



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

HOLY MASS IN THE COURTYARD OF VADSTENA CASTLE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Vadstena (Sweden)
Saturday, 10 June 1989

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

[Text in Swedish]

1. Kära unga vänner!

Idag befinner vi oss i den heliga Birgittas stad. Birgitta, Sveriges skyddshelgon, är en kvinna som i sitt liv förenade giftermål, karriär och grundandet av en ny orden inom kyrkan. Birgittas systrar finns fortfarande i denna stad och i detta land.

Här i Vadstena har ni samlats, representanter för ungdomen i Norden. Det är till ungdomen jag vill rikta mig nu när jag kommit till slutet av min nordiska resa, jag vill vända mig speciellt till er som är den katolska kyrkans och andra kristna kyrkors framtid i dessa länder.

Jag vänder mig också speciellt till representanterna för Linköpings stift och framför allt till dess ungdomsgrupp. Er närvaro är ett bevis för den goda ekumeniska anda som råder bland er och som vi tackar Gud för. Jag vill också vända mig till representanterna för Vadstena och landshövdingen i länet.

2. The theme of your preparation for our meeting today has been *"From the Margin to the Centre"*.

Like young people everywhere, you are looking for what is central and important in life. Though you may be far from a geographical centre, and some of you may even be distant as regards faith and commitment to God, you have come here because you are sincerely searching for something worthwhile on which to base your lives. You want to establish firm roots and you realize that religious faith is an important part of the fuller life you yearn for.

Let me say straight away that I *understand your problems and your hopes*, even though your situation differs in many ways from what your parents and I myself experienced when we were young. When I was nineteen years old, World War II broke out, and there began a period of violence and senseless killing which profoundly affected my country. At times I worried about my own safety and that of my family and friends. Some of you have yourselves experienced hardship, persecution or threats to your lives before you came to your new homes. But the majority of you have lived in the peace, freedom and security that your countries offer. Still, you know that a high standard of living does not automatically bring happiness and inner peace.

Today, young friends, I want to speak to you about the joy and peace that can be found, not in having but in being, *in knowing a person* and in living according to his teaching. This person is *Jesus Christ*, our Lord and Friend. *He is the Centre*, the focal point, the one who draws us together *in love*.

3. In the Gospel of today's Mass, Jesus says the following words in the house of Zaccheus: "*Today salvation has come to this house*" (Luc. 19, 9). I wish to repeat these words of Jesus in this house, in the courtyard of Vadstena Castle. For all of us – both in Sweden and in Rome – this Castle is associated with *the memory of Saint Birgitta*. In her lifetime Sweden was a Catholic country.

Christianity was still new to the region. Living on the far edge of the Christian world of that time she felt called by God to renew the Church, which she saw was turning away from the centre, away from Christ. She went to Rome and there she worked bravely for the unity of the Church. She was a woman strong in character, and heroic in faith, hope and love.

Together with Saint Birgitta, I wish to mention some of the *first apostles and missionaries* in Scandinavia and elsewhere in Northern Europe, holy men and women who were living witnesses of Christ:

[Text in Swedish]

Ni ungdomar här i Sverige, ni kommer väl ihåg den heliga Birgitta, denna framstående kvinna, och hennes förebildliga dotter Katarina. Bada två gjorde en stor insats här i livet, ledda av sin kristna övertygelse. Även Sankt Ansgar tog sig till dessa trakter och sadde här trons första frön. Hans modiga missionsarbete har gett honom titeln "Nordens apostel". Kung Erik den nionde är er

skyddspatron och en symbol för nationens enhet. Dessa män och kvinnor är en del av det arv ni fatt ta emot. Det var i Evangelierna som de upptäckte det stora äventyret, och de lät det styra hela deras liv. Ma ni ga och göra likaledes, styrkta av deras förböner.

[Text in Finnish]

Tervehdin suomalaisia nuoria, jotka ovat tulleet tänne viettämään juhlahetkeä paavin kanssa. Pyhä Henrik, teidän suojeluspyhimyksenne, muistuttaa teitä siitä, että Kristuksen seuraaminen vaatii rohkeutta ja syvää luottamusta Jumalan rakastavaan läsnäoloon teidän elämässänne. Kun palaatte takaisin kotimaahanne, kertokaa perheillenne ja ystäville, että paavi tervehtii heitä ja rukoilee heidän puolestaan.

[Text in Danish]

Kere unge danskerev: Jeres traditionelle Skytshelgen er den elskede *Kong Knud*, men Danmark har også givet mange andre hellige mænd og kvinder. For mindre end et år siden havde jeg den store gglæde at *Saligkare* den store danske firske og Biskop Niels Steensen. Matte hans eksempel lære jer at leve i fuld fred i jeres katolske tro.

[Text in Norwegian]

Norske ungdommer, i deres land er minnet om *den hellige Olav* stadig levende, dere ma forvandle det eksempel på tro og hengivenhet som han gav til en aktuell kristen innsats. Elsk Gud av hele deres hjerte og forsøk a se ham i hver av deres brødre og søstre som trenger deres hjelp og solidaritet.

[Text in Icelandic]

Kaeru ungu íslensku vinir,
 bekkid bid aevisögu heilags Þorláks Þórhallssonar
 biskups í Skálholti?
 Hann var samlandi ykkar, bekkur fyrir laerdóm, gudraekni og kostgaefni.
 Hann lagdi mikid af mörkum til að baeta kristni meðal þjóðar sinnar.
 Það er sannf aering mín að þú munud ávallt finna
 styrk í kaerleikanum til Jesú Krists og
 og í kynnum ykkar af honum.

These holy men and women and many others recognized Christ as the centre of their lives even if at times they felt isolated or weighed down by burdens and problems. Dear young people: Christ is the centre of your lives too. *He is your hope, your model and your joy, the joy of your youth!*

“Today salvation has come to this house”. *The “today”* that witnessed the first stirrings of Christianity in these lands belongs to history, and subsequent events have distanced us from that time. However, in *God’s plan of salvation, that distant “today” of centuries ago has not passed into oblivion*; it lives on in God. It survives also in the Church, in the liturgy, in the word and in the Eucharist which is a “memorial” – a remembrance and at the same time a making present. When the Body and the Blood of Christ are made present we experience communion with all the Saints.

4. Truly “salvation has come to this house”. The word “*salvation*” means *God’s saving gift of himself* it is a divine self-giving which has to be accepted in the spiritual depths of each person and of all humanity. *The saints are a special proof* of God’s action in the world: in the world of the human spirit. Today, as always, we are invited to accept his divine action of love. By responding to God’s invitation with love, the saving and sanctifying work of his Spirit fills the human heart and from there extends to others. Is not the life of Saint Birgitta and so many other saints eloquent proof of this?

Dear young people of the North: you come here from different countries and from different backgrounds, but you all hear *a common call to be united in Christ*, who has given each of you some special gift or talent. In spite of differences, you are united in his name; you are members of a living body (Cfr. *1Cor. 12, 27*).

Today at Vadstena we are celebrating *our unity. It is unity in diversity*. It is authentically Nordic and it is authentically Catholic! With different talents and different hopes you are *one* in Jesus, one in the ideal of Christian service, one in pursuing justice, one in proclaiming the equal human dignity of all people.

5. A special characteristic of the young people of our time is *openness* – openness to the great cultural diversity of our world. But you must also *be open to Christ*. Just as he did in the case of the rich young man in the Gospel (Cfr. *Marc. 10, 17ss*). Jesus looks on you who are rich in talents and material things and *he looks on you with love*. He asks you to be completely open to him. He will never disappoint you!

At this Mass I will *present a cross* to a representative from each of your countries as an expression of my hope in you – *in all of you* – who truly want to follow Christ. In doing this, I say with all the affection I hold for young people: *keep close to Christ; walk in the footsteps of your Saint*. You know that you will never find true happiness by being closed in on yourselves.

There is no room for selfishness or apathy in your lives. The Cross speaks a language of giving, and you young people have so much to offer, so much to give! By opening yourselves to Christ you will learn the meaning of the Cross. On Calvary, Christ gave himself as the complete and perfect gift and he asks you to give likewise of yourselves. *The road to Calvary is the road that leads to the Centre*, that will lead you to holiness. It is a road which everyone is called to travel

because *the vocation to holiness is universal*. It excludes no one (Cfr. *1Cor.* 12, 11).

6. *What does it mean to be holy?* In order to answer the question, we must return for a moment to the house of Zaccheus in today's Gospel. Zaccheus was a tax collector, a person who did not enjoy a good reputation in the society of his day. He knew what it meant to live on the margin, so to speak. But when he received Christ into his house *he understood the gift* being offered to him and he rejoiced saying: "Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold" (*Luc.* 19, 8). If Zaccheus was previously a sinner, then these words are *proof of a real conversion* on his part. At the same time, they express to us what is important for the Christian life: they help us to understand what it means "to be" in Christ, "to live in grace".

Sometimes the Christian life is presented mainly in terms of keeping the *commandments of God* and the laws of the Church, and of observing our obligations towards the State. All this is true, but when we consider the matter more deeply, *another dimension* opens up before us: the Christian life consists in accepting the Gift of God, the Holy Spirit, and in *responding to the Gift* with a gift of our own. We are talking here of an "*exchange of gifts*". Yet, these gifts are not equal in value. What we receive from God in Christ is infinitely greater than anything we can give him in return. We have received everything from God, and there is only one language in which to thank him, *the language of giving*.

7. My dear young friends: today I am returning to Rome, to the centre of the Church, the same Church of which you are the beloved sons and daughters, here in the North! As I say good-bye to you, I wish to leave you a gift – not merely a pleasant memory of this meeting but something more. I wish *to give you my love, to leave you my heart!* And, if I may, I wish to take back to Rome your gift to the Church, your gift to the world – which is *your love for Christ and your fidelity to his Gospel*.

Young people of the North: remember that the richest meaning of life lies *in giving*. Remember that we are willing to give in proportion as we love, and when love is perfect, the gift is complete.

Yes, dear young people, *remember the Gift!* Amen.

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