



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 23 August 2000

1. Last week Rome experienced an unforgettable event: World Youth Day, which made a deep and vivid impression on everyone. It was a pilgrimage marked by joy, prayer and reflection.

The first sentiment we naturally feel in our heart is one of sincere gratitude to the Lord for this truly great gift, not only to our city and to the Church in Italy, but to the whole world. I also thank those who in various ways helped to bring about this meeting, which took place peacefully and with the greatest order. I once again express my gratitude to everyone: the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Central Committee for the Jubilee, the Italian Episcopal Conference, the Diocese of Rome, the civil and administrative authorities, the police force, the medical services, the University of Tor Vergata and the various volunteer organizations.

2. Our thoughts naturally turn to this truly extraordinary meeting, which exceeded all expectations and, I would say, even all human expectations. I feel an ardent desire to tell those young people again of my joy at being able to welcome them on the evening of the Solemnity of the Assumption in the squares at St John Lateran and St Peter's.

I still feel the deep emotion I experienced in taking part in the Saturday evening Vigil at Tor Vergata and in presiding at the solemn closing Mass the next day.

As I flew over that area by helicopter, I marvelled from above at a unique and impressive sight: an enormous human carpet of festive people, happy to be together. I will never be able to forget the enthusiasm of those young people. I would have liked to embrace them all and to express to each one the affection that ties me to the youth of our time, to whom the Lord entrusts a great mission in the service of the civilization of love.

What, or better who, did the young people come to seek if not Jesus Christ? What is World Youth Day if not a personal and community encounter with the Lord which reveals the true meaning of human existence? In fact, it is he who first seeks them out and calls them, as he seeks out and calls every human being in order to bring him to salvation and full happiness. At the end of the meeting, it was also he who entrusted to young people the special mission of being his witnesses in every corner of the world. These were days marked by the discovery of a friendly and faithful presence, that of Jesus Christ, as we celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of his birth.

3. The young people, with the enthusiasm typical of their age, replied that they intend to follow Jesus. They want to do so because they feel that they are a living part of the Church. They want to do so by walking together, because they regard themselves as the pilgrim People of God.

Their weakness does not frighten them because they count on the love and mercy of the heavenly Father, who sustains them in their daily lives. Beyond every race and culture, they feel like brothers and sisters linked by one faith, one hope, one and the same mission: to set the world on fire with God's love. The young people have shown that they have a need for meaning. They seek reasons for hope and hunger for authentic spiritual experiences.

May the message of World Youth Day be welcomed and reflected on by all who have taken part, as well as by their peers, who have followed the various phases and events through newspapers, radio and television!

The Gospel atmosphere experienced in those days must not be lost; on the contrary, it must continue to be the atmosphere of the youth communities and associations, of the parishes and Dioceses, especially during this Jubilee Year, which invites all believers to meet Christ, who died and rose for us.

I would like to repeat to all young people: be proud of the mission which the Lord has entrusted to you; carry it out with humble and generous perseverance. May you be sustained by the maternal help of Mary, who watched over you during the days of your Jubilee. Christ and his Church are counting on you!

I warmly welcome the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims, especially those from England, the Philippines, Japan and the United States of America. Upon you and your families I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

Before reciting the "Our Father" at the end of the Audience, the Holy Father said:

I would now ask you to pray for the 118 men who died on the Russian submarine Kursk. Most of them were young. As I express my deep sympathy for the grief of their relatives, I commend the victims to God's mercy, that he may welcome them into his peace.

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