



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN KAZAKHSTAN
MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Astana – Eurasia University

Sunday, 23 September 2001

Dear Young People!

1. It is a great joy for me to meet with you, and I am deeply grateful for your warm welcome. I greet especially the Rector and the academic authorities of this new and already prestigious University. Its very name, *Eurasia*, indicates *the particular mission* which it has in common with your great nation which is a point of contact between Europe and Asia: *a mission of linking two continents*, their respective cultures and traditions, and the different ethnic groups who have mingled here through the centuries.

Indeed, yours is a country in which the world can see *accord and harmony between different peoples* as an eloquent sign of the vocation of all peoples to live together in peace, in mutual knowledge and openness, and an ever deeper discovery and appreciation of the distinctive traditions of each people. *Kazakhstan is a land of encounter*, exchange and newness; a land which stirs in everyone the desire for new discoveries and makes it possible to experience difference not as a threat but as an enrichment.

Recognizing this, dear young people, I greet each one of you. To all of you I say as a friend: *peace be with you*, may peace fill your hearts! Know that you are called *to be the builders of a better world*. Be peace-makers, because a society solidly based on peace is a society with a future.

2. In preparing this visit, I asked myself what the young people of Kazakhstan would want to hear from the Pope of Rome and what would they like to ask him. My experience of young people tells me that they are interested in the basic questions. Probably the first question you would want to put to me is this: "*Who am I*, Pope John Paul II, according to the Gospel that you proclaim? What is the meaning of my life? Where am I going?" My answer, dear young people, is simple but hugely significant: *You are a thought of God, you are a heart-beat of God*. To say this is like saying that you have a

value which in a sense is infinite, that *you matter to God in your completely unique individuality*.

You understand then, dear young people, why I come among you this evening with respect and trepidation, and why I look to you with great affection and confidence. I am happy to meet you, the descendants of the noble Kazakh people, proud of your indomitable yearning for freedom, which is as limitless as the steppe where you were born. You come from different backgrounds, in which suffering played a big part.

Here you sit *side by side*, in a spirit of friendship, not because you have forgotten the evil there has been in your history, but because you are rightly more interested in the good that you can build together. There is no true reconciliation which does not lead to generous shared commitment.

Realize that *each one of you is of unique worth*, and be ready to accept one another with your respective convictions as you search together for the fullness of truth. Your country has experienced the deadly violence of ideology. Do not let yourselves fall prey now to *the no less destructive violence of "emptiness"*. What a suffocating void it is when nothing matters in life, when you believe in nothing! Emptiness is the negation of the infinite, which your steppe-land powerfully evokes: it is the opposite of that Infinity for which the human heart has an irresistible longing.

3. I have been told that, in your beautiful Kazakh language, "I love you" is "*men senen jaskè korejmen*", which can be translated as "I look upon you well, my gaze upon you is good". Human love, but more fundamentally still God's love for humanity and creation, *stems from a loving gaze*, a gaze that helps us see the good and leads us to do what is good: "God saw everything he had made, and he found it very good" (*Gen 1:31*). Such a gaze allows us to see all that is positive in things and leads us to ponder far beneath the surface the beauty and richness of every human being we meet.

Spontaneously we ask ourselves: "What is it that constitutes the beauty and greatness of the human person?" Here is the answer I give you: what makes a human being great is *the stamp of God which each of us bears*. According to the Bible, a human being is created "in the image and likeness of God" (cf. *Gen 1:26*). This is why the human heart is never satisfied: it wants more and better, it wants everything. No finite reality satisfies or placates its longing. Saint Augustine, one of the early Church Fathers, wrote: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions*, 1,1). Is it not perhaps the same intuition that prompts the question which your great thinker and poet Ahmed Jassavi repeats several times in his poems: "What is life's point if not to be given, and given to the Most High God?"

4. Dear friends, in these words of Ahmed Jassavi there is *a great message*, echoing what religious tradition describes as a "vocation". In giving life to man, God entrusts to him a task and awaits his response. To declare that the purpose of human life, with all its experiences, its joys and sorrows, is that it be "given to the Most High God" in no way diminishes or denies our life. Rather, it is an assertion of the supreme dignity of the human person: made in the image and likeness of God, men and women are called to cooperate in transmitting life and in ruling over creation (cf. *Gen 1:26-28*).

The Pope of Rome has come to say this to you: there is a God who has thought of you and given you life. He loves you personally and he entrusts the world to you. It is he who stirs in you the thirst for freedom and the desire for knowledge. Allow me to profess before you with humility and pride the faith of Christians: Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God made

man two thousand years ago, came to reveal to us this truth through his person and his teaching. Only in the encounter with him, the Word made flesh, do we find the fullness of self-realization and happiness. Religion itself, without the experience of wondrous discovery of the Son of God and communion with him who became our brother, becomes a mere set of principles which are increasingly difficult to understand, and rules which are increasingly hard to accept.

5. Dear friends, you sense that *no earthly reality can fully satisfy you*. You are aware that openness to the world is not enough to satisfy your thirst for life and that freedom and peace can come only from Another who is infinitely greater than you, even though he is very close to you.

Realize that you are not your own masters, and open yourselves to the One who created you out of love and wants to make you worthy, free and good people. I encourage you to adopt this attitude of confident openness: learn *to listen in silence to the voice of God*, who speaks in the depths of every heart; build your lives on sure and solid foundations; do not be afraid of commitment and sacrifice, which today require a great investment of energies, but which are the guarantee of success tomorrow. Discover the truth about yourselves, and new horizons will not cease to open up before you.

Dear young people, perhaps these words of mine seem unusual to you. To me however they seem relevant and necessary for people today, who at times delude themselves that they are all-powerful, because they have made great scientific progress and managed in some sense to control the complex world of technology. But every individual has a heart: *intelligence may drive machines, but it is the heart that beats with life!* Give your heart the vital resources which it needs, allow God to enter your life: then your life will brighten with his divine light.

6. I came among you in order to offer you encouragement. We are at the beginning of a new millennium: it is an important time for the world, because in people's minds there is a growing conviction that *we cannot go on living divided as we are*. Unfortunately nowadays, when communications are becoming easier by the day, differences are often apparent in still more dramatic forms. I urge you to work for a more united world, and to do so in your everyday life, bringing to the task the creative contribution of a heart renewed.

Your country is counting on you and expects much from you in the years ahead: the path your country takes will be determined by your choices. *You will be the face of Kazakhstan tomorrow!* Be courageous, fear nothing, and you will not be disappointed.

May the Most High God protect you always, and may his blessing be upon each of you, upon your loved ones and upon every aspect of your lives!

At the end of the talk to young people at the University, the Holy Father offered these remarks in Italian.

I wish to express my profound appreciation for the meeting with the University. The University is always very close to me. I am happy to find one here because it is the foundation of national culture and of national development. Culture is the foundation of the identity of a people. Thank

you.

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