



The Holy See

12TH WORLD YOUTH DAY

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE FRENCH PRESIDENT**

Palais de l'Élysée

Thursday, 21 August 1997

Mr. President of the Republic,

1. Your welcome and your words have touched me deeply. I now have the joy of returning to France again on the occasion of the Twelfth World Youth Day. I am particularly grateful for the mark of attention which you are showing me; and I am touched by the presence of numerous personalities who have wished to take part in this ceremony.

It was only natural that one day young Catholics, representing their peers from more than one hundred and thirty countries of the world, would wish to come together in Paris. With them, I thank you, Mr. President, as well as the authorities and officials of the State, for the reception given them. Whether they be from neighbouring European nations or from countries in other continents, they are all happy to be welcomed by French people of all ages and to discover the value of your spiritual and cultural traditions; they will be better able to appreciate the importance of these traditions for history and for the Church, while perceiving the influence they still have today.

2. In addressing you, Mr. President, in these first hours of my stay, I wish cordially to greet all the people of France, wishing them prosperity and expressing the hope that they will continue to place their talents and ideals at the service of their brothers and sisters in their own country and on every continent.

Numerous young people from around the world have been welcomed these past days all over France, and they are now gathered here in Paris. I wish to convey here all the gratitude of the Church for the generous hospitality given to these visitors in all the various regions and now in Île-

de-France. And I thank the Parisians and *franciliens* in a particular way who, not without certain inconveniences, are helping their guests to live these days in the best possible conditions.

3. In such a special circumstance, I am pleased to meet the French faithful one more time, recalling the warm welcome which they have given me on more than one occasion already, most notably last September. With the World Youth Day, two events mark this year in a particular way for French Catholics: I am thinking of the centennial of the death of Saint Theresa of Lisieux, a great spiritual figure known and loved throughout the world, whom the youth of all countries have rightly celebrated: and secondly, tomorrow, I will have the joy of proclaiming blessed Frédéric Ozanam, an apostle of that charity which is respectful of the human person, and a clear-sighted analyst of social problems. These two different personalities are, among so many others, witnesses of the fruitful contribution of French Catholics to the universal Church.

4. My coming to Paris marks a new step in a kind of grand journey which I have made with young people across the world in the past twelve years, in an ever renewed exchange with them. They come together to strengthen their will to build a new and more hospitable world and a more peaceful future. Many of them, in their regions and in their countries, experience sufferings generated by fratricidal conflicts and disregard for the human person; too often they face uncertainty with regard to employment, and even extreme poverty. Their generation is involved in a difficult search not only for a minimum of material necessities, but also for reasons for living and goals that will motivate their generosity. They realize that they will only find happiness if they are well integrated into a society which respects human dignity and in which brotherhood is a reality. Here they have a privileged occasion to share with one another their aspirations and to convey to one another the richness of their cultures and their experiences.

Their search springs interiorly from a query of a spiritual nature that has led them to take up their pilgrim staff, like their forerunners who crossed continents as peacemakers, as brothers of all men and as seekers of God.

5. Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for having understood the importance of this vast gathering of hope in your magnificent capital. I am convinced that the efforts made to welcome this great variety of guests will produce lasting fruits for them as well as for your own fellow-citizens.

While again expressing my personal gratitude, I wholeheartedly invoke upon you and the French people an abundance of divine blessings.

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