself to be questioned by Christ: "What do you want to do with your life?". May those of you who hear the call to follow him in the priesthood or consecrated life, in the wake of numerous young people who have taken part in the "Frat", accept the Lord's invitation to put yourselves totally at the service of the Church in a life entirely given for the Kingdom of Heaven. They will not be disappointed. Lastly, I want to thank the Lord for all, priests, Religious and lay people, who, forming an immense chain, have contributed for a century to making this pilgrimage an important moment in the life of a large number of young Christians. Dear young people, I entrust each one of you to the motherly intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes and of St Bernadette. To you, to the Bishops who are the Pastors of your Dioceses of Île-de-France, to your chaplains, to the lay people who accompany you and who bear witness among you to their faith with joy and simplicity, I willingly impart my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, 12 April 2008.* **BENEDICTUS XVI**

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