



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF ROME
IN PREPARATION
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF WORLD YOUTH DAY**

Thursday, 5 April 2001

Dear Young People of Rome!

"Morning watchmen at the dawn of the third millennium!"

1. On entering this square, looking at you and listening to the words of your friends and of the Cardinal Vicar, I could not but revisit in my mind and heart the unforgettable moments we spent together during the 15th World Youth Day in August last year. It is an indelible memory. How can we not thank the Lord together for World Youth Day 2000 and the Jubilee of Young People? Thank God and thank you, dear young friends! In greeting you affectionately, I would also like to mention the young members of the *Canadian Delegation* who next Sunday will receive from you the Cross that accompanies the World Youth Day pilgrimage.

I would like to express my gratitude not only for World Youth Day, but also for today's meeting, whose significant title is "*Let us put out into the deep!*", trusting in Jesus' word and life-giving presence.

Today we are concluding in a sense the second phase of the "school of faith" that began at Tor Vergata. For it was there that I presented the high ideals of the Gospel to you and asked you to persevere in saying "yes" to Christ, in order to achieve your noblest ideals.

At that time, when I "re-entrusted" the Gospel to you, and you said "I believe", the second phase of the "school of faith" began for you Roman young people. With the help of the Diocesan Youth Ministry Service, you have set out on a journey of reflection, eager, as you are, to carry out the Church's mission together in this city. You have grown in communion and in the awareness that

you are a living part of the Diocesan Church of Rome. Today this journey prompts you to respond together to Jesus as he invites you: "*Let us put out into the deep!*".

2. Put out into the deep *to go where?* The answer is clear: *to reach out to man*, an unfathomable mystery; and *to go to all people*, a boundless ocean. This is possible in a *missionary Church*, which is able to speak to people and, especially, to touch the human heart, because the saving encounter with Christ occurs there, in that intimate and sacred place.

Dear friends, in my ministry I have never tired of meeting people; this is the goal of the pilgrimages and pastoral visits I continue to make. Even now as the years go by, I do not intend to stop, if this is God's will, because I am convinced that it is easier to proclaim Christ through personal contact with others.

However, this mission is far from easy; proclaiming and bearing witness to the Gospel involves many difficulties. Yes, it is true: we live at a time when society is strongly influenced by models of life that give priority to possessions, pleasure and appearances in a selfish sense. The missionary thrust of believers has to deal with this way of thinking and acting. But we must not be afraid, because Christ can change the human heart and is capable of working a "miraculous catch" when we least imagine.

3. Let us now look more closely at your situation, dear young people. You - especially you adolescents - are living in a difficult age, full of enthusiasm, but also exposed to dangerous confusion. Your limited experience threatens you with the risk of falling prey to *those who play on your emotions*, who, instead of fostering a critical conscience in you, tend to exalt uninhibitedness and to present immoral choices as values. They blur every distinction between good and evil and present truth with the changing features of expediency.

I hope that you have at your side fathers and mothers who are genuine teachers; sincere, honest and faithful friends; mature and responsible people who take care of you and help you to strive for the lofty goals that Jesus himself proposes in the Gospel.

Here I would like to make a *heartfelt appeal to all educational institutions*, that they unambiguously devote themselves to serving the younger generations, so that they can calmly grow in a way that conforms with their dignity. I first call on *Christian families* to be authentic communities, "schools" in which people are taught faith and fidelity in love; families of believers who are ready to help those in trouble, so that every child who is born may experience God's tender fatherhood.

4. This requires an authentic cultural and spiritual revolution, which will bring *the Gospel to all areas of life*. Dear young people, you must promote this peaceful revolution, which can show Christ's love for everyone, starting with the neediest and most afflicted. You can do much if you remain united and reject those who offer you easy goals that lower the standard and quality of

your moral life. Speaking to you is a Pope who has already lived for over 80 years, but is still young at heart because he has always wanted to walk with you young people, who are the hope of the Church and of society, and he intends to continue doing so.

I now appeal to your young hearts. Before I arrived here in the square, you had been celebrating with singers, dancers and athletes. When they put their professionalism at the service of true values, they can render a valuable service to youth. I ask them and everyone who can exert a positive or, vice versa, a negative influence on the lives of children and young people, to be aware of *their great responsibility*.

I repeat to you, dear young people: pay attention to what is proposed to you. When words and ways of life that contradict the Gospel are presented to you, have the strength to say "no".

5. "*Put out into the deep*" means refusing anything negative that is offered to you and putting your imagination and enthusiasm at the service of Christ. I heard of the *initiatives* you are undertaking, together with the whole diocesan community, to make a journey that is demanding but will bear good fruit. I encourage you to work in constant contact with one another, and with the help of the diocesan youth ministry services. I also ask the movements and new communities to integrate their own experiences into the local Church and parishes for the success of this missionary work, which should always be promoted and carried out together.

With the help of the adults and priests of your communities, organize *formation meetings on the most important issues of the moment*. By sharing the life of your peers in places of study, recreation, sport and culture, seek to bring them the liberating message of the Gospel. *Re-establish after-school programmes*, adapting them to the needs of the times as bridges between the Church and the street, with special attention for those who are marginalized, going through hard times or are ensnared in deviancy and delinquency. In the pastoral care of your school or university, strive to form groups and cultural workshops that can be a reference-point for your friends. Do not forget to be close to those who are living in pain and illness: in these situations we can be particularly open to the God of life.

Let all this be based on a daily and sincere relationship with the divine Master. That is, let there be *prayer*, listening to the Word of God and meditation, the celebration of the Eucharist, Eucharistic adoration and the sacrament of Confession. In this regard, I congratulate you on the excellent programme that brings many of you together for prayer at the Church of St Agnes *in Agone* in Piazza Navona every Thursday evening. In this way I will also follow all of you who will be taking part in the pilgrimage to the Holy Land which you have planned for this September. Returning to the sources of faith, to prayer, does not mean taking refuge in a vague religious sentimentalism, but rather pausing to contemplate the face of Christ, an indispensable condition for being able to reflect it later in life.

6. Here, once again, I propose to you the arduous but exalting Gospel ideal. Dear young people, *do not be afraid* and *do not feel alone!* Your families, teachers and priests are close to you. The Pope is close to you. Jesus, who was the first to obey the Father's will and let himself be nailed to the Cross to redeem the world, is particularly close to you. *The Way of the Cross*, as I recalled in my Message for World Youth Day, which we will be celebrating this Sunday, is the way he proposes to us.

Do not be afraid, young watchmen at this dawn of the new millennium, *to take up your missionary responsibilities* which flow from your Baptism and Confirmation. If the Lord then calls you to serve him more closely in the priesthood or in a state of special consecration, follow him generously.

Mary, the young Virgin of Nazareth who said "yes" to God and gave Christ to humanity, stands beside each of you. May you be helped by your many peers, whose total fidelity to the Gospel has been recognized by the Church and who have been held up as examples to follow and intercessors to call upon. Among these I would like to mention *Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati*, the *centenary of whose birth* will occur tomorrow. Get to know him! The life of this "normal" young man shows that we can be holy by living our friendships, studies, sports and service to the poor in a constant relationship with God. I entrust your missionary efforts to him.

As for me, I accompany you with affection and prayer, as I cordially bless you, your families and the young people of the entire city of Rome.