



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ISLAND OF ISCHIA

MEETING OF JOHN PAUL II WITH YOUTH

Sunday, 5 May 2002

Dear Young People,

1. *You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world!* (Mt 5,13-14). These words of Jesus, as you know, constitute the theme of the next *World Youth Day*. This is how the divine Teacher addressed his disciples on the shores of the Lake of Galilee, 2,000 years ago. This is how once again he will address thousands of young Christians from every part of the world next summer, in Toronto. These same words re-echo today, on the shores of the Mediterranean, as my brief but full visit to your beautiful island draws to its close. They re-echo for you, dear young people of Ischia. And it is a great joy to me to be an echo of the voice of Christ, who invites you to *listen, think, and act*. The words of Christ alone can truly be a light for your steps.

I greet you warmly, dear young friends, each of you. I thank your bishops who presented you as "sentinels of the dawn". I thank your representatives who have spoken in the name of all the young people of Ischia. Thank you for your warm welcome, in which I found the enthusiasm of youth and the "genius" of your island.

2. *"You are the salt of the earth"* (Mt 5,13). Dear young men and women, it is not hard to understand this first image that Jesus used. *Salt*: a very important image. When there was no other way of preserving food, salt did not only serve to give food savour, but was often indispensable to guarantee the possibility of *access to it*. In saying: "you are the salt of the earth", the Redeemer entrusted a twofold mission to his disciples: to give life a *savour* by showing its meaning as revealed through him and *to make accessible to all the food that comes from on high*. Today it is in this twofold sense that I want to speak of it to you.

Young people of Ischia, be the salt of the earth that *gives beauty and savour*.

Show with concrete gestures and convincing words that *life and living together* the love that Jesus came to reveal and give us is worthwhile. Is it not the love of Christ, the Victor over evil and death, who transformed us? Do all you can so that this experience can reach the greatest number of young people.

Be the salt that *enables the food of Heaven to be distributed to all*, so that even the least reflective and those who have wandered far off, through your enthusiasm, passion, humble and persevering dedication, may feel called to believe in God and to love him in their neighbour.

3. "*You are the light of the world*" (Mt 5,14). This is Jesus' other message to his disciples. The characteristic of light is to *dispel darkness*, warm what it touches, and enhance its contours. It does this *at high speed*. Therefore, for Christians and especially for young Christians, being the light of the world means *spreading everywhere the light that comes from on high*. It means fighting the darkness that is due to the resistance of evil and sin, and that caused by ignorance and prejudice.

Young people of Ischia, be *rays of Christ's light*. He is the "*light of the world*" (Jn 8,12). Radiate this light everywhere, especially where Jesus is not known and loved, or even where he is rejected. With your lives, make people understand that the light which comes from on high *does not destroy the human being: on the contrary, it exalts him*, just like the sun, whose brilliance throws into bold relief shapes and colours. *God is not man's rival* but his true friend, his most faithful ally.

You must promote this message with the speed of light! *Do not waste time*: your youth is too precious to waste even the smallest part. *God needs you* and calls each one of you by name.

4. *From this island* full of sunshine and natural beauty, clad in green and immersed in the marvellous waters of the "*mare nostrum*" (our sea), may a *message of light and hope reach all young people*, starting with those who come to visit here. Dear young people, together with your parents, pastors, teachers, catechists and friends, be "*salt and light*" for all those whom the Lord sets on your path.

May the *Blessed Virgin Mary*, "Star of the Sea" guide you; she directs towards the safe haven those who sail on the great ocean of life, by shining like a bright star even in the darkest hours. May your *Patron Saints* be an example to you, especially St Restituta and St John Joseph of the Cross. May no disturbance, no fear, no sin, separate you from God's love. Jesus is the light that triumphs over the darkness; the salt that gives flavour to your years of youth and to your entire life. It is he who keeps you in beauty and faithfulness to God, his Father and ours.

Goodbye until Toronto, where I hope there will be some of you: together with your peers from every continent, we will offer the world a message of hope. Your bishop introduced you as "sentinels of the dawn". Yes, dear young friends, *be faithful sentinels of the Gospel*, who await and prepare for the coming of the new Day that is Christ the Lord.

The Holy Father then added extemporaneously when the young people presented a check to help the people of Bethlehem and a large cake for his birthday on 18 May:

Some might think that the young people of Ischia and the young people of Italy are very rich. But I know that here it is a question of a different economy. It is the Gospel economy of the poor in spirit. I hope that the forthcoming World Youth Day may be the expression of the Gospel maturity of all the young people of the world, and especially, of the young people of Italy and the young people of your wonderful island.

So courage. Courage and hope. Praised be Jesus Christ.