



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE VII WORLD YOUTH DAY**

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel" (Mk 16:15)

Dear Young People,

1. In an extraordinary way the Lord blessed the Sixth World Youth Day which was celebrated last August at the shrine of Jasna Góra in Czestochowa. In announcing the theme for the next Day, my thoughts return to those wonderful moments and I thank divine Providence for the spiritual fruits which that world meeting brought not only to the Church, but to all humanity.

How I want the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which we experienced in Czestochowa, to spread everywhere! During those memorable days, Mary's shrine became the Upper Room for a new Pentecost, with the doors thrown open to the Third Millennium. Once again the world was able to see the Church, so young and so missionary, full of joy and hope.

I experienced great happiness in seeing so many young people, who gathered together for the first time from the East and West, from the North and South, united in prayer by the Holy Spirit. We witnessed a historical event, an event whose immeasurable meaning for salvation opened a new stage in the process of evangelization, in which young people have an active part to play.

Here we are before the Seventh World Youth Day, 1992. I chose these words of Christ as this year's theme: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel" (Mk 16:15). Through the Church, these words addressed to the Apostles concern every baptized person. As one can easily see, this theme is closely connected with last year's. The same Spirit who made us children of God compels us to evangelize. The Christian vocation, in fact, implies a mission.

In light of the missionary mandate which Christ has entrusted to us, the meaning and importance

of World Youth Days in the Church appear with greater clarity. By participating in these gatherings, young people intend to confirm and strengthen their own "yes" to Christ and his Church, as they say again in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Here I am; send me!" (cf. Is 6:8). This precisely was the meaning of the dismissal rite which took place in Czestochowa, when I handed lighted candles to some of your representatives and invited all young people to bring Christ's light to the world. Yes, in Jasna Góra — on Bright Mountain — the Holy Spirit enkindled a light which is a sign of hope for the Church and for all humanity.

2. By her very nature the Church is a missionary community (cf. *Ad gentes*, n. 2). She is continually impelled by this missionary thrust which she has received from the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). In fact, the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of the Church's entire mission (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, III).

As a consequence, the Christian vocation is also directed towards the apostolate, towards evangelization, towards mission. All baptized persons are called by Christ to become his apostles in their own personal situation and in the world: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21). Through his Church Christ entrusts you with the fundamental mission of sharing with others the gift of salvation, and he invites you to participate in building his kingdom. He chooses you, in spite of the personal limitations everyone has, because he loves you and believes in you. This unconditional love of Christ should be the very soul of your apostolic work, in accord with the words of St Paul: "The love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14).

Being disciples of Christ is not a private matter. On the contrary, the gift of faith must be shared with others. For this reason the same Apostle writes: "If I preach the Gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it!" (1 Cor 9:16). Moreover, do not forget that faith is strengthened and grows precisely when it is given to others (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 2).

"Go into the whole world"

3. The mission lands in which you have been called to work are not necessarily located in distant countries, but can be found throughout the world, even in the everyday situations where you are. In the countries of more ancient Christian tradition today there is an urgent need to call attention again to the message of Jesus by means of a new evangelization, since there are widespread groups of people who do not know Christ, or do not know him well enough; many, caught by the mechanisms of secularism and religious indifference, are far from him (cf. *Christifideles laici*, n. 4).

The same world of young people, dear friends, is a mission land for the Church today. Everyone knows the problems which plague the environment in which young people live: the collapse of values, doubt, consumerism, drugs, crime, eroticism, etc. But at the same time every young

person has a great thirst for God, even if at times this thirst is hidden behind an attitude of indifference or even hostility. How many young people, lost and dissatisfied, went to Czestochowa to give a deeper and more decisive meaning to their lives! How many came from a distance — not only in a geographical sense — although they were not baptized! I am sure that for many young people the meeting in Czestochowa was a form of pre-evangelization; for others it marked an essential turning-point, an occasion of genuine conversion.

The harvest is abundant! But, although there are many young people seeking Christ, there are still few apostles who are ready to proclaim him in a credible way. There is a need for many priests, teachers and educators in the faith, but there is also a need for young people inspired with a missionary spirit, because it is young people who "should become the first apostles of the young, in direct contact with them, exercising the apostolate by themselves among themselves" (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 12). This is a basic principle of educating in faith. Here, then, is your great task!

Today's world offers many challenges to your involvement in the Church. In particular, the collapse of the Marxist system in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe and the subsequent opening of many countries to the proclamation of Christ are a new sign of the times to which the Church is called to give an appropriate response. In the same way the Church is searching for ways to overcome the different kinds of barriers which remain in many other countries. The effort and enthusiasm which you young people can offer the Church are indispensable.

"Proclaim the Gospel"

4. Proclaiming Christ means above all giving witness to him with one's life. It is the simplest form of preaching the Gospel and, at the same time, the most effective way available to you. It consists in showing the visible presence of Christ in one's own life by a daily commitment and by making every concrete decision in conformity with the Gospel. Today the world especially needs believable witnesses. Dear young people, you who love personal authenticity so much and who almost instinctively condemn every type of hypocrisy are able to give a clear and sincere witness to Christ.

Therefore, testify to your faith through your involvement in the world too. A disciple of Christ is never a passive and indifferent observer of what is taking place. On the contrary, he feels responsible for transforming social, political, economic and cultural reality.

Moreover, proclaiming means precisely proclaiming — becoming one who brings the Word of salvation to others. There is indeed much ignorance about the Christian faith, but there is also a deep desire to hear the Word of God. And faith comes from listening. St Paul writes: "And how can they believe unless they have heard of him?" (Rom 10:14). Dear young people, proclaiming the Word of God is not the responsibility of priests or religious alone, but it is yours too. You must

have the courage to speak about Christ in your families and in places where you study, work or recreate, inspired with the same fervour the Apostles had when they said: "We cannot help speaking of what we have heard and seen" (Acts 4:20). Nor should you be silent! There are places and circumstances where you alone can bring the seed of God's Word.

Do not be afraid of presenting Christ to someone who does not yet know him. Christ is the true answer, the most complete answer to all the questions which concern the human person and his destiny. Without Christ the human person remains an unsolvable riddle. Therefore, have the courage to present Christ! Certainly, you must do this in a way which respects each person's freedom of conscience, but you must do it (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 39). Helping a brother or sister to discover Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6) is a true act of love for one's neighbour.

It is not an easy task to speak of God today. Many times one finds a wall of indifference and even a certain hostility. How many times will you be tempted to repeat with the prophet Jeremiah: "Ah, Lord God, I know not how to speak; I am too young"! But God will always answer: "Say not 'I am too young'. To whomever I send you, you shall go" (cf. Jer 1:6-7). So, do not be discouraged, because you are never alone. The Lord will not fail to accompany you, as he promised: "Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world" (Mt 28:20).

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel"

5. The theme of the Seventh World Youth Day also invites you to look at the history of peoples, particularly the history of their evangelization.

In some cases the history is very ancient, in others it is recent. But there is a wondrous dynamism with which the youngest Churches grow in the faith and enrich the spiritual patrimony of the whole universal Church.

On the occasion of this Day, dear young people throughout the world, I invite you to reflect in the light of faith on the figures of the apostles and missionaries who first raised the cross of Christ in your countries. Try to draw from their example the zeal and courage to face up better to the challenges of our time.

With gratitude for the gift of faith which they brought to people, may you take personal responsibility for the heritage of Christ's cross, which you are called to pass on to future generations.

At this point I want to offer special encouragement to the young people of the Latin American continent, where the Fifth Centenary of its first evangelization is being celebrated this year. This event, which is very important for the whole Church, is an occasion for you to thank the Lord for

the faith he has given you and to renew your commitment to meet the challenges presented by the new evangelization on the threshold of the Third Millennium.

6. With the publication of this Message a journey of spiritual preparation is being started for the upcoming World Youth Day, which will gather you together around your Bishops on Palm Sunday.

The ordinary character of the celebration, however, should not mean less involvement. On the contrary, I invite you young people, and those who are involved in youth work, as well as those responsible for movements, associations and ecclesial communities, to intensify your efforts so that this journey will become a true school of evangelization and apostolic formation.

I hope that many young men and women, inspired by sincere, apostolic zeal, will consecrate their own lives to Christ and the Church as priests and religious, or as lay people who are also ready to leave their own countries to rush to those places where workers in Christ's vineyard are scarce. Listen attentively, then, to the voice of the Lord, who today does not cease calling you, as he called Peter and Andrew: "Come after me and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19).

As the year 2000 approaches, the Church feels the need for a renewed missionary effort and she puts her hope in you, dear young people, precisely for this task. Do not forget to thank the Holy Spirit each day for continuing to light so many fires of apostolic commitment in the Church today. Parish communities that are dynamic and alive are its very fertile field, as well as associations, ecclesial movements and new communities which are increasing and spreading with such an abundance of charisms, especially in young people's surroundings. This is the new inspiration which the Holy Spirit is giving to our times: how I wish that it would penetrate each of your lives!

I entrust the celebration of World Youth Day 1992 to Mary, Queen of Apostles. May she teach you that to bring Jesus to others it is not necessary to do extraordinary feats, but simply to have a heart filled with love for God and one's brothers and sisters, a love which impels one to share the priceless treasures of faith, hope and charity.

In the course of preparing for the Seventh World Youth Day, dear young people, may my special Apostolic Blessing accompany you.

From the Vatican, 24 November 1991, the Solemnity of Jesus Christ the King.