



The Holy See

14th WORLD YOUTH DAY

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Palm Sunday, 28 March 1999

1. "He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8).

The celebration of Holy Week begins with the "*Hosanna!*" of Palm Sunday and culminates in the "*Crucify him!*" of Good Friday. But this is not a contradiction; rather it is the heart of the mystery the liturgy wants to proclaim: Jesus willingly gave himself up to his passion; he did not find himself crushed by superior forces (cf. Jn 10:18). It was he himself who, in discerning the Father's will, understood that his hour had come and he accepted it with the free obedience of the Son and with infinite love for mankind.

Jesus brought our sins to the Cross and our sins brought Jesus to the Cross: he was crushed for our iniquities (cf. Is 53:5). The prophet said in reply to David, who was seeking the one responsible for the deed Nathan had recounted to him: "*You are the man!*" (2 Sm 12:7). The Word of God gives us the same answer as we wonder what caused Jesus' death: "*You are the man!*". Indeed, Jesus' trial and passion are repeated in the world today and renewed by every person who abandons himself to sin and can only prolong the cry: "*Not this man, but Barabbas! Crucify him!*".

2. Looking at Jesus in his passion, we see humanity's sufferings as well as our personal histories reflected as in a mirror. Although there was no sin in Christ, he took upon himself what man could not endure: injustice, evil, sin, hatred, suffering and finally death. In Christ, the humiliated and suffering Son of Man, God loves everyone, forgives everyone and confers the ultimate meaning on human life.

We are here this morning to receive this message from the Father who loves us. We can ask ourselves: what does he want of us? He wants us to look at Jesus and be willing to follow him in his passion in order to share in his Resurrection. At this moment we recall Jesus' words to his

disciples: "The cup that I drink, you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized" (Mk 10:39). "If any man would come after me, let him ... take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 16:24-25).

The "*hosanna*" and the "*crucify him*" thus become the way to measure how one conceives of life, faith and Christian witness: we must not be discouraged by defeat nor exalted by victory because, as with Christ, the only victory is fidelity to the mission received from the Father. "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name" (Phil 2:9).

3. The first part of today's celebration let us relive Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. On that fateful day, who realized that Jesus of Nazareth, the Teacher who spoke with authority (cf. Lk 4:32), was the Messiah, the son of David, the awaited and promised Saviour? It was the people, and among them the most enthusiastic and active were the young, who thus in a way became the Messiah's "heralds". They understood that it was the hour of God, the longed-for and blessed hour awaited by Israel for centuries, and, waving palm and olive branches, they proclaimed Jesus' triumph.

In continuity with the spirit of that event we have now been celebrating World Youth Day for 14 years, when young people, together with their Pastors, joyfully profess and proclaim their faith in Christ, question themselves about their deepest aspirations, experience ecclesial communion and confirm and renew their commitment to the urgent task of the new evangelization.

They seek the Lord in the heart of the paschal mystery. The mystery of the glorious Cross becomes for them the great gift and sign of a mature faith. With his Cross, the universal symbol of Love, Christ leads the world's young people in the great "assembly" of the kingdom of God, who transforms hearts and societies.

How can we not give thanks to the Lord for the World Youth Days, which began in 1985 precisely in St Peter's Square and which, following the "Holy Year Cross", have traveled the world like a long pilgrimage towards the new millennium? How can we not praise God, who reveals the secrets of his kingdom to the young (cf. Mt 11:25), for all the good fruits and Christian witness which this successful initiative has produced?

Today's World Youth Day is the last in this century and in this millennium before the great gathering of the Jubilee: it thus has special significance. May the contribution of all make it a powerful experience of faith and ecclesial communion.

4. The young people of Jerusalem shouted: "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*". Young people, my friends, do you too want to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, the Saviour, the Teacher, the Leader, the Friend of your life, as your peers did on that day so long ago? Remember: he alone

knows deeply what is in every human being (cf. Jn 2:25); he alone teaches us to be open to the mystery and to call God our Father, "Abba"; he alone makes us capable of selfless love for our fellow human beings, accepted and recognized as "brothers" and "sisters".

Dear young people, go joyfully to meet Christ, who gladdens your youth. See him and meet him by clinging to his word and his mysterious presence in the Church and the sacraments. Live with him in fidelity to his Gospel: demanding, it is true, but at the same time the only source of hope and true happiness. Love him in the face of your brother who needs justice, help, friendship and love.

On the eve of the third millennium, this is your hour. May the contemporary world open new paths before you and call you to be bearers of faith and joy, as expressed by the palm and olive branches you are holding today, symbols of a new springtime of grace, beauty, goodness and peace. The Lord Jesus is with you and is accompanying you!

5. Every year during Holy Week, the Church enters into the paschal mystery with trepidation, as she commemorates the Lord's Death and Resurrection.

It is precisely through the paschal mystery which gave her birth that she can proclaim to the world, in the words and deeds of her children: "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:11).

Yes! Jesus Christ is Lord! He is the Lord of time and history, the Redeemer and the Saviour of man. Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna!

Amen.

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