



The Holy See

PASTORAL JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

MEETING WITH THE YOUTH

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Nakivubo Stadium in Kampala (Uganda)
Saturday, 6 February 1993*

Blessed be God who gives joy to our youth (cf. Ps. 42 (41):4)!

Dear Young People of Uganda,

1. How happy I am to meet you! *In your joyful enthusiasm and love I see reflected the light of Christ. Tonight you are sharing your youth with the Pope and make him young again!* Here in Nakivubo Stadium, through Christ, the Light shining in the darkness (cf. Jn. 1:5), we are united as friends (cf. Mt. 18:20). I give back to each one of you – and all the youth of Uganda – that same love of Christ which overwhelms us (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14) and which you have shown to me. Let us always love one another, "for love is of God" (1 Jn. 4:7).

Your short plays have honestly and creatively described the struggles facing young Ugandans today. *I share your sadness and frustration at the works of darkness that surround you* (cf. Eph. 5:11). Despite your many trials – of students lacking family support and future opportunities, of workers facing unemployment and economic hardship, of young people from the rural areas who are often exploited and without services, of those who are suffering from AIDS – you are not overcome by discouragement. Darkness has not extinguished your light. I know that in your hearts *you feel pain when you see the apparent triumph of injustice, corruption and violence. As your father and your friend, the Pope understands how difficult it can be to keep the light of hope burning in your hearts.*

2. But, you may ask, what can we do to guarantee that the darkness of evil will not defeat the light of goodness in our world? The Church has only one answer, ever ancient and ever new. *Open your hearts and your minds to Jesus Christ. He is your brother, who is always faithful. He is your Redeemer, who died and rose for you. He is your Lord, who leads you to glory.*

With Christ, the "Light of the world" (Jn. 8:12), you can conquer the darkness of sin which casts its shadow over this land of the sun. With Christ, the Saviour of the world, you will be victorious (cf. Ibid., 16:33).

Christ is standing at the door of your heart (cf. Rev. 3:20). He wants to enter there and *share with you the flame of his sacrificial love*. But if you are to open the door so that Christ can shine on you (cf. Eph. 5:14), you must first hear him knocking.

This means that every day you must escape from the turmoil of noise and confusion and, for a few minutes, be silent and calm. "Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray!", Saint James tells us (James 5:13). *Even more than speaking, prayer is listening. The Father tells us: "This is my beloved Son, listen to him" (Mk. 9:7).* Through prayer you will be enlightened, refreshed and strengthened for life's journey.

When you are praying, some of you will hear the Lord inviting you to follow him as a priest or Religious. If you hear his gentle voice calling you, do not be afraid! *Say with enthusiasm: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:9).* Rely on God's strength (cf. Phil. 4:13) and believe that the love of Jesus will sustain you.

3. Because you are baptized, the light of day is already shining in your hearts. You have been called from darkness into God's marvellous light (cf. 1 Pt. 2:9). *You are "children of the light" (Jn. 12:36).*

In his Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul reminds Christians that they must lead lives worthy of God's call (cf. Eph. 4:1). *"You must live like people who belong to the light" (Ibid., 5:8).* In your families, communities and nation the light of Christ has already shone brilliantly – in the heroism of your martyrs, in the vitality of your noble traditions, in the charity of the believers. *They have passed this shining torch of evangelical love to you – the generation of Uganda's tomorrow, the hope of the Church's future!*

God invites you – each and every one of you – to walk in the light as a companion of Christ (cf. 1 Jn. 1:7).. The Prince of this world, however, often tries to extinguish your light. We have heard the sober words of Saint John: "Every one who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light" (Jn. 3:20). Your songs and plays tell me that you do not want to stumble and fall. Like young people everywhere *you yearn to walk in the light. But how can you shine "like stars lighting up the sky" (cf. Phil. 2:15)?* Uganda needs a well-prepared generation of young people. You must

prepare for future responsibilities through your dedication to study, your love of chastity and your solidarity in community.

4. You are convinced, I know, that *a sound education is necessary both for your personal maturity and for your Nation's development*. Yet you have told me that remaining in school is often very difficult and that you are tempted to give up. You ask: What is the use of so much effort?

From my own experience of studying during the time of war in my land I can assure you schooling is one of the main paths leading us out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of truth. *To seek, discover and rejoice in the truth are among life's most thrilling adventures*. Education frees you, so that you can become a fully-integrated man or woman. Remaining in school requires perseverance and patience; it requires self-denial and discipline. Above all, *it calls for courage!* Do not give in to defeatism and discouragement. The truth alone can make you free (cf. Jn. 8:32), so pursue it fearlessly. Christ calls you to cure the blindness of ignorance with the light of truth.

May the lamp of learning radiate in every corner of the "Pearl of Africa's Crown!" In a few years, my dear friends, you will be the men and women of the Third Millennium. Uganda and the Church are counting on the harvest of your talents (cf. Mt. 25:14-30)!

5. Secondly, most of you will walk the path of life in marriage. This too requires a kind of education. *You need to equip yourselves for the magnificent commitment of marriage and founding a family*—the most important unit of the Christian community. As young Christians, you must carefully prepare to become good spouses and good parents with families of your own.

Essential to preparing for marriage is your vocation to chastity. I know that young people reject hypocrisy. You want to be honest with yourselves and others. A chaste person is honest. When God created us he gave us more than one way to "speak" to each other. *Besides expressing ourselves through speech, we express ourselves through our bodies*. Gestures are like "words" that tell who we are. Sexual actions are "words" that reveal our hearts. *The Lord wants us to use our sexuality according to his plan*. He expects us to "speak" truthfully.

Honest sexual "language" requires a commitment to lifelong fidelity. To give your body to another person symbolizes the total gift of yourself to that person. But if you are not married, you are admitting that you might change your mind in the future. Total self-giving would then be absent. *Without the bond of marriage, sexual relations are a lie*. And for Christians, marriage means sacramental marriage.

Chastity – which means respecting the dignity of others because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit – (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19) leads you to grow in love for others and for God. It prepares you to make the "sincere gift of self" (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 48) that is the basis of Christian marriage. More important, *it teaches you to learn to love as Christ loves, laying down his life for others* (cf.

Jn. 15:13).

Do not be deceived by the empty words of those who ridicule chastity or your capacity for self-control. The strength of your future married love depends on the strength of your present commitment to learning true love, a chastity which includes refraining from all sexual relations outside of marriage. *The sexual restraint of chastity is the only safe and virtuous way to put an end to the tragic plague of AIDS* which has claimed so many young victims.

Helped by God's grace in the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, "be strong and of good courage" (Deut. 31:6). *The Pope urges you to commit yourselves to this spiritual revolution of purity of body and heart.* Let Christ's redemption bear fruit in you! The contemporary world needs this kind of revolution!

6. Thirdly, as you grow into the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:13), clothed with the "armour of light" (Rom. 13:12), you must continue to meet challenges presented by violence, racial discrimination, unemployment, poverty and injustice—all the terrifying darkness of sin. *Do not flee from your social responsibilities by substituting passing pleasures for lasting commitment to your brothers and sisters.*

Make your voice for truth and justice be heard. Do not be afraid! Keep up your courageous questioning and searching for "whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just and whatever is pure" (Phil. 4:8). *Claim your right to participate* in deciding your political, social and economic destiny (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 17). *Study carefully the Church's rich tradition of social doctrine.* It is the master resource for building a society where justice, solidarity and peace will thrive.

The Lord Jesus challenges you this evening. He asks you to lend him your hands and your feet, your hearts and your minds, so that – through you! – he may set the downtrodden free (cf. Lk. 4:18). *With Christ, I ask you to replace selfishness with solidarity.* Solidarity is the opposite of escapism, laziness and loving only those who love you (cf. Mt. 5:46)! Solidarity demands that you work with others and for others without exception.

I know that young people want to work together in love. That is the key to human liberation! *Build a chain of solidarity – of cooperation in charity – that will extend from your families to include your school, your work place, your towns and your nation.* If you live solidarity, justice will flourish (cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39-40).

7. My dear young friends: Because you have been baptized into Christ's Death and Resurrection and inflamed by his Spirit at Confirmation, *you have the power to dispel the dark shadows of pessimism and selfishness.* As the new Millennium draws near, "God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 86). And he is relying on you to be

the messengers of this hope throughout Uganda!

Christ knows what is in your heart – and he loves you. *His gaze of love has enlightened each one of you* (cf. Jn. 1:9). I thank the young people of Uganda for being children of the light and of the day (cf. Thess. 5:5). In your light I see the light of Christ! Now you must share that same light with your brothers and sisters!

Your energy and enthusiasm for the Gospel are pledges of confidence for the Church's future in Uganda and Africa. As you take up responsibility for the coming century, may the word of God be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (cf. Ps. 119 (118):195)! With you – and all Ugandan youth – I pray that the Virgin Mary, the Morning Star who bore the Sun of Justice (cf. Mal. 4:2), will fill you with the love of Christ. *With your lamps burning for all to see, go out to meet the Lord of the Day!* God bless you all. But he will look upon these young people with loving kindness and hear their prayers so that they may always keep their hearts and minds open to Christ our life.

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