



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO BRAZIL ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTH GENERAL CONFERENCE
OF THE BISHOPS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

MEETING WITH YOUTH

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Municipal Stadium in Pacaembu, São Paulo
Thursday, 10 May 2007*

My dear young friends!

*"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor...and come, follow me"
(Mt 19:21).*

1. I was particularly eager to include a meeting with you during this my first journey to Latin America. I have come to inaugurate the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America which, according to my wish, will take place at Aparecida, here in Brazil, at the Shrine of Our Lady. It is she who leads us to the feet of Jesus so that we can learn his teachings about the Kingdom, and it is she who stirs us up to be his missionaries so that the people of this "Continent of Hope" may have full life in him.

In their General Assembly last year, your Bishops here in Brazil reflected on the theme of the evangelization of youth and they placed a document into your hands. They asked you to receive that document and add your own reflections to it in the course of the year. At their most recent Assembly, the Bishops returned to the theme, enriched now by your collaboration, in the hope that the reflections and guidelines proposed therein would serve as a stimulus and a beacon for your

journey. The words offered by the Archbishop of São Paulo and the Director of Pastoral Care for Young People, both of whom I thank, confirm the spirit that moves your hearts.

While flying over the land of Brazil yesterday evening, I was already anticipating our encounter here in the Stadium of Pacaembu, anxious to extend to all of you a warm Brazilian embrace and to share with you the sentiments which I carry in the depths of my heart, and which are very appropriately indicated to us in today's Gospel.

I have always felt a very special joy at these encounters. I remember especially the [Twentieth World Youth Day](#) at which I was able to preside two years ago in Germany. Some of you gathered here today were also present! It is an emotional memory for me on account of the abundant fruits of the Lord's grace poured out upon those who were there. Among the many fruits which I could point to, there is little doubt that the first was the exemplary sense of fraternity that stood as a clear witness to the Church's perennial vitality throughout the world.

2. For this reason, my dear friends, I am certain that today the same impressions I received in Germany will be renewed here. In 1991, during his visit to Mato Grosso, the Servant of God Pope John Paul II, of venerable memory, said that "youth are the first protagonists of the third millennium ... they are the ones who will be charged with the destiny of this new phase in human history" (16 October 1991). Today, I feel moved to make the same observation regarding all of you.

The Christian life you lead in numerous parishes and small ecclesial communities, in universities, colleges and schools, and most of all, in places of work both in the city and in the countryside, is undoubtedly pleasing to the Lord. But it is necessary to go even further. We can never say "enough", because the love of God is infinite, and the Lord asks us—or better—requires us to open our hearts wider so that there will be room for even more love, goodness, and understanding for our brothers and sisters, and for the problems which concern not only the human community, but also the effective preservation and protection of the natural environment of which we are all a part. "Our forests have more life": do not allow this flame of hope which your National Hymn places on your lips to die out. The devastation of the environment in the Amazon Basin and the threats against the human dignity of peoples living within that region call for greater commitment in the different areas of activity than society tends to recognize.

3. Today I would like to reflect on the text we have just heard from Saint Matthew (cf. 19:16-22). It speaks of a young man who ran to see Jesus. His impatience merits special attention. In this young man I see all of you young people of Brazil and Latin America. You have "run" here from various regions of this Continent for this meeting of ours. You want to listen to the words of Jesus himself—spoken through the voice of the Pope.

You have a crucial question—a question that appears in this Gospel—to put to him. It is the same

question posed by the young man who ran to see Jesus: *What good deed must I do, to have eternal life?* I would like to take a deeper look at this question with you. It has to do with life. A life which—in all of you—is exuberant and beautiful. What are you to do with it? How can you live it to the full?

We see at once that in the very formulation of the question, the "here" and "now" are not enough; to put it another way, we cannot limit our life within the confines of space and time, however much we might try to broaden their horizons. Life transcends them. In other words: we want to live, not die. We have a sense of something telling us that life is eternal and that we must apply ourselves to reach it. In short, it rests in our hands and is dependent, in a certain way, on our own decision.

The question in the Gospel does not regard only the future. It does not regard only a question about what will happen after death. On the contrary, it exists as a task in the present, in the "here" and "now", which must guarantee authenticity and consequently the future. In short, the young man's question raises the issue of life's meaning. It can therefore be formulated in this way: what must I do so that my life has meaning? How must I live so as to reap the full fruits of life? Or again: what must I do so that my life is not wasted?

Jesus alone can give us the answer, because he alone can guarantee us eternal life. He alone, therefore, can show us the meaning of this present life and give it fullness.

4. But before giving his response, Jesus asks about a very important aspect of the young man's enquiry: why do you ask me about what is good? In this question, we find the key to the answer. This young man perceives that Jesus is good and that he is a teacher—a teacher who does not deceive. We are here because we have the very same conviction: Jesus is good. It may be that we do not know how to explain fully the reason for this perception, but it undoubtedly draws us to him and opens us up to his teaching: he is a good teacher. To recognize the good means to love. And whoever loves—to use a felicitous expression of Saint John—knows God (cf. *1 Jn 4:7*). The young man in the Gospel has perceived God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus assures us that God alone is good. To be open to goodness means to receive God. In this way, he invites us to see God in all things and in everything that happens, even where most people see only God's absence. When we see the beauty of creation and recognize the goodness present there, it is impossible not to believe in God and to experience his saving and reassuring presence. If we came to see all the good that exists in the world—and moreover, experience the good that comes from God himself—we would never cease to approach him, praise him, and thank him. He continually fills us with joy and good things. His joy is our strength.

But we can only know in an imperfect, partial way. To understand what is good, we need help, which the Church offers us on many occasions, especially through catechesis. Jesus himself shows what is good for us by giving us the first element in his catechesis: *"If you would enter life,*

keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17). He begins with the knowledge that the young man has surely already acquired from his family and from the synagogue: he knows the commandments. These lead to life, which means that they guarantee our authenticity. They are the great signs which lead us along the right path. Whoever keeps the commandments is on the way that leads to God.

It is not enough, however, simply to know them. Witness is even more important than knowledge; or rather, it is applied knowledge. The commandments are not imposed upon us from without; they do not diminish our freedom. On the contrary: they are strong internal incentives leading us to act in a certain way. At the heart of them we find both grace and nature, which do not allow us to stay still. We must walk. We are motivated to do something in order fulfil our potential. To find fulfilment through action is, in reality, to become real. To a large extent, from the time of our youth, we are whatever we want to be. We are, so to speak, the work of our own hands.

5. At this point, I turn once more to you, young people, because I want to hear you give the same response that the young man in the Gospel gave: all these I have observed from my youth. The young man in the Gospel was good. He kept the commandments. He was walking along the way of God. Jesus, therefore, gazing at him, loved him. By recognizing that Jesus was good, he showed that he too was good. He had an experience of goodness, and therefore of God. And you, young people of Brazil and Latin America, have you already discovered what is good? Do you follow the Lord's commandments? Have you discovered that this is the one true road to happiness?

These years of your life are the years which will prepare you for your future. Your "tomorrow" depends much on how you are living the "today" of your youth. Stretching out in front of you, my dear young friends, is a life that all of us hope will be long; yet it is only one life, it is unique: do not let it pass in vain; do not squander it. Live it with enthusiasm and with joy, but most of all, with a sense of responsibility.

Many times, we who are pastors feel a sense of trepidation as we take stock of the situation in today's world. We hear talk of the fears of today's youth. These fears reveal an enormous lack of hope: a fear of death, at the very moment when life is blossoming and the young are searching to find how to fulfil their potential; fear of failure, through not having discovered the meaning of life; fear of remaining detached in the face of a disconcerting acceleration of events and communications. We see the high death rate among young people, the threat of violence, the deplorable proliferation of drugs which strike at the deepest roots of youth today. For these reasons, we hear talk of a "lost youth".

But as I gaze at you young people here present—you who radiate so much joy and enthusiasm—I see you as Christ sees you: with a gaze of love and trust, in the certainty that you have found the true way. You are the youth of the Church. I send you out, therefore, on the great mission of

evangelizing young men and women who have gone astray in this world like sheep without a shepherd. *Be apostles of youth*. Invite them to walk with you, to have the same experience of faith, hope, and love; to encounter Jesus so that they may feel truly loved, accepted, able to realize their full potential. May they too may discover the sure ways of the commandments, and, by following them, come to God.

You can be the builders of a new society if you seek to put into practice a conduct inspired by universal moral values, but also a personal commitment to a vitally important human and spiritual formation. Men and women who are ill-prepared for the real challenges presented by a correct interpretation of the Christian life in their own surroundings will easily fall prey to all the assaults of materialism and secularism, which are more and more active at all levels.

Be men and women who are free and responsible; make the family a centre that radiates peace and joy; be promoters of life, from its beginning to its natural end; protect the elderly, since they deserve respect and admiration for the good they have done. The Pope also expects young people to seek to sanctify their work, carrying it out with technical skill and diligence, so as to contribute to the progress of all their brothers and sisters, and to shed the light of the Word upon all human activities (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 36). But above all, the Pope wants them to set about building a more just and fraternal society, fulfilling their duties towards the State: respecting its laws; not allowing themselves to be swept along by hatred and violence; seeking to be an example of Christian conduct in their professional and social milieu, distinguishing themselves by the integrity of their social and professional relationships. They should remember that excessive ambition for wealth and power leads to corruption of oneself and others; there are no valid motives that would justify attempting to impose one's own worldly aspirations—economic or political—through fraud and deceit.

There exists, in the final analysis, an immense panorama of action in which questions of a social, economic and political nature take on particular importance, as long as they draw their inspiration from the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church. This includes building a more just and fraternal society, reconciled and at peace, it includes the commitment to reduce violence, initiatives to promote the fullness of life, the democratic order and the common good and especially initiatives aimed at eliminating certain forms of discrimination existing in Latin American societies: avoiding exclusion, for the sake of mutual enrichment.

Above all, have great respect for the institution of the sacrament of Matrimony. There cannot be true domestic happiness unless, at the same time, there is fidelity between spouses. Marriage is an institution of natural law, which has been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament; it is a great gift that God has given to mankind: respect it and honour it. At the same time, God calls you to respect one another when you fall in love and become engaged, since conjugal life, reserved by divine ordinance to married couples, will bring happiness and peace only to the extent that you are able to build your future hopes upon chastity, both within and outside marriage. I repeat here to all

of you that "eros tends to rise . . . towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing" (Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 5). To put it briefly, it requires a spirit of sacrifice and renunciation for the sake of a greater good, namely the love of God above all things. Seek to resist forcefully the snares of evil that are found in many contexts, driving you towards a dissolute and paradoxically empty life, causing you to lose the precious gift of your freedom and your true happiness. True love "increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to 'be there for' the other" (*ibid.*, 7) and therefore will always grow in faithfulness, indissolubility and fruitfulness.

In all these things, count upon the help of Jesus Christ who will make them possible through his grace (cf. *Mt* 19:26). The life of faith and prayer will lead you along the paths of intimacy with God, helping you to understand the greatness of his plans for every person. "For the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (*Mt* 19:12), some are called to a total and definitive self-giving, by consecrating themselves to God in the religious life—an "exceptional gift of grace", as the Second Vatican Council expressed it (cf. Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12). Consecrated persons, by giving themselves totally to God, prompted by the Holy Spirit, participate in the Church's mission, bearing witness before all people to their hope in the heavenly Kingdom. I therefore bless and invoke divine protection upon all those religious who have dedicated themselves to Christ and to their brothers and sisters within the vineyard of the Lord. Consecrated persons truly deserve the gratitude of the ecclesial community: monks and nuns, contemplative men and women, religious men and women dedicated to apostolic works, members of Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life, hermits and consecrated virgins. "Their existence witnesses to their love for Christ as they walk the path proposed in the Gospel and with deep joy commit themselves to the same style of life which he chose for himself" (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 5). I pray that in this moment of grace and profound communion in Christ, the Holy Spirit will awaken in the hearts of many young people an impassioned love, prompting them to follow and imitate Jesus Christ, chaste, poor and obedient, totally devoted to the glory of the Father and to love for their brothers and sisters.

6. The Gospel assures us that the young man who went to meet Jesus was very rich. We may understand this wealth not only on the material level. Youth itself is a singular treasure. We have to discover it and to value it. Jesus appreciated it so much that he went on to invite the young man to participate in his saving mission. He had great potential and could have accomplished great things.

But the Gospel goes on to say that this young man, having heard the invitation, was saddened. He went away downcast and sad. This episode causes us to reflect further on the treasure of youth. It is not, in the first place, a question of material wealth, but of life itself, and the values inherent in youth. This wealth is inherited from two sources: life, transmitted from generation to generation, at the ultimate origin of which we find God, full of wisdom and love; and upbringing, which locates us

within a culture, to such an extent that we might almost say we are more children of culture and therefore of faith, than of nature. From life springs freedom, which manifests itself, especially in this phase, as responsibility. There comes the great moment of decision, in a twofold choice: firstly, concerning one's state of life, and secondly concerning one's profession. It is about providing an answer to the question: what do I do with my life?

In other words, youth appears as a form of wealth because it leads to the discovery of life as a gift and a task. The young man in the Gospel understood that his youth was itself a treasure. He went to Jesus, the good Teacher, in order to seek some direction. At the moment of the great decision, however, he lacked the courage to wager everything on Jesus Christ. In consequence, he went away sad and downcast. This is what happens whenever our decisions waver and become cowardly and self-seeking. He understood that what he lacked was generosity, and this did not allow him to realize his full potential. He withdrew to his riches, turning them to selfishness.

Jesus regretted the sadness and the cowardice of the young man who had come to seek him out. The Apostles, like all of you here today, filled the vacuum left by that young man who went away sad and downcast. They, and we, are happy, because we know the one in whom we believe (cf. *2 Tim* 1:12). We know and we bear witness with our lives that he alone has the words of eternal life (cf. *Jn* 6:68). Therefore, we can exclaim with Saint Paul: Rejoice always in the Lord! (cf. *Phil* 4:4).

7. My appeal to you today, young people present at this gathering, is this: *do not waste your youth*. Do not seek to escape from it. Live it intensely. Consecrate it to the high ideals of faith and human solidarity.

You, young people, are not just the future of the Church and of humanity, as if we could somehow run away from the present. On the contrary: you are that young man now; you are that young man in the Church and in humanity today. You are his young face. The Church needs you, as young people, to manifest to the world the face of Jesus Christ, visible in the Christian community. Without this young face, the Church would appear disfigured.

My dear young people, soon I shall inaugurate the Fifth Conference of the Bishops of Latin America. I ask you to follow its deliberations attentively; to participate in its discussions; to receive its fruits. As was the case with earlier Conferences, the present one will also leave a significant mark on the next ten years of evangelization in Latin America and the Caribbean. No one must stay on the sidelines or remain indifferent in the face of this ecclesial initiative, least of all you young people. You are full members of the Church, which represents the face of Jesus Christ for Latin America and the Caribbean.

I greet the French speakers who live on the Latin American continent, and I invite them to be witnesses of the Gospel, and to be actively engaged in the life of the Church. My prayer is addressed to you young people in a particular way: you are called to build your lives on Christ and

on fundamental human values. Everyone should feel invited to work together in order to build a world of justice and peace.

My dear young friends, like the young man in the Gospel who asked Jesus: "*What good deed must I do, to have eternal life?*", you are all seeking ways to respond generously to God's call. I pray that you may listen to his saving words and that you may become his witnesses for the peoples of today. May God pour out upon all of you his blessings of peace and joy.

My dear young people, Christ is calling you to be saints. He himself is inviting you and wants to walk with you, in order to enliven with his Spirit the steps that Brazil is taking at the beginning of this third millennium of the Christian era. I ask the *Senhora Aparecida* to guide you with her maternal help and to accompany you throughout your lives.

Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ!

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