



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE
GATHERED IN THE VATICAN BASILICA***

Wednesday, 6 December 1978

Beloved boys and girls, and beloved young people,

I find you in large numbers and exuberant as always. I am pleased to be able to meet you today, both to feel your warm communion with the Pope, who is Peter's Successor, and to tell you that I cherish a special affection for you, because I see in you all the promising hopes of the Church and of the world of tomorrow. Always remember that you will be able to construct something really great and lasting only if you build, as St Paul says, on the one foundation, which is Jesus Christ (I Cor 3:11).

Prepare for life seriously and with commitment. In this period of youth, which is so important for the full maturation of your personality, always give the right place to the religious element of your formation, the one that lets man reach his full dignity, which is that of being a son of God.

As you well know, in these days all Christians are living the liturgical period of Advent, which is the immediate preparation for Christmas. Last Wednesday I already spoke to so many other youngsters like you, explaining that Advent means "coming", that is, God's coming among men to share their sufferings and promote joy in their lives. Today I would like to tell you in general who man is, man who is called to meeting and friendship with the Lord.

The first pages of the Bible, which I think you have already read, tell us that "God created man in his own image" (Gen 1:27). This means that man, every human being, and therefore also each of you, has a particular relationship with God. Though belonging to visible creation, to nature and to the animal world, each of us is differentiated in some way from all other creatures.

You know that some scientists affirm man's dependence on the evolution of nature and place him in the changeable becoming of the various species. These affirmations, to the extent to which they are really proved, are very important, because they tell us that we must respect the natural world of which we are part. But if we go down into the depths of man, we see that he is more different from nature than he resembles it. Man possesses a spirit, intelligence, freedom, conscience therefore he resembles God more than the created world.

It is again the first book of the bible, Genesis, which tells us that Adam gave a name to all living creatures of the air and of the land, thus proving his own superiority over them; but among all these beings "for the man there was not found a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:20). He realizes that he is different from all living creatures, even if they are endowed, like him, with vegetative and sensitive life. It could be said that this first man does what every man of any time normally does, that is, he reflects on his own identity and asks himself who he is. the result of this attitude is the ascertaining of a fundamental difference: I am different from all the rest, I am more different than similar.

All this helps us to understand better the mystery of Advent, which we are living. If God, as we said, "comes" to man, he does so because there is, in the human being, a capacity for expectation and a capacity for welcome, such as does not exist in any other creature. God comes for man, in fact he comes into man, and establishes a most particular communion with him.

Therefore I call upon you, too, dear boys and girls, in view of Christmas, to make room for him, to prepare for the meeting with him, so that he may find his true image, clean and faithful, in each of you.

With these wishes, I willingly bless you, and with you I bless your parents, your teachers and those who have accompanied you here.

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