



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE GATHERED IN THE VATICAN BASILICA**

14 March 1979

*Dear Boys and Girls!
Beloved Young People!*

I see you here, so numerous and so full of life, that I feel really amazed and moved! Thank you for your visit! I thank each of you, your parents, your teachers and educators! I greet everyone with special affection, and I intend to clasp you all to my Father's heart!

I wish to recall particularly the pilgrimage of the Young Ecclesial Groups of Catholic Action of the Diocese of Rieti, organized by the Diocesan Evangelization Centre, with one thousand three hundred children and adolescents, and the pilgrimage of the pupils of Montecatini Terme, in the Diocese of Pescia, accompanied by their Bishop, Monsignor Giovanni Bianchi; these pupils built a grand crib for last Christmas.

You have come to Rome also to see the Pope, to hear the word of the Vicar of Christ, to receive his Blessing. And in your lives, which I hope will be long and beautiful, you will certainly always remember this meeting in the Vatican Basilica, because certain events are never forgotten, owing to their importance. But I would like you to remember too what I now wish to say to you, in this time of Lent.

You know that Lent is the liturgical time that prepares us for Holy Easter and lasts only forty days a year. Actually, however, we must always strain towards God, that is, be converted continually. Lent must leave a strong and lasting mark on our lives. It must renew in us awareness of our union with Jesus, who speaks to us of the necessity of conversion and indicates to us the way to reach it.

The first of the ways indicated by Jesus is that of prayer: "they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Lk 18:1).

Why must we pray?

1.—*We must pray first and foremost because we are believers.*

Prayer is in fact the recognition of our limitation and our dependence: we come from God, we belong to God and we return to God! We cannot, therefore, but abandon ourselves to him, our Creator and Lord, with full and complete confidence. Some people affirm and try to prove that the universe is eternal and that the whole order we see in the universe, including man with his intelligence and freedom, is only the work of chance. Scientific studies and the deeply-felt experience of so many honest persons say, however, that these ideas, though affirmed and even taught, are not proved and always leave those who uphold them confused and restless, because they understand very well that an object in movement must be pushed from outside! They understand very well that chance cannot produce the perfect order that exists in the universe and in man! Everything is admirably ordained, from the tiny particles that compose the atom to the galaxies that revolve in space! Everything indicates a plan, which comprises every manifestation of nature, from inert matter to man's thought! Where there is order, there is intelligence; and where there is a supreme order, there is Supreme Intelligence, whom we call "God", and whom Jesus revealed to us as Love and taught us to call Father!

Thus, reflecting on the nature of the universe and on our own life, we understand and recognize that we are creatures, limited and yet sublime, who owe their existence to the Infinite Majesty of the Creator!

Prayer, therefore, is first of all an act of intelligence, a feeling of humility and gratitude, an attitude of trust and abandonment to him who gave us life out of love.

Prayer is a mysterious but real dialogue with God, a dialogue of confidence and love.

2.—*We, however, are Christians, and therefore we must pray as Christians.*

For the Christian, in fact, prayer acquires a particular characteristic, which completely changes its innermost nature and innermost value.

The Christian is a disciple of Jesus; he is one who really believes that Jesus is the Word Incarnate; the Son of God who came among us on this earth.

As a man, the life of Jesus was a continual prayer, a continual act of worship and love of the Father, and since the maximum expression of prayer is sacrifice, the summit of Jesus' prayer is

the Sacrifice of the Cross, anticipated with the Eucharist at the Last Supper and handed down with Holy Mass throughout the centuries.

Therefore, the Christian knows that his prayer is Jesus; every prayer of his starts from Jesus; it is he who prays in us, with us, for us.

All those who believe in God, pray; but the Christian prays in Jesus Christ: Christ is our prayer!

The greatest prayer is Holy Mass, because in Holy Mass Jesus himself is really present, renewing the Sacrifice of the Cross; but every prayer is precious, especially the "Our Father", which he himself, willed to teach to the Apostles and to all men on earth.

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