



The Holy See

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

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6: 68).

Dear Young People,

1. "I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (Rom 1:11-12).

The Apostle Paul's words to the Christians of Rome summarize the sentiment with which I address you all, as we begin to prepare ourselves for the 11th World Youth Day.

Indeed, I come in spirit to you with this same wish, to meet you in every corner of the earth, wherever you face the intense, daily adventure of life: in your families, where you study or work, in the communities where you gather to hear the word of the Lord and to open your hearts to him in prayer.

My gaze turns in particular to the young people who are personally involved in too many of the tragedies that still wound humanity: those suffering from war, from violence, from hunger and poverty, thus prolonging the suffering of Christ who, with his Passion, is close to those oppressed by the burden of pain and injustice.

In 1996 World Youth Day will take place in diocesan communities, as usual, in expectation of the new world meeting that will take us to Paris in 1997.

The future belongs to the younger generation

2. We are journeying towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, an appointment for which in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* I invited the whole Church to prepare with conversion of heart and life.

I also ask you now to undertake this preparation with the same spirit and goals. I entrust to you a plan of action which, based on the words of the Gospel and corresponding to the themes presented to the whole Church for each year, will serve as a guide for the next World Youth Days:

1997: "Teacher, where are you staying? Come and see" (Jn 1:38-39).

1998: "The Holy Spirit will teach you all things" (Jn 14:26).

1999: "The Father loves you" (Jn 16:27).

2000: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).

3. I am appealing especially to you, young people, to look to the epochal threshold of the Year 2000, remembering that "the future of the world and the Church belongs to the younger generation, to those who, born in this century, will reach maturity in the next, the first century of the new millennium.... If they succeed in following the road which he points out to them, they will have the joy of making their own contribution to his presence in the next century" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 58).

As we approach the Great Jubilee, may you be accompanied by the conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, which I want to recommend to all of you, as I did to your peers from the European continent in Loreto last September. It is a "valuable and ever youthful document.... Reread it attentively. You will find in it the light to discern your vocation as men and women called to live in this both marvellous and dramatic era, as artisans of brotherhood and builders of peace" (*Angelus*, 10 September 1995; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 13 September, p. 2, n. 2).

4. "Lord, to whom shall we go?". The goal and target of our life is he, the Christ, who awaits us — each one singly and all together — to lead us across the boundaries of time to the eternal embrace of the God who loves us.

But if eternity is our horizon as people starving for truth and thirsting for happiness, *history is the setting of our daily commitment*. Faith teaches us that man's destiny is written in the heart and mind of God, who directs the course of history. It also teaches us that the Father puts in our hands the task of beginning to build here on earth the "kingdom of heaven" which the Son came to announce and which will find its fulfilment at the end of time.

It is our duty then to live in history, side by side with our peers, sharing their worries and hopes,

because the Christian is and must be fully a man of his time. He cannot escape into another dimension, ignoring the tragedies of his era, closing his eyes and heart to the anguish that pervades life. On the contrary, it is he who, although not "of" this world, is immersed "in" this world every day, ready to hasten to wherever there is a brother in need of help, a tear to be dried, a request for help to be answered. On this will we be judged!

Charity is the high road to the Great Jubilee

5. Remembering the Master's warning: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25:35-36), we must put the "new commandment" into practice (Jn 13:34).

Thus we will oppose what today seems to be the "disintegration of civilization", in order vigorously to reaffirm the "civilization of love" which alone can open to the men of our time horizons of true peace and lasting justice in lawfulness and solidarity.

Charity is also the high road that must lead us to the goal of the Great Jubilee. To reach this appointment, we need to be able to confront ourselves and undertake a rigorous examination of conscience, the indispensable premiss for a radical conversion, which can transform our life and give it an authentic meaning which enables believers to love God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their strength, and to love their neighbour as themselves (cf. Lk 10:27).

By conforming your daily life to the Gospel of the one Teacher who has "the words of eternal life", you will be able to become genuine workers for justice, following the commandment which makes love the new "frontier" of Christian witness. This is the law for transforming the world (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 38).

6. It is first of all necessary for you young people to give a forceful witness of love for life, God's gift. This love must extend from the beginning to the end of every life and must struggle against every attempt to make man the arbiter of his brother's life, of unborn life, of life that is waning or that of the handicapped and the weak.

I ask you young people, who naturally and instinctively make your "love of life" the horizon of your dreams and the rainbow of your hopes, to become "prophets of life". Be such by your words and deeds, rebelling against the civilization of selfishness that often considers the human person a means rather than an end, sacrificing its dignity and feelings in the name of mere profit. Do so by concretely helping those who need you and who perhaps, without your help, would be tempted to resign themselves to despair.

Life is a talent (cf. Mt 25:14-30) entrusted to us so that we can transform it and increase it, making

it a gift to others. No man is an iceberg drifting on the ocean of history. Each one of us belongs to a great family, in which he has his own place and his own role to play. Selfishness makes people deaf and dumb; love opens eyes and hearts, enabling people to make that original and irreplaceable contribution which, together with the thousands of deeds of so many brothers and sisters, often distant and unknown, converges to form the mosaic of charity which can change the tide of history.

Be prophets of life, love and joy!

7. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life".

When, considering his language too demanding, many of his disciples left him Jesus asked the few who had remained: "Will you also go away?", Peter answered him: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:67-68). And they chose to remain with him. They stayed because the Master had "the words of eternal life", words which, while promising eternity, gave full meaning to life.

There are times and circumstances when it is necessary to make decisive choices for the whole of life. We are experiencing, and you know it, difficult times in which it is often hard to distinguish good from evil, true teachers from the false. Jesus warned us: "Take heed that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'the time is at hand!'. Do not go after them" (Lk 21:8). Pray and listen to his words; let yourselves be guided by true pastors; do not ever succumb to the world's flattery and facile illusions which frequently become tragic disappointments.

It is in the difficult moments, in moments of trial, that the quality of decisions is measured. Thus it is in this difficult time that each one of you will be called to have the courage of your decision. There are no short cuts to happiness and light. The torment of all those who, throughout the history of humanity, have tirelessly sought the meaning of life, answers to the fundamental questions written on the heart of every human being, are proof of this.

You know that these questions are no more than the expression of a longing for the infinite, which God himself has planted in each one of us. Thus it is with a sense of duty and sacrifice that you must walk the paths of conversion, commitment, research, work, volunteer service, dialogue, respect for all, without giving up in the face of failure, knowing that your strength lies in the Lord who guides your steps with love and is ready to welcome you like the prodigal son (cf. Lk 15:11-24).

8. Dear young people, I have asked you to be "prophets of life and love". I also ask you to be "prophets of joy": the world must recognize us by our ability to communicate to our peers the sign of a great hope which has already been fulfilled: Jesus, who for our sake died and rose again.

Do not forget that "the future of humanity is in the hands of those men who are capable of providing the generations to come with reasons for life and optimism" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 31).

Purified by reconciliation, fruit of divine love and of your sincere repentance, striving for justice and living in thanksgiving to God, you can be credible and effective prophets of joy in a world so frequently gloomy and sad. You will be heralds of the "fullness of time", whose timeliness is recalled by the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

The way Jesus shows you is not easy. Rather, it is like a path winding up a mountain. Do not lose heart! The steeper the road, the faster it rises towards ever wider horizons. May Mary, Star of Evangelization, guide you! Docile like her to the Father's will, take the stages of history as mature and convincing witnesses.

With her and with the Apostles may you repeat at every moment your profession of faith in Jesus Christ's live-giving presence: "You have the words of eternal life!".

From the Vatican, 26 November 1995, Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.