



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE ITALIAN YOUTH

St. Peter's Basilica

Wednesday, 8 November 1978

Welcome to you, dear boys and girls, and dear young people.

I greet you with my whole heart and I tell you that you bring me particularly great joy today with your numerous and affectionate presence. One is always happy among the young.

The Pope wishes well to everyone, to each man and to all men, but he has a preference for the youngest, because they had a preferential place in the heart of Christ, who wished to remain with the children (Mk 10: 14; Lk 18: 16) and to talk to the young. He addressed his call to the young particularly (Mt 19:21), and John, the youngest Apostle, was his favourite.

So I thank you heartily for coming to visit me, bringing me the precious gift of your youth, your eyes full of joy and vitality, and your faces shining with ideals.

At this first meeting I wish to express to you, in addition to the intensity of my feelings of affection, my hope. Yes, my hope, because you are the promise of tomorrow. You are the hope of the Church and society.

Contemplating you, I think with trepidation and with trust of what is in store for you in life and of what you will be in the world of tomorrow, and I wish to leave you, as a viaticum for your lives, three thoughts:

- look for Jesus,
- love Jesus,
- bear witness to Jesus.

1) In the first place, "look for Jesus!"

It is less possible than ever today to stop at a Christian faith that is superficial or of a sociological type; times, as you well know, have changed. The increase in culture, the continual influence of the mass media, knowledge of past and present human events, increased sensitivity and a greater demand for certainty and clarity on fundamental truths, the massive presence in society and in culture of atheistic, agnostic, and even anti-Christian conceptions, call for a personal faith: a faith, that is, sought with longing for the truth, and then put completely into practice in life.

That is to say, it is necessary to arrive at the clear and certain conviction of the truth of one's Christian faith, namely, in the first place, the historicity and divinity of Christ and the mission of the Church willed and founded by him.

When one is really convinced that Jesus is the Word Incarnate and is still present in the Church, then one accepts his "word" completely, because it is a divine word which does not deceive, which does not contradict itself, and which gives us the true and only meaning of life and eternity. He alone, in fact, has words of eternal life! He alone is the way, the truth and the life!

So I repeat to you: look for Jesus, by reading and studying the Gospel, by reading some good books; look for Jesus by taking advantage in particular of the religious instruction lesson at school, of the catechisms, and of the meetings in your parishes.

To look for Jesus personally, with the eagerness and joy of discovering the truth, gives deep inner satisfaction and great spiritual strength in order then to put into practice what he demands, even though it costs sacrifice.

2) In the second place, I tell you, love Jesus!

Jesus is not an idea, a sentiment, a memory! Jesus is a "person", always alive and present with us!

— Love Jesus present in the Eucharist. He is present in a sacrificial way in Holy Mass, which renews the Sacrifice of the Cross. To go to Mass means going to Calvary to meet him, our Redeemer.

He comes to us in Holy Communion and remains present in the tabernacles of our churches, for he is our friend; he is everyone's friend and wishes particularly to be the friend and prop of you boys and girls on your way through life; you need confidence and friendship so much.

— Love Jesus present in the Church by means of his priests; present in the family by means of your parents and those who love you.

— Love Jesus especially in those who are suffering in any way: physically, morally, spiritually. Let it be your commitment and programme to love your neighbour, discovering Christ's face in him.

3) And finally, I tell you, bear witness to Jesus with your courageous faith and your innocence.

It is no use complaining of the wickedness of the times. As St Paul wrote, we must overcome evil by doing good (Rom 12:21). The world esteems and respects the courage of ideas and the strength of virtues. Do not be afraid to refuse words, acts, and attitudes which are not in conformity with Christian ideals. Be courageous in rejecting what destroys your innocence or wilts the freshness of your love for Christ.

To seek, love and bear witness to Jesus! This is your commitment; these are the instructions I leave you! By doing so, not only will you keep real joy in your lives, but also you will benefit the whole of society, which needs, above all, consistency with the evangelical message.

This is what I wish you from "the bottom of my heart, while I willingly bless you, all your dear ones, and those who are engaged in your formation.

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