



# The Holy See

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## 12TH WORLD YOUTH DAY

### MEETING WITH YOUTH

### **MEDITATION OF JOHN PAUL II**

*Champ de Mars*

*Thursday, 21 August 1997*

*Dear Young People,* 1. We have just heard *the Gospel of the washing of the feet. By this gesture of love on the evening of Holy Thursday, the Lord helps us to understand the meaning of his Passion and Resurrection.* The time which we are going to spend together will focus on Holy Week and, in particular, on the three days which bring us back to the mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. Holy Week is also connected to the journey of Christian initiation and the catechumenate, that is to say, to the preparation of adults for Baptism, a preparation which in the ancient Church was of fundamental importance. The liturgy during Lent points out the stages of the preparation of catechumens for Baptism, celebrated at the Easter Vigil. During the next few days we will accompany Christ on the last stages of his earthly life and will contemplate *the great aspects of the paschal mystery* in order to affirm our baptismal faith. We will show forth all our love for the Lord, as Peter did when he said three times on the lakeshore, after the Resurrection: "You know that I love you" (cf. Jn 21:4-23). On Holy Thursday, by instituting the Eucharist and the priesthood, as well as by the washing of the feet, Jesus clearly indicated the meaning of his Passion and Death to the assembled Apostles. He also introduced them to the mystery of the new Passover and the Resurrection. *On the day of his condemnation and Crucifixion, out of love for humanity, he made a gift of his life to the Father for the salvation of the world. On Easter morning the holy women, and then Peter and John, found the tomb empty. The risen Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the disciples of Emmaus and to the Apostles. Death did not have the last say. Jesus rose victorious from the tomb. After having withdrawn to the Upper Room, the Apostles received the Holy Spirit, who gave them the strength to be missionaries of the Good News.* 2. The washing of the feet, a display of perfect love, is the distinguishing mark of disciples. "You also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:15). Jesus, Master and Lord, rises from his place at table to take on the role of a servant. He switches roles, showing *the radical novelty of the Christian life.* He humbly demonstrates that *to love in word and deed consists above all in serving one's brothers and sisters.* Whoever does not accept this cannot be a disciple. Conversely, whoever serves receives the promise of eternal salvation. From the day of our Baptism we are reborn to new life. Christian living demands that *we advance along the path of love. The law of Christ is the law of love.* Transforming the

world in the manner of leaven, this law disarms the violent and gives place to the weak and the little ones, who are called to proclaim the Gospel. By virtue of the Spirit which they receive, Christ's disciples are enabled to place themselves at the service of their brothers and sisters, in the Church, in the family, in their professional life, in numerous associations and in public life at the national and international levels. This pursuit is a kind of continuation of Baptism and Confirmation. *Service is the way to happiness and holiness*: our lives then become a journey of love towards God and towards our brothers and sisters. In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus anticipates the humiliation of his death on the Cross, by which he will give himself in absolute service to the world. He shows that *his triumph and his glory pass through sacrifice and service*: this is likewise the path of every Christian. There is no greater love than that of giving one's life freely for one's friends (cf. Jn 15:13), for love saves the world, builds up society and is our preparation for eternity. In this way you will be prophets of a new world. *May love and service be the first rules of your lives!* By sacrificing yourselves you will discover what you yourselves have received and you will receive in turn the gift of God.<sup>3</sup> Dear young people, inasmuch as you are members of the Church, your task is to continue the Lord's gesture: *the washing of the feet foreshadows every act of love and mercy* which Christ's disciples will perform throughout history in order to increase communion among people. Today, you are being called to commit yourselves in this way: accepting to follow Christ, you proclaim that the way of perfect love passes through the total and constant gift of oneself. Wherever people are suffering, wherever they are humiliated by poverty or injustice, and wherever a mockery is made of their rights, make it your task to serve them. The Church invites all her children to work so that everyone can live a worthwhile life and have their inherent dignity as children of God recognized. *When we serve our brothers and sisters, we are not drawing away from God but, quite the contrary, we meet him on our journey and we serve him.* "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). In this way we give glory to the Lord, our Creator and Saviour, we contribute to the growth of the kingdom of God in the world and we advance the progress of humanity. As a reminder of this essential mission of Christians towards all people, especially towards the poorest, I wished at the very beginning of this World Youth Day to stop in prayer at the Trocadéro, in the area dedicated to human rights. Today, we pray together especially for the young people who have neither the possibility nor the means to live decently and to receive the education required for their human and spiritual growth, because of poverty, war or disease. May they know of the Church's affection and support!<sup>4</sup> *Those who love are not calculating*, they do not seek their own gain. They work quietly and without charge for their brothers and sisters, knowing that every person, whoever he or she may be, has infinite value. In Christ no one is inferior and no one is superior. All are *members of the same body*, seeking one another's happiness and wishing to build a world which embraces everyone. By gestures of concern and by our active participation in social life we bear witness before our neighbour that we want to help him to become himself and to give the best of himself, for his own personal good and for the good of the entire human community. Brotherhood rejects the desire for power, and service the temptation of power. Dear young people, you have in yourselves the extraordinary capacity of being gift, of giving love and of showing solidarity. The Lord wishes to strengthen this immense generosity which animates your hearts. I invite you to come and draw from the spring of life which is Christ, in order to discover each day ways of *serving your brothers and sisters in the midst of the society in which you must assume your responsibilities as men and women and as believers*. In the social, scientific and technical fields, humanity needs you. Take care never to cease perfecting your professional skills, so that you can carry out your tasks with competence, and at the same time do not neglect to deepen your faith, which will enlighten every decision which you will make in your personal lives and in your work for the good of your brothers and sisters. Even as you hope to be recognized for your professional abilities, how can you not also wish to grow in your inner life, which is the source of all human dynamism?<sup>5</sup> *Love and service give meaning to our lives and make them beautiful*, because we know *for what reason* and *for whom* we are committed. It is in the name of Christ who loved us and served

us first. Is there anything greater than knowing that we are loved? How can we fail to respond joyfully as we wait for the Lord? Love is the witness *par excellence* which leads to hope. *Service of others transfigures life*; it shows that hope and living in fraternal union are stronger than any temptation to despair. Love can triumph in every circumstance. Unsettled by Jesus' humble gesture, Peter says to him: "Lord do you wash my feet? ... You shall never wash my feet" (Jn 13:6,8). As with him, it takes us time to understand the mystery of salvation and we sometimes refuse to follow the "little way" of love. Only those who allow themselves to be loved are able to love in turn. Peter allowed the Lord to wash his feet. He let himself be loved, then he understood. Dear young people, experience the love of Christ: you will become aware of what he has done for you and then you will understand. Only those who live in intimacy with their Master can imitate him. Those who are nourished by the Body of Christ find the strength to act in brotherhood. Between Christ and his disciple there is thus created a bond of closeness and unity which profoundly transforms the person's being, making him or her a servant. Dear young people, you will come to ask yourselves how it is that you are to serve Christ. In the washing of the feet you will find *the royal road to union with Christ*, in imitating him and in discovering him in your brothers and sisters.<sup>6</sup> By means of your apostolate you offer to your brothers and sisters *the Gospel of love*. Wherever witness by word is difficult or impossible in a world which does not accept it, by your attitude you make Christ the servant present, because your actions are in harmony with the teaching of the One whom you proclaim. This is *an eminent form of professing the faith*, a form practised with humility and perseverance by the saints. It is a way of showing that one can sacrifice everything for the truth of the Gospel and out of love for others, as Christ did. By conforming our lives to his, by living in love as he did, we acquire full freedom to respond to our vocation. That can sometimes call for the moral heroism which consists in committing ourselves courageously to following Christ, in the certainty that the Master will show us the way to happiness. It is only in the name of Christ that we can reach the extreme of love, in giving and selflessness. Dear young people, the Church believes in you. She is counting on you to be witnesses of the Risen One throughout the whole of your lives. You are now going to head out to the places where the various Vigils will be held. Whether in festive celebration or in meditation, look to Christ in order to penetrate the meaning of the divine message and to find the strength for the mission which the Lord entrusts to you in the world, whether as committed lay persons or in the consecrated life. Moreover, in revisiting your daily lives, with clarity and hope and without bitterness or discouragement, and by sharing your experiences, you will feel the presence of God who gently accompanies you. In the light of the lives of the saints and of other witnesses to the Gospel, help one another to affirm your faith and to be the apostles of the Year 2000, reminding the world that the Lord is inviting us to share in his joy and that true happiness consists in giving oneself out of love for others! Play your part in the life of the Church which needs your youth and energy!

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