



The Holy See

YOUTH MEETING AT THE GREEK-CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL - DAMASCUS

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

May 7, 2001

My Dear Friends,

When the Cardinals elected me to the Chair of St Peter, I spoke to young people and said: "You are my hope, the hope of the Church".

After 23 years, I repeat with great conviction: you are my hope, the hope of the Church! Today I add: you are the hope of Syria!

The hope of peace, of unity, of the civilization of love, you are the hope.

Dear Young People,

1. "Peace be with you!" I greet you this evening with the Easter greeting of the Risen Lord to his disciples. I am happy to meet you at the conclusion of my pilgrimage in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul in Syria. I thank the young people who welcomed me in your name. Although you belong to a variety of Christian confessions, all of you wish to listen to the voice of the one Lord and to journey together towards him. May your presence here be a sign of your commitment to work together, with Christ's grace, in promoting full visible unity between all Christians!

I cordially greet His Beatitude Patriarch Gregoire III and I thank him for welcoming me in the name of the Bishops of the Greek-Melkite Patriarchate of Antioch. In this Cathedral I also greet with fraternal affection the venerable Patriarch Maximos Hakim, who joins us in prayer from his residence in Beirut.

2. The passage of the Letter to Timothy which we have just heard is a source of encouragement for you: "If we have died with him, we shall also live with him. If we hold out to the end, we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him, he will deny us. If we are unfaithful, he will remain faithful, for he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim 2:11-13).

Dear young people, you are going through a time of life filled with questions and uncertainties. Yet Christ is calling you and awakening in you a desire to make your life something magnificent and beautiful, a determination to pursue high ideals, a refusal to be satisfied with mediocrity, and the courage to make commitments, with patience and perseverance.

3. In order to be able to respond to this call, strive constantly to grow in closeness to the Lord of life. Remain faithfully in his presence through prayer, knowledge of the Scriptures, the celebration of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In this way you will build yourselves up and strengthen what the Apostle Paul calls "your inner self". An intimate relationship with the Lord is also the secret behind a fruitful life, a life grounded in what is essential for every human being: namely, dialogue with God, our Creator and our Saviour. In this way, your life will not be superficial, but profoundly rooted in the spiritual, moral and human values which sustain our whole being and our whole existence. Remember that you cannot be a Christian if you reject the Church founded on Jesus Christ; you cannot be called believers unless you put your faith into practice; and you cannot call yourselves spiritual men and women unless you allow yourselves to be moulded by God, in humble and joyful openness to his Spirit and in docility to his will. Your life's centre of gravity must be in God.

Only then you will be able to make choices and to undertake generous commitments. Today you may be asking questions like: "What road should I take?", "What should I do with my life?", "Whom should I follow?". Don't be afraid to take time to reflect with older people, in order to consider seriously the choices you have to make, choices which involve listening to Jesus Christ as he invites you to follow him along the demanding path of a courageous witness to values worth living for and worth giving your lives for: values such as truth, faith, human dignity, unity, peace and love. With the help of Christ and his Church, you will develop each day into men and women who are free and responsible for their own lives, actively involved in the life of their Church, in strengthening relationships between their religious and social communities, and in building an ever more just and fraternal society.

4. The Lord Jesus asks his disciples to be *signs* in the midst of the world, visible and credible agents of his saving presence wherever they live and work. It is not merely in words but above all by a particular *lifestyle*, one marked by a free heart and a creative spirit, that you will help the young people of your generation to discover that your joy and the source of your happiness is Christ. Do not separate your faith from your daily life and your daily life from your faith, as so many people do today. The life and the whole being of each Christian must be unified around a central axis: fidelity to Jesus Christ. In this way each Christian will constantly be able to repeat with the

Apostle: "I know him in whom I have believed" (2 Tim 1:12).

5. Like the pagans who asked Philip, saying: "We wish want to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21) or the man in Paul's vision who said: "Come and help us" (cf. Acts 16:9), people today are seeking, however hesitantly, to know the truth. Often, even when they are not fully aware of it, they wish to know Christ the one Saviour. Dear young people, I invite you today to *proclaim* Jesus Christ with courage and fidelity, above all to the young people of your generation. And not only to *proclaim* Jesus Christ, but also and even more importantly, to *help others to see him*. In seeing the way you live, your contemporaries ought to wonder what is your inspiration and the source of your joy. Then you can say to them: "Come and see". The Church is counting on you to make Christ better known and better loved. Like the Apostles and the women on Easter morning, you have met the Risen Lord and have been given a mission (cf. Jn 20:11-21,25), which is the mission of all the baptized. Love inspires us to pass on this good news, which has the power to transform individual lives and the future of the world.

6. Dear young people, the future of Christianity in your country depends on better relations and closer cooperation between the Churches and Ecclesial Communities present here. You know this and you are already working on it. The fellowship which you are happily experiencing in everyday life, in your neighbourhoods, in your schools or training centres, and in your groups or your youth activities, is important to you. It is preparing you even now to contemplate together your future as Christians in Syria. Strengthen the things that unite you. Meditate together on the Gospel, call upon the Holy Spirit, listen to the testimony of the Apostles, pray with joy and thanksgiving. Love your ecclesial communities. They have handed on to you the faith and the testimony for which your forefathers often payed a high price. They are counting on your courage and your holiness, which are the foundation of all true reconciliation. May the prayer of Christ "that all may be one" always resound in your hearts as an invitation and a promise! Your country is marked by fellowship between all parts of society. I highly esteem this fraternal and peaceful fellowship, and I express my hope that everyone will feel a real part of the community and be able to make their own contribution, in freedom, to the common good.

Dear young people, having discovered God, you must now *offer* him to the world. The "logic" of Christianity is truly unique! No one can keep this gift unless he also gives it away. This is the same "logic" which we have seen in the life of divine Master, who humbled himself, even to making the supreme sacrifice. That is why he was raised up and given the Name which is above every other name (cf. Phil 2:5-11). The true fruitfulness of every human life is linked to this radical experience of the mystery of the Passion and the Resurrection.

7. Tonight, with your Patriarchs and your Bishops, your priests and the whole Church, I say to you once again: Wherever you are, be faithful witnesses to the Incarnate Word of life! Your presence and readiness to help in your parishes and ecclesial movements, your fraternal concern for those suffering in body and spirit, your involvement in the building of a society which respects the rights

of all and promotes the common good and peace: these are your commitments because you belong to Christ and are determined to serve humanity. Dear young Christians, bear witness to "the Gospel of charity"! Dear young people of Syria: build "the civilization of love"! I say this with great hope and immense confidence.

8. To you I renew the challenge which I addressed to the young people of the world on the occasion of the Great Jubilee: "Do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium! ... With Christ, holiness – the divine plan for every baptized person – becomes possible [...]. Jesus walks with you, he renews your heart and strengthens you with the vigour of his Spirit" (*Message for the Fifteenth World Youth Day*, No. 3).

With great affection I bless all of you and your families.