



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

**TELECONFERENCE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE**

*Universal Amphitheatre (Los Angeles)
Tuesday, 15 September 1987*

Dear young Friends,

I think you already know, without my saying it, how happy I am to be with you today. Wherever I travel around the world, I always make it a point to meet young people. A few days ago I was with them in New Orleans and today *I enjoy being with you*. From my early days as a young priest, I have spent many hours talking with students on university campuses or while hiking along lakes or in the mountains and hills. I have spent many evenings singing with young men and women like yourselves. Even now as Pope, during the summer months, various groups of young people come to Castel Gandolfo for an evening and we sing and talk together.

As you probably know, I often say that you who are young bring *hope* to the world. The future of the world shines in your eyes. Even now, you are helping to shape the future of society. Since I have always placed high hopes in young people, I would like to speak to you today precisely *about hope*.

2. *We cannot live without hope*. We have to have some purpose in life, some meaning to our existence. We have to aspire to something. Without hope, we begin to die.

Why does it sometimes happen that a seemingly healthy person, successful in the eyes of the world, takes an overdose of sleeping pills and commits suicide? Why, on the other hand, do we see a seriously disabled person filled with great zest for life? Is it not because of hope? The one

has lost all hope; in the other, hope is alive and overflowing. Clearly, then, hope does not stem from talents and gifts, or from physical health and success! It comes from something else. To be more precise, *hope comes from someone else*, someone beyond ourselves.

Hope comes *from God*, from our belief in God. People of hope are those who believe God created them for a purpose and that he will provide for their needs. They believe that God loves them as a faithful Father. Do you remember the advice that Jesus gave his disciples when they seemed to be *fearful of the future*? He said: "Do not be concerned for your life, what you are to eat, or for your body, what you are to wear. *Life is more important* than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they do not sow, they do not reap, they have neither cellar nor barn - yet God feeds them. *How much more important you are than the birds!*" (*Luc. 12, 22-24*). Yes, God knows all our needs. He is the foundation for our hope.

3. But what about people who do not believe in God? This is indeed a serious problem, one of the greatest problems of our time - *atheism*, the fact that many of our contemporaries have no faith in God. When I visited Australia last year, I told a group of children: "The hardest thing about being Pope is to see that many people do not accept the love of Jesus, do not know who he really is and *how much he loves them*... (Jesus) does not force people to accept his love. He offers it to them, and leaves them free to say *yes* or *no*. It fills me with joy to see how many people know and love our Lord, how many say *yes* to him. But it saddens me to see that some people say *no*" (Ioannis Pauli II, *Ad alumnos "Katherine School of the Air" urbis vulgo nuncupatae "Darwin"*, die 29 nov. 1986: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IX/2 [1986] 1746 e 1747). Without faith in God, there can be no hope, no lasting, authentic hope. To stop believing in God is to start down a path that can lead only to emptiness and despair.

But those who have the gift of faith live with confidence about things to come. They *look to the future with anticipation and joy*, even in the face of suffering and pain; and the future that they are ultimately looking towards is everlasting life with the Lord. This kind of hope was very prominent in the life of Saint Paul who once wrote: "We are afflicted in every way possible, but we are not crushed; full of doubts, we never despair. We are persecuted but never abandoned; we are struck down but never destroyed... *We do not lose heart*, because our inner being is renewed each day" (*2Cor. 4, 8-9. 16*). Only God can renew our inner self each day. Only God can give meaning to life, God who has drawn near to each of us in "Christ Jesus our hope" (*1Tim. 1, 1*).

In the New Testament there are two letters ascribed to Saint Peter. In the first of these, he said: "Venerate the Lord, that is, Christ, in your hearts. Should anyone ask you *the reason for this hope of yours*, be ever ready to reply" (*1Petr. 3, 15*). Dear young friends: I pray that your faith in Christ will always be lively and strong. In this way, you will *always be ready to tell others the reason* for your hope; you will *be messengers of hope for the world*.

4. I am often asked, especially by young people, *why I became a priest*. May be some of you

would like to ask the same question. Let me try briefly to reply.

I must begin by saying that it is impossible to explain entirely, for it remains a mystery, even to myself. How does one explain the ways of God? Yet, I know that at a certain point in my life, I became convinced that Christ was saying to me what he had said to thousands before me: "*Come, follow me!*" There was a clear sense that *what I heard in my heart* was no human voice, nor was it just an idea of my own. Christ was calling me to serve him as a priest.

And you can probably tell, *I am deeply grateful* to God for my vocation to the priesthood. Nothing means more to me or gives me greater joy than *to celebrate Mass each day* and *to serve God's people* in the Church. That has been true ever since the day of my ordination as a priest. Nothing has ever changed it, not even becoming Pope.

Confiding this to you, I would like to invite each of you to listen carefully to God's voice in your heart. *Every human person is called to communion with God.* That is why the Lord made us, to know him and love him and serve him, and - in doing this - to find the secret to lasting joy.

In the past the Church in the United States has been rich in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. And it could be especially true today. At the same time, the Church needs the Gospel witness of holy lay people, in married life and in the single state. Be assured that *the Lord knows each of you by name* and wishes to speak to your heart in a dialogue of love and salvation. *God continues to speak* to young people on the banks of *the Mississippi River* and on the slopes of *the Rocky Mountains*. God continues to speak in the cities on *the West Coast* of America and across *the rolling hills and plains*. God continues to speak to every human person.

Dear young people of America, *listen to his voice*. Do not be afraid. Open up your hearts to Christ. The deepest joy there is in life is the joy that comes from God and is found in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the hope of the world. Jesus Christ is your hope and mine!

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