



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO PARIS, ON THE OCCASION OF THE

12TH WORLD YOUTH DAY

(AUGUST 21-24, 1997) **MASS FOR 12TH WORLD YOUTH DAY** *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II* *Longchamp*

*Racecourse*

*Sunday, 24 August 1997*

1. "Teacher, where are you staying?" (Jn 1:38). This is the question which Jesus was asked one day by two young men. This happened on the banks of the Jordan. Jesus had gone there to receive the baptism of John. But the Baptist, when he saw Jesus coming towards him, said: "Behold, the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:36). These prophetic words indicated the Redeemer, the one who was to give his life for the salvation of the world. And so, even from the baptism in the Jordan, John pointed out the Crucified One. In fact, two disciples of John, upon hearing these words, followed Jesus. Is this not significant? When Jesus asks them: "What do you seek?" (Jn 1:38), they answer him with a question of their own: "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" (*ibid.*). Jesus replies: "Come and see". "They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day" (Jn 1:39). They became the first disciples of Jesus. One of them was Andrew, who also brought his brother Simon Peter to Jesus.

Dear friends, I am happy to be able to meditate upon this Gospel with you, together with the Cardinals and Bishops who have joined us. I am pleased to greet them, especially Cardinal Eduardo Pironio who has worked so hard for the World Youth Days. I am grateful to Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger for his welcome, to Bishop Michel Dubost and to the Bishops of France and those from many countries of the world who are accompanying you and who have guided your reflections. My cordial greeting also goes to the concelebrating priests, the men and women religious, and the leaders of your movements and diocesan groups.

I thank our brothers and sisters from other Christian communities, as well as the civil authorities, for their presence and for their participation in this liturgical celebration.

In greeting you again, I wish in particular to express affection and encouragement to the handicapped among you; we are all grateful that you are with us and have brought your testimony of faith and hope.

In the name of all present, I would also like to express gratitude to the many volunteers who have worked so hard and so effectively in organizing this gathering.

2. The few lines of the Gospel of John which we have just heard sum up the programme of World Youth Day: it is an exchange of questions, and then an answer which is also an appeal. In presenting this encounter with Jesus, today's liturgy wants to show that which counts most in your lives. As the Successor of Peter, I too have come to invite you to ask Christ: "Where are you staying?". If you ask him this question sincerely, you will be able to hear his response and receive from him the courage and strength to carry it out.

The question is born of *a quest*. Men and women seek God. Young people realize in the depths of their being that this quest is the inner law of their lives. Human beings seek their way in the visible world and, through the visible world, they seek the unseen world at every stage of their spiritual journey. Each of us can repeat the words of the Psalmist: "Your face, Lord, do I seek; hide not your face from me" (Ps 27:8-9). We all have our personal history and an innate desire to see God, a desire which makes itself felt at the same time as we discover the created world. This world is wonderful and rich; it sets before us countless treasures; it enchants us; it attracts both our reason and our will. But in the end it does not satisfy our spirit. Man realizes that this world, with all its many riches, is superficial and precarious; in a sense, it is destined for death. Nowadays, we are more aware of the fragility of our earth, too often degraded by the hand of man himself, to whom the Creator entrusted it.

As regards man himself, each person comes into the world, is born from a mother's womb, grows and matures. We discover our vocation and develop our personality throughout our years of activity; then the moment comes when we must leave this world. The longer we live, the more we realize how precarious life is, and the more we wonder about immortality: what exists beyond the frontiers of death? Then, from the depths of our being, there arises the same question asked of the one who conquered death: "Rabbi, where are you staying?". Teacher, you who love and respect the human person, you who have shared in human suffering, you who illumine the mystery of human existence, help us to discover the true meaning of our life and vocation! "Your face, Lord, do I seek; hide not your face from me" (Ps 27:8-9).

3. On the banks of the Jordan, and much later still, the disciples failed to realize who Jesus truly was. It took them a long time to understand the mystery of the Son of God. We too have an innate desire to know the one who reveals the face of God. Christ answered the question of his disciples by way of his entire messianic mission. He taught and, in order to confirm the truth of what he proclaimed, he worked great miracles, healing the sick, raising the dead, calming the storms of the sea. But this whole extraordinary journey reached its fulfilment on Golgotha. It is by contemplating Christ on the Cross, with the eyes of faith, that we can "see" who the Saviour really is: the one who bore our sufferings, the just man who made his life a sacrifice and who would bring righteousness to many (cf. Is 53:4,10-11).

Saint Paul sums up *the highest wisdom* in today's second reading with these striking words: "*The word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart' . . . Since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe . . . We preach Christ crucified*" (1 Cor 1:18-23). The Apostle was speaking to the people of his time, to the children of Israel who had received God's revelation on Mount Sinai and to the Greeks who had developed an impressive human wisdom, a great

philosophy. But now, the unsurpassable culmination of wisdom is the Crucified Christ, not only because of his words, but because he delivered himself up for the salvation of humanity.

With his remarkable fervour, Saint Paul repeats: "We preach Christ Crucified". He whom the world considered as nothing but weakness and folly is the one whom we proclaim as Power and Wisdom, the fulness of Truth. It is true that our confidence has its highs and lows. Certainly our vision of faith is often darkened by doubt and by our own weakness. Humble and poor sinners that we are, let us accept the message of the Cross. In order to answer our question: "Rabbi, where are you staying?", Christ summons us: come and see; in the Cross you will see the radiant sign of the world's redemption, the loving presence of the living God. Because Christians realize that the Cross dominates history, they place the crucifix in their churches and along roadsides, or they wear it near their hearts. For the Cross is a genuine sign of the presence of the Son of God; by this sign he is revealed as the Redeemer of the world.

4. "Rabbi, where are you staying?". Each day the Church responds: *Christ is present in the Eucharist*, in the sacrament of his death and resurrection. In and through the Eucharist, you acknowledge the dwelling-place of the living God in human history. For the Eucharist is the sacrament of the love which conquers death; it is the sacrament of the Covenant, pure gift of love for the reconciliation of all humanity. It is the gift of the real presence of Jesus the Redeemer, in the bread which is his body given up for us, in the wine which is his blood poured out for all. Thanks to the Eucharist, constantly renewed among all the peoples of the world, Christ continues to build his Church: he brings us together in praise and thanksgiving for salvation, in the communion which only infinite love can forge. Our worldwide gathering now takes on its fullest meaning, through the celebration of Mass. Dear young friends, may your presence here mean a true commitment in faith! For Christ is now answering your own question and the questions of all those who seek the living God. He answers by offering an invitation: this is my Body, take it and eat. To the Father he entrusts his supreme desire: that all those whom he loves may be one in the same communion.

5. The response to the question "Teacher, where do you live?" involves many aspects. It has an historical, paschal and sacramental dimension. Today's first reading suggests yet another aspect of the answer to the question which is the theme of the World Youth Day: *Christ dwells among his People*. This is the people mentioned in the Book of Deuteronomy in relation to the history of Israel: "It is because the Lord loves you . . . that [he] has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondage . . . Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps his covenant . . . to a thousand generations" (Dt 7:8-9). Israel is the people whom God chose for himself and with whom he made a covenant.

In the New Covenant, God's election has been extended to all the peoples of the earth. In Jesus Christ, God has chosen all humanity for his own. Through the Redemption he has revealed the universality of his election. In Christ, there is no longer Jew or Greek, nor slave or free; all are now one (cf. Gal 3:28). Everyone is called to share in God's life, thanks to the death and resurrection of Christ. Does not our encounter at this World Youth Day reflect this truth? All of you, assembled here from many countries and continents, bear witness to the universal vocation of the People of God redeemed by Christ! The ultimate answer to the question "Teacher, where are you staying?" should then be understood as: I live in all the human beings who have been saved. Yes, Christ dwells in his People, the People which has struck root among all the peoples of the earth, the People which follows him, the Crucified and Risen Lord, the Redeemer of the world, the Teacher who has the words of everlasting life, the one who is "the head of the new and universal people of the

children of God" (*Lumen Gentium*, 13). The Second Vatican Council has said it wonderfully: "Christ has shared with us his Spirit who, being one and the same being in head and members, gives life to, unifies and moves the whole body" (*ibid.*, 7). Thanks to the Church which gives us a share in the very life of the Lord, all of us can now repeat Peter's words to Jesus: "To whom shall we go? To whom else shall we go? (cf. Jn 6:68).

6. Dear young people, your journey does not end here. Time does not come to a halt. Go forth now along the roads of the world, along the pathways of humanity, while remaining ever united in Christ's Church!

Continue to contemplate God's glory and God's love, and you will receive the enlightenment needed to build the civilization of love, to help our brothers and sisters to see the world transfigured by God's eternal wisdom and love.

Forgiven and reconciled, be faithful to the Baptism which you have received! Be witnesses to the Gospel! As active and responsible members of the Church, be disciples and witnesses of Jesus Christ who reveals the Father! And abide always in the unity of the Spirit who is the giver of life!