



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

15th WORLD YOUTH DAY

***THE HOLY FATHER'S ADDRESS
AT THE WELCOMING CEREMONY***

St. Peter's Square, Tuesday, 15 August 2000

FIRST PART

1. Dear young people of the Fifteenth World Youth Day, dear brother priests, men and women religious, and teachers who are here with you, welcome to Rome! I thank Cardinal James Francis Stafford for his warm words of presentation. With him I greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini, and the other Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops present. I also thank the two young people who so well expressed the feelings of all of you, gathered here from so many parts of the world.

After stopping at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, the Cathedral of Rome, to greet the young people of Rome and Italy, I welcome all of you with joy. The Roman and Italian young people join me in offering you a most fraternal and heartfelt welcome.

Your faces bring to mind, and in a way make present here, all the young people that it has been my privilege to meet on my apostolic journeys throughout the world in these years at the end of the millennium. To each of you I say: Peace be with you!

Peace be with you, young people who have come from Africa:

d'Algérie,
de Angola,
du Bénin,
du Burkina Faso,
du Burundi,

du Cameroun,
de Cabo Verde,
du Tchad,
du Congo,
de Côte d'Ivoire,
d'Egypte,
from Eritrea,
du Gabon,
from Gambia,
from Ghana,
de la République de Guinée,
de Gibuti,
da Guiné Bissau,
from Kenya,
des Comores,
de l'Île Maurice,
from Lesotho,
from Liberia,
de Libye,
de Madagascar,
from Malawi,
du Mali,
du Maroc,
de Moçambique,
from Namibia,
from Nigeria,
de la République Centrafricaine,
de la République Démocratique du Congo,
du Rwanda,
du Sénégal,
from the Seychelles,
from Sierra Leone,
from South Africa,
from Sudan,
from Swaziland,
from Tanzania,
du Togo,
from Uganda,
from Zambia,
from Zimbabwe.....

Peace be with you, young people who have come from the Americas:

from the Antilles,
de Argentina,
from the Bahamas,
from Belize,
de Bolivia,
do Brasil,
from Canada,
de Chile,
de Colombia,
de Costa Rica,
de Cuba,
del Ecuador,
de El Salvador,
de Guatemala,
d'Haiti,
de Honduras,
de México,
de Nicaragua,
de Panama,
del Paraguay,
de Perú,
de Puerto Rico,
de la República Dominicana,
from Saint Lucia,
from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines,
from the United States of America,
from Suriname,
del Uruguay,
de Venezuela. ...

Peace be with you, young people who have come from Asia:

from Saudi Arabia,
from Armenia,
from Bahrein,
from Bangladesh,
du Cambodge,
from South Korea,
from the United Arabs Emirates,
from the Philippines,
from Georgia,

from Japan,
from Jordan,
from Hong Kong,
from India,
from Indonesia,
de l'Iraq,
from Israel,
from Kazakhstan,
from Kyrgyzstan,
du Laos,
du Liban,
from Malaysia,
from Mongolia,
from Myanmar,
from Nepal,
from Oman,
from Pakistan,
from Qatar,
from Singapore,
de Syrie,
from Sri Lanka,
from Taiwan,
from the Palestinian Territories,
from Thailand,
de Macau,
de Timor Leste,
from Turkmenistan,
from Uzbekistan
et du Viet Nam....

Peace be with you, young people who have come from Europe:

dall'Albania,
aus Österreich,
de Belgique,
de Biélorussie,
from Bosnia-Herzegovina,
from Bulgaria,
from Cyprus,
dalla Croazia,
from Denmark,
aus Deutschland,

from England,
de España,
from Estonia,
from Finland,
de France,
from Greece,
from Ireland,
dall'Italia,
from Latvia,
aus Lichtenstein,
from Lithuania,
du Luxembourg,
dalla Macedonia,
from Malta,
from Moldova,
from the Netherlands,
from Norway,
z Polski,
de Portugal,
de la Principauté de Monaco,
dalla Repubblica Ceca,
dalla Repubblica di San Marino,
dalla Romania,
dalla Russia,
from Scotland,
dalla Slovacchia,
dalla Slovenia,
de Suisse,
from Sweden,
from Turkey,
from Ukraine,
from Hungary,
from Yugoslavia.....

Peace be with you, young people who have come from Oceania:

from Australia,
from Guam,
from New Zealand,
from Papua New Guinea.....

With special affection I greet the group of young people from countries where hatred, violence and war bring suffering to

the life of entire populations. Thanks to the solidarity shown by all the youth here present, they have been able to come here this evening. To them I say, in your name as well, that in our gathering we are close to them as brothers and sisters; with all of you, I ask for them and for their people a time of peace in justice and freedom.

I mention too the young people of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities who are here this evening with some of their Pastors: may the World Youth Day be another occasion for us to know each other and to implore together from the Spirit of the Lord the gift of the perfect unity of all Christians!

Dear friends from the five Continents, I am happy to inaugurate with you this evening the *Jubilee of Young People*. Pilgrims in the footsteps of the Apostles, imitate their faith.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

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SECOND PART

1. Dear friends who have travelled so many miles in so many ways to come to Rome, to the Tombs of the Apostles, let me begin by putting to you a question: what have you come here to find? You have come to celebrate your Jubilee: the Jubilee of the young Church. Yours is not just any journey: if you have set out on pilgrimage it is not just for the sake of recreation or an interest in culture. Well then, let me ask again: what have you come in search of? Or rather, who have you come here to find?

There can be only one answer to that: you have come in search of Jesus Christ! But Jesus Christ has first gone in search of you. To celebrate the Jubilee can have no other meaning than that of celebrating and meeting Jesus Christ, the Word who took flesh and came to dwell among us.

The Prologue of Saint John's Gospel, which has just now been proclaimed, are in a sense Jesus's "visiting card". These words invite us to fix our eyes on the mystery that he is. These words hold a special message for you, dear young people: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (*Jn 1:1-2*).

Indicating to us the Word who is one in being with the Father, the eternal Word generated as God from God and light from light, the Evangelist takes us to the heart of the divine life, but also to the wellspring of the world. This Word in fact is the beginning of all creation: "all things were made through him, and without him was not made anything that was made" (*Jn 1:3*). The whole created world, before ever it came to be, was in the mind of God and was willed by him in an eternal plan of love. Therefore, if we look at the world in depth, allowing ourselves to marvel at the wisdom and beauty which God has poured out upon it, we can see in it a reflection of the Word, which biblical revelation unveils for us fully in the face of Jesus of Nazareth. In a sense, creation is the first "revelation" of him.

2. The Prologue continues with these words: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the

darkness, but the darkness did not accept it" (*Jn* 1:4-5). For the Evangelist, the light is life, and death, the enemy of life, is darkness. Through the Word, all life appeared on the earth, and in the Word this life has its perfect fulfilment.

Identifying light and life, John is thinking of the life that is not just the biological life of the body but the life which comes from sharing in the very life of Christ. The Evangelist says: "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world" (*Jn* 1:9). This enlightenment was given to humanity on the night of Bethlehem, when the eternal Word of the Father took a body from the Virgin Mary, became man and was born into the world. From that time onwards, every person who by faith shares in the mystery of that event experiences some measure of that enlightenment.

Christ himself, announcing that he was the light of the world, said one day: "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become children of light" (*Jn* 12:36). This is a summons which the followers of Christ pass on to one another from generation to generation, trying to answer it in everyday life. Referring to this summons, Saint Paul writes: "Walk always as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true" (*Eph* 5:8-9).

3. The heart of John's Prologue is the proclamation that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us" (1:14). A little before this, the Evangelist had declared: "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God" (cf. 1:10-12). Dear friends, are you among those who have accepted Christ? Your presence here is already an answer to that question. You have come to Rome, in this Jubilee of the two thousandth anniversary of Christ's birth, in order to open your hearts to the power of life which is in him. You have come here to rediscover the truth about creation and to recover a sense of wonder at the beauty and the richness of the created world. You have come to renew within yourselves the awareness of the dignity of man, created in the image and likeness of God.

"We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (*Jn* 1:14). A contemporary philosopher has emphasized the significance of death in human life, to the point of describing man as "a being made for death". The Gospel, on the contrary, makes it clear that man is a being made for life. Every person is called by God to share in the divine life. Man is a being called to glory.

These days, which you will spend together in Rome at the World Youth Day, should help each of you to see more clearly the glory which belongs to the Son of God and to which we have been called in him by the Father. For this to happen, your faith in Christ must grow and be strengthened.

4. I wish to bear witness to this faith here before all of you, young friends, at the tomb of the Apostle Peter, to whom the Lord wished me to succeed as Bishop of Rome. Beginning with myself, today I wish to tell you that I believe firmly in Jesus Christ our Lord. Yes, I believe, and I make my own the words of the Apostle Paul: "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (*Gal* 2:20).

I remember how as a child, in my own family, I learned to pray and trust in God. I remember the life in the parish that I attended in Wadowice, as well as the parish of Saint Stanislaus Kostka, in Debniki in Kraków, where I received my basic formation in Christian living. I cannot forget the experience of the war and the years of work in a factory. My priestly vocation came to its full maturity during the Second World War, during the occupation of Poland. The tragedy of the War

gave a particular colouring to the gradual maturing of my vocation in life. In these circumstances, I perceived a light shining ever more brightly within me: the Lord wanted me to be a priest! I remember with feeling that moment in my life when, on the morning of 1 November 1946, I was ordained a priest.

My *Credo* continues in my present service to the Church. On 16 October 1978, after my election to the See of Peter, when I was asked "Do you accept?", I answered "With obedience in faith to Christ, my Lord, and trusting in the Mother of Christ and of the Church, no matter what the difficulties, I accept" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 2). From that time on, I have tried to carry out my mission, drawing light and strength every day from the faith that binds me to Christ.

But my faith, like that of Peter and like the faith of each one of you, is not just my doing, my attachment to the truth of Christ and the Church. It is essentially and primarily the work of the Holy Spirit, a gift of his grace. The Lord gives his Spirit to me as he gives him to you, to help us say: "I believe", and then to use us to bear witness to him in every corner of the world.

5. Dear friends, why do I want to offer you this personal testimony at the beginning of your Jubilee? I do so in order to make it clear that the journey of faith is part of everything that happens in our lives. God is at work in the concrete and personal situations of each one of us: through them, sometimes in truly mysterious ways, the Word "made flesh", who came to live among us, makes himself present to us.

Dear young people, do not let the time that the Lord gives you go by as though everything happened by chance. Saint John has told us that everything has been made in Christ. Therefore, believe unshakeably in him. He directs the history of individuals as well as the history of humanity. Certainly Christ respects our freedom, but in all the joyful or bitter circumstances of life he never stops asking us to believe in him, in his word, in the reality of the Church, in eternal life!

Don't ever think then that you are unknown to him, as if you were just a number in an anonymous crowd. Each one of you is precious to Christ, he knows you personally, he loves you tenderly, even when you are not aware of it.

6. Dear friends, who face the third millennium with all the ardour of your youth, give your full attention to the opportunity offered to you by World Youth Day in this Church of Rome, which today more than ever is your Church. Let yourselves be moulded by the Holy Spirit. Spend time in prayer, letting the Spirit speak to your hearts. To pray means to give some of your time to Christ, to entrust yourselves to him, to listen in silence to his word, to make it echo in your hearts.

Treat these days as though they were a great week of spiritual exercises; look for times of silence, prayer and recollection. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your minds, ask him for the gift of a living faith which will forever give meaning to your lives, joining them to Christ, the Word made flesh.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who gave birth to Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit, *Mary Salus Populi Romani* and Mother of all peoples, and Saints Peter and Paul, and all the other Saints and Martyrs of this Church and of all the Churches to which you belong, sustain you on your journey.

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