



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE OCCASION
OF A MEETING OF RUSSIAN CATHOLIC YOUTH
AT IRKUTSK, RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

Dear Young People,

1. With great joy I greet you who have made sacrifices to come to Irkutsk from every corner of the Russian Federation to take part in the meeting promoted by your Bishops in preparation for the 20th World Youth Day, which will be held in Cologne, Germany, next August. I greet each one of you with affection.

This meeting is an important moment for the Church which lives in the Russian Federation. In the past she suffered much hardship and was persecuted and tortured, often to the point of bloodshed, but she persevered in her loyalty to Christ, the one Lord, and in the confession of the perennial truths of the faith. In this confession, Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants found themselves side by side. Their witness has become a common patrimony for us all. "This gesture cannot fail to have an ecumenical character and expression. Perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is the ecumenism of the saints and of the martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us" (Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, n. 37). Rightly, then, the Church sets great store by you, dear young people, and confidently expects from your enthusiasm and from your youthful vigour new dynamism for her mission.

Listen, therefore, to the fundamental questions that dwell in your hearts, questions about the meaning of life. Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote: "Man is a mystery. A mystery that must be solved, and if you were to spend the whole of your life seeking to solve it, do not say that you have wasted time: I study this mystery, because I want to be a man" (*Letter to his brother, Michail*, 16 August 1839).

Dear young people, the true meaning of life is found in following Jesus, "*the Way, the Truth and*

the Life" (Jn 14: 6). He alone has words that give life, call into existence, show the way and comfort the disappointed, imbuing them with new hope. "It is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh", the Second Vatican Council teaches, "that the mystery of man truly becomes clear" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22).

2. "*We wish to see Jesus*" (Jn 12: 21): this was the theme of the recent World Youth Day that marked the last stage before the important meeting in Cologne. The request that some Greeks made to the Apostle Philip is echoed in the cry, unexpressed and usually unconscious, of so many of your peers who "ask believers not only to 'speak' of Christ, but in a certain sense to 'show' him to them. And is it not the Church's task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium?" (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 16).

Thus, it is urgently necessary to show the face of Christ alive in his Church, pointing him out as the only way that leads to the truth about man and to his complete happiness.

The precious treasure of Christian Tradition, enriched by the blood of the martyrs, should be preserved and presented anew with consistent courage. Dear young people, you must resist the temptation, today both subtle and lethal, of leaving God out of your life or of reducing faith to episodic and formal gestures. The Church needs witnesses ready to follow Christ to the Cross.

Your peers, who all too often give in to the mirages of an easy, comfortable life and the temptations of drugs and hedonism, and who even end up being dominated by violence, lack of meaning and despair, are really longing more than ever for this radical fidelity to the Gospel. Do not let the freedom in your beloved Nation, regained at the cost of great sacrifices and sufferings, be dispelled by succumbing to false ideals. Christ is our true freedom, since he has freed us once and for all from the slavery of sin. Only in him do our hearts find peace and meaning.

3. The heavenly Father sent his Son among us because he wants every person to be saved, and you can be the face of his merciful love in the world and for the world.

This is your daily task! This is the constant goal you will be able to attain, thanks also to the programmes and initiatives that your Pastors suggest to you as a response to the social, cultural and spiritual challenges of our time. Join forces with the young Christians of the whole world in the spiritual pilgrimage to Cologne, to live the 20th World Youth Day together. I invite you from this moment not to miss this great event in the Church.

I entrust you to the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and of the Church. The Pope, your Bishops and the entire Christian community are counting on you!

With these sentiments, I am pleased to send you my Blessing, which I willingly extend to your

Pastors and to your families.

From the Vatican, 26 July 2004

JOHN PAUL II

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