



The Holy See

JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE HOLY LAND (MARCH 20-26, 2000)

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

*Israel – Korazim, Mount of the Beatitudes
Friday, 24 March 2000*

“Consider your calling, brothers and sisters” (1 Cor 1:26).

1. Today these words of Saint Paul are addressed to all of us who have come here to the Mount of the Beatitudes. We sit on this hill like the first disciples, and we listen to Jesus. In the stillness, we hear his gentle and urgent voice, as gentle as this land itself and as urgent as a call to choose between life and death.

How many generations before us have been deeply moved by the Sermon on the Mount! How many young people down the centuries have gathered around Jesus to learn the words of eternal life, as you are gathered here today! How many young hearts have been inspired by the power of his personality and the compelling truth of his message! It is wonderful that you are here!

Thank you, Archbishop Boutros Mouallem, for your kind welcome. Please take my prayerful greeting to the whole Greek-Melkite community over which you preside. I extend my fraternal good wishes to the many Cardinals, to Patriarch Sabbah, and to many Bishops present and all the priests. I greet the members of the Latin community, including the Hebrew-speaking faithful, the Maronite community, the Syrian community, the Armenian community, the Chaldean community, and all our brothers and sisters of the other Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities. I extend a special word of thanks to our Muslim friends who are here, and to the members of the Jewish faith and to the Druse community.

This great gathering is like a rehearsal for the World Youth Day to be held in August in Rome! The young man who spoke promised that you will have another mountain, Mount Sinai. Young people of Israel, of the Palestinian Territories, of Jordan and Cyprus; young people of the Middle East, of Africa and Asia, of Europe, America and Oceania! With love and affection I greet each one of you!

2. The first to hear the Beatitudes of Jesus bore in their hearts the memory of another mountain – Mount Sinai. Just a month ago, I had the grace of going there, where God spoke to Moses and gave the Law, “written with the finger of God” (*Ex 31:18*) on the tablets of stone. These two mountains – Sinai and the Mount of the Beatitudes – offer us the roadmap of our Christian life and a summary of our responsibilities to God and neighbour. The Law and the Beatitudes together mark the path of the following of Christ and the royal road to spiritual maturity and freedom.

The Ten Commandments of Sinai may seem negative: “You will have no false gods before me; . . . do not kill; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness...” (*Ex 20:3, 13-16*). But in fact they are supremely positive. Moving beyond the evil they name, they point the way to *the law of love* which is the first and greatest of the commandments: “You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. . . You will love your neighbour as yourself” (*Mt 22:37, 39*). Jesus himself says that he came not to abolish but to fulfil the Law (cf. *Mt 5:17*). His message is new but it does not destroy what went before; it leads what went before to its fullest potential. Jesus teaches that the way of love brings the Law to fulfilment (cf. *Gal 5:14*). And he taught this enormously important truth on this hill here in Galilee.

3. “Blessed are you!”, he says, “all you who are poor in spirit, gentle and merciful, you who mourn, who care for what is right, who are pure in heart, who make peace, you who are persecuted! Blessed are you!” But the words of Jesus may seem strange. It is strange that Jesus exalts those whom the world generally regards as weak. He says to them, “Blessed are you who seem to be losers, because you are the true winners: the kingdom of heaven is yours!” Spoken by him who is “gentle and humble in heart” (*Mt 11:29*), these words present a challenge which demands a deep and abiding *metanoia* of the spirit, a great change of heart.

You young people will understand why this change of heart is necessary! Because you are aware of another voice within you and all around you, a contradictory voice. It is a voice which says, “Blessed are the proud and violent, those who prosper at any cost, who are unscrupulous, pitiless, devious, who make war not peace, and persecute those who stand in their way”. And this voice seems to make sense in a world where the violent often triumph and the devious seem to succeed. “Yes”, says the voice of evil, “they are the ones who win. Happy are they!”

4. Jesus offers a very different message. Not far from this very place Jesus called his first disciples, as he calls you now. His call has always demanded a choice between the two voices competing for your hearts even now on this hill, the choice between good and evil, between life and death. Which voice will the young people of the twenty-first century choose to follow? To put

your faith in Jesus means choosing to believe what he says, no matter how strange it may seem, and choosing to reject the claims of evil, no matter how sensible or attractive they may seem.

In the end, Jesus does not merely speak the Beatitudes. He lives the Beatitudes. He is the Beatitudes. Looking at him you will see what it means to be poor in spirit, gentle and merciful, to mourn, to care for what is right, to be pure in heart, to make peace, to be persecuted. This is why he has the right to say, "Come, follow *me!*" He does not say simply, "Do what I say". He says, "Come, follow *me!*"

You hear his voice on this hill, and you believe what he says. But like the first disciples at the Sea of Galilee, you must leave your boats and nets behind, and that is never easy – especially when you face an uncertain future and are tempted to lose faith in your Christian heritage. To be good Christians may seem beyond your strength in today's world. But Jesus does not stand by and leave you alone to face the challenge. He is always with you to transform your weakness into strength. Trust him when he says: "My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9)!

5. The disciples spent time with the Lord. They came to know and love him deeply. They discovered the meaning of what the Apostle Peter once said to Jesus: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). They discovered that the words of eternal life are the words of Sinai and the words of the Beatitudes. And this is the message which they spread everywhere.

At the moment of his Ascension Jesus gave his disciples a mission and this reassurance: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations . . . and behold I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). For two thousand years Christ's followers have carried out this mission. Now, at the dawn of the Third Millennium, it is your turn. It is your turn to go out into the world to preach the message of the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. When God speaks, he speaks of things which have the greatest importance for each person, for the people of the twenty-first century no less than those of the first century. The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes speak of truth and goodness, of grace and freedom: of all that is necessary to enter into Christ's Kingdom. Now it is your turn to be courageous apostles of that Kingdom!

Young people of the Holy Land, Young people of the world: answer the Lord with a heart that is willing and open! Willing and open, like the heart of the greatest daughter of Galilee, Mary, the Mother of Jesus. How did she respond? She said: "I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

O Lord Jesus Christ, in this place that you knew and loved so well, listen to these generous young hearts! Continue to teach these young people the truth of the Commandments and the Beatitudes!

Make them joyful witnesses to your truth and convinced apostles of your Kingdom! Be with them always, especially when following you and the Gospel becomes difficult and demanding! You will be their strength; you will be their victory!

O Lord Jesus, you have made these young people your friends: keep them for ever close to you!
Amen.

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