



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF YOUTH

MASS WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL FORUM

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

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1. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (*Jer 1: 5*). The words God addressed to the prophet Jeremiah affect us personally. They remind us of God's plan for each of us. He knows us individually because he has chosen and loved us from eternity, entrusting to each of us a specific vocation within the general plan of salvation.

Dear young people of the International Forum, I am pleased to welcome you together with Cardinal James Francis Stafford, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and his staff. I greet you affectionately. Quite rightly you feel personally challenged by the prophet's words. Indeed, many of you already hold a position of responsibility in your local Church and many others will be called to assume one. It is therefore important that you bring with you the rich human, spiritual and ecclesial experience of this forum. You are sent out to proclaim to others the words of life you have received: they will act and take root in you the more you share them with others. Dear young people, do not doubt God's love for you! He has reserved for you a place in his heart and a mission in the world. The first reaction can be fear or doubt. These are sentiments which Jeremiah felt before you: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (*Jer 1: 6*). The task seems immense, because it assumes the dimensions of society and the world. But do not forget that when the Lord calls, he also provides the necessary strength and grace to answer his call. Do not be afraid to accept your responsibilities: the Church needs you, she needs your commitment and generosity; the Pope needs you and, at the beginning of this new millennium, he is asking you to take the Gospel on the paths of the world.

2. In the responsorial psalm, we heard a question which echoes with special timeliness in today's polluted world: "How can a young man keep his way pure?" (*Ps 118: 9*). We also heard the simple, incisive reply: "By guarding it according to your word" (*ibid.*). Thus it is necessary to ask to acquire a taste for the Word of God and for the joy to be able to witness to something that is greater than us: "In the way of your testimonies I delight..." (*Ps 119: 14*). Joy is also born of the

knowledge that countless other people in the world accept, like us, the "Lord's commandments" and make them the substance of their lives. How rich is the Church's universality, her "catholicity"! What diversity according to the countries, rites, spirituality, associations, movements and communities, what beauty, and at the same what deep communion in the common values and shared attachment to Jesus, the Lord! Living and praying together, you have perceived that the diversity of your ways of receiving and expressing the faith neither alienates you from one another nor makes you rivals. It simply highlights the riches of that one, extraordinary gift of Revelation, for which the world has so great a need.

3. In the Gospel we have just heard, the Risen One asks Peter the question that will determine his whole life: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (*Jn* 21: 16). Jesus does not ask him what his talents, gifts and skills are. Nor does he ask the one who had just denied him whether from now on he will be faithful to him, whether he will stand firm. He asks him the only thing that matters, the one thing that can give a vocation its foundation: do you love me? Today Christ is asking each of you the same question: do you love me? He is not asking you whether you know how to speak to crowds, whether you can direct an organization or manage an estate. He is asking you to love him. All the rest will ensue. In fact, walking in Jesus' footsteps is not immediately expressed in things to do or say, but first of all in loving him, in staying with him, in totally accepting him into one's life. Today you are giving Jesus' question a sincere answer. *Some will be able to say with Peter*: "Lord; you know that I love you!" (*Jn* 21: 16). Others will say: "Lord, you know how I would like to love you; teach me to love you, to be able to follow you". The important thing is to stay on the path, to continue the journey without losing sight of the goal, until the day when you will be able to say with all your heart: "You know that I love you!".

4. Dear young people, love Christ and love the Church! Love Christ as he loves you. Love the Church as Christ loves her. Do not forget that true love sets no conditions; it does not calculate or complain but simply loves. How could you in fact be responsible for an inheritance which you only partly accepted? How can one share in building something that one does not love with all one's heart?

May communion in the Body and Blood of the Lord help everyone grow in love for Jesus and for his Body, which is the Church.

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