



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE 18th WORLD YOUTH DAY
(APRIL 13, 2003)**

"Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19,27)

My dear young people!

1. It always gives me great joy to address a special message to you on the occasion of World Youth Day. It is also a way to show you the extent of my affection for you. The vivid recollection of my experiences during our World Youth Day meetings is impressed on my memory: young people and the Pope together, and a large gathering of bishops and priests, all with our gaze on Christ, light of the world, invoking him and proclaiming him to the entire human family. While I give thanks to God for the witness of faith that you have given once again recently in Toronto, I renew the invitation I made to you on the banks of Lake Ontario: "the Church today looks to you with confidence and expects you to be the people of the Beatitudes!" ([Exhibition Place, 25 July 2002](#); *ORE*, 31 July 2002, p. 6).

For the 18th World Youth Day that will be celebrated in dioceses all over the world, I have chosen a theme related to the Year of the Rosary: "Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19,27). Before his death, Jesus entrusted to the apostle John what was most precious to him: his Mother, Mary. These are the final words of the Redeemer, and therefore they take on a solemn nature and could be regarded as his spiritual testimony.

2. The angel Gabriel's words in Nazareth: "Hail, full of grace" (Lk 1,28) also cast light on the scene at Calvary. The Annunciation comes at the beginning, the Cross signals the fulfilment. At the Annunciation, Mary gives human nature to the Son of God within her womb; at the foot of the Cross, she welcomes the whole of humanity within her heart in the person of John. She was Mother of God from the first moments of the Incarnation, and she became the Mother of humanity during the final moments of the life of her Son Jesus on earth. She, who was without sin, on

Calvary "experienced" within her own being the suffering of sin that her Son had taken upon himself to save humankind. At the foot of the Cross on which was dying the One whom she had conceived at the moment of her "yes" at the Annunciation, Mary received, as it were, a "second annunciation": "Woman, behold, your son!" (Jn 19,26).

The Son upon the Cross can pour out his suffering into his Mother's heart. Every child who suffers experiences that need. You too, my dear young people, are faced with suffering: loneliness, failures and disappointments in your personal lives; difficulties in inserting yourselves in the adult world and in professional life: the separations and losses in your families; the violence of war and the death of the innocent. Know, however, that in difficult times, which everyone experiences, you are not alone: like John at the foot of the Cross, Jesus also gives his Mother to you so that she will comfort you with her tenderness.

3. It says in the Gospel that "from that hour the disciple took her to his own home (Jn 19,27). This statement, the subject of many commentaries since early Christian times, does not simply point out the place where John lived. Beyond the material aspect, it evokes the spiritual dimension of this welcome and of the new bond established between Mary and John.

My dear young people, you are more or less the same age as John and you have the same desire to be with Jesus. Today, it is you whom Jesus expressly asks to receive Mary "into your home" and to welcome her "as one of yours"; to learn from her the one who "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2,19) that inner disposition to listen and the attitude of humility and generosity that singled her out as God's first collaborator in the work of salvation. She will discharge her ministry as a mother and train you and mould you until Christ is fully formed in you (cf. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n. 15).

4. This is why I now wish to repeat the motto of my episcopal and pontifical service: "*Totus tuus*". Throughout my life I have experienced the loving and forceful presence of the Mother of Our Lord. Mary accompanies me every day in the fulfilment of my mission as Successor of Peter.

Mary is Mother of divine grace, because she is the Mother of the Author of grace. Entrust yourselves to her with complete confidence! You will be radiant with the beauty of Christ. Open up to the breath of the Spirit, and you will become courageous apostles, capable of spreading the fire of charity and the light of truth all around you. In Mary's school, you will discover the specific commitment that Christ expects of you, and you will learn to put Christ first in your lives, and to direct your thoughts and actions to him.

Dear young people, you know that Christianity is not an opinion nor does it consist of empty words. Christianity is Christ! It is a Person, a Living Person! To meet Jesus, to love him and make him loved: this is the Christian vocation. Mary was given to you to help you enter into a more authentic and more personal relationship with Jesus. Through her example, Mary teaches you to

gaze on him with love, for He has loved us first. Through her intercession, she forms in you a disciple's heart able to listen to her Son, who reveals the face of his Father and the true dignity of the human person.

5. On 16 October 2002 I proclaimed the "Year of the Rosary", and I invited all the children of the Church to make of this ancient Marian prayer a simple and profound exercise in contemplation of the face of Christ. To recite the Rosary means to learn to gaze on Jesus with his Mother's eyes, and to love Jesus with his Mother's heart. Today, my dear young people, I am also, in spirit, handing you the Rosary beads. Through prayer and meditation on the mysteries, Mary leads you safely towards her Son! Do not be ashamed to recite the Rosary alone, while you walk along the streets to school, to the university or to work, or as you commute by public transport. Adopt the habit of reciting it among yourselves, in your groups, movements and associations. Do not hesitate to suggest that it be recited at home by your parents and brothers and sisters, because it rekindles and strengthens the bonds between family members. This prayer will help you to be strong in your faith, constant in charity, joyful and persevering in hope.

With Mary, the handmaiden of the Lord, you will discover the joy and fruitfulness of the hidden life. With her, disciple of the Master, you will follow Jesus along the streets of Palestine, becoming witnesses of his preaching and his miracles. With her, the sorrowful Mother, you will accompany Jesus in his passion and death. With her, Virgin of hope, you will welcome the festive Easter proclamation and the priceless gift of the Holy Spirit.

6. My dear young people, only Jesus knows what is in your hearts and your deepest desires. Only He, who has loved you to the end (cf. Jn 13,1), can fulfil your aspirations. His are words of eternal life, words that give meaning to life. No one apart from Christ can give you true happiness. By following the example of Mary, you should know how to give Him your unconditional "yes". There is no place in your lives for selfishness or laziness. Now more than ever it is crucial that you be "watchers of the dawn", the lookouts who announce the light of dawn and the new springtime of the Gospel of which the buds can already be seen. Humanity is in urgent need of the witness of free and courageous young people who dare to go against the tide and proclaim with vigour and enthusiasm their personal faith in God, Lord and Saviour.

You are also aware, my dear friends, that this mission is not easy. It becomes absolutely impossible if one counts only on oneself. But "what is impossible with men is possible for God" (Lk 18,27; 1,37).

True disciples of Christ are conscious of their own weakness. For this reason they put all their trust in the grace of God and they accept it with undivided hearts, convinced that without Him they can do nothing (cf. Jn 15,5). What characterises them and distinguishes them from others is not their talents or natural gifts. It is their firm determination to proceed as followers of Jesus. May you be imitators of them as they were of Christ! "May the eyes of your heart be enlightened, that you may

know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might" (Eph 1,18-19).

7. My dear young people, the next World Meeting will be held, as you know, in Germany in 2005 in the city and diocese of Cologne. The road is still long, but the two years that separate us from that appointment can serve as a time of intense preparation. To help you on this path, I have chosen the following themes for you:

- 2004: 19th World Youth Day: "*We wish to see Jesus*" (Jn 12,21);
- 2005: 20th World Youth Day: "*We have come to worship him*" (Mt 2,2).

Meanwhile, you will meet in your local Church on Palm Sunday: live this experience with commitment, in prayer, in attentive listening and joyful sharing in these opportunities for "ongoing learning", and showing your lively devout faith! Like the Magi, you too should be pilgrims stimulated by the desire to find the Messiah and to adore Him! Courageously proclaim that Christ, who died and is risen, has vanquished evil and death!

In these times threatened by violence, hatred and war, you must witness that he and he alone can give true peace to the heart of individuals, families and peoples on this earth. Commit yourselves to seeking and promoting peace, justice and fellowship. Do not forget the words of the Gospel: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Mt 5,9).

As I entrust you to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, I accompany you with a special Apostolic Blessing, sign of my trust and demonstration of my affection for you all.

From the Vatican, 8 March 2003.

JOHN PAUL II