



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II

TO THE YOUTH OF THE WORLD ON THE OCCASION

OF THE III WORLD YOUTH DAY 1990 "I am the vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15:5) *Dear young people!*¹. I

come to you to announce the next World Youth Day. As I write these words, the memory is still fresh of the last Youth Day, culminating in the unforgettable meeting at Santiago de Compostela where, together with many of you, I went on pilgrimage. That was an ecclesial event of great importance, an exceptional witness of faith on the part of thousands of young people from every continent, an intense moment of evangelization. At Santiago, the Church presented once again to the world her youthful image, full of joy, of hope and of enthusiasm in the faith. The Santiago event was a great gift for the Church; I would even venture to say, for society as a whole. For this I shall never cease to thank Our Lord. The theme of the last Youth Day, as you will remember, was centred on Christ. This year, instead, I should like to propose that you reflect on *the theme of the Church*. The correlation is not haphazard. Between Christ and his Church there is a very close and deep organic relationship. Christ lives in the Church, the Church is the mystery of Christ living and working among us, as St Paul says: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27); and again: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1Co 12: 27). On the occasion of this V World Youth Day, I want therefore to invite you all to *a new discovery of the Church and of your mission in the Church, as young people*. The Church of Christ is a fascinating and wonderful reality. She is ancient, being almost two thousand years old, but, at the same time, *forever young*, thanks to the Holy Spirit working within her. The Church is young because her message of salvation is young, that is, relevant for all times. That is why there is a dialogue of such importance between the Church and youth: "The Church has so much to talk about with youth and youth have so much to share with the Church. This mutual dialogue, by taking place with great cordiality, clarity and courage ... will be a source of richness and youthfulness for the Church ...", as I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (n. 46). I should like the V Day to contribute towards developing this dialogue both at the level of the Church's life and in the existence of each one of you.² In the Bible, among the many images expressing the mystery of the Church, we find also the *image of the vine* (cf. Jer 2:21; Is 5:1-7). The Church is the vine planted by the Lord himself, a vine that rejoices in his special love. In John's Gospel, Christ explains the fundamental principle of the life of this vine when He says: "I am the vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15:5). These are the very words that I have chosen as theme for the next World Youth Day. And so, I appeal to all of you: *Young people, be living branches in the Church*, be branches laden with fruit! To be living branches in the vineyard of the Church means above all to *be in living communion with Christ the vine*. The branches are not self-sufficient; they are totally dependent on the vine. In the vine is the source of their life. Likewise, in Baptism, each one of us was grafted onto Christ, and received the free gift of new life. To be living branches, you must live this reality of your Baptism, deepening every day your communion with the Lord, by listening to his Word and obeying it, by participating in the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, and by speaking personally with Our Lord in prayer. Jesus says: "He who abides in me and I in him bears

much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (*Jn 15:5*). To be living branches in the vineyard of the Church also means *accepting a commitment in the ecclesial community and in society*. The Second Vatican Council explains this very clearly: "As in the structure of a living body no member is merely passive, but each has a share in the functioning as well as in the life of the body: so too, in the Body of Christ, which is the Church, 'the whole body ... when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth' (*Eph 4:16*)" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2). We all share, according to our particular vocations, in the mission of Christ and of his Church. Ecclesial communion is a missionary communion. The Church needs many labourers. For this V World Day, Christ himself extends to you young people a great invitation: "You go into my vineyard too" (*Mt 20:4*). The Church is an organic communion, in which *each one has his or her own place and his or her own task*. You young people have also your own place. A very important one. On the threshold of the year Two Thousand, the Church feels called by the Lord to an ever more intense effort of evangelization; she has special need of you, of your dynamism, your authenticity, your ardent will to grow, the freshness of your faith. So, place your youthful talents unreservedly at the service of the Church, with the generosity that is characteristic of your age. Take your place in the Church. It is not merely the place of objects of pastoral care. It is above all one of active protagonists in the Church's mission (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 46). The Church is yours. More still, you yourselves are the Church! For her part, *the Church has so much to offer to you young people*. We are witnessing today a very significant phenomenon. After a period of distrust and indifference with regard to the Church, many young people are now rediscovering the Church as a sure and faithful guide, as an indispensable point of communion with God and with their brothers and sisters, as an area of spiritual growth and commitment. This is a most eloquent sign. Many of you are no longer content just with belonging to the Church formally, statistically. They are looking for something more. Special opportunities for rediscovering the Church and ecclesial commitment are found in *associations, movements and the various ecclesial communities for youth*. Today, indeed, we speak of a "new era of group endeavours" within the Church (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 29). This is an immense treasure and a precious gift of the Holy Spirit, for which we should be most grateful. "You go into my vineyard too" (*Mt 20: 4*). The vineyard of the Church also needs special labourers, serving her in a specific way, with the radicalism of the Gospel, consecrating their whole life to her service. I refer to *priestly and religious vocations*, and also to the vocations of *consecrated lay people in the world*. I am sure that many of you, as you meditate on the mystery of the Church, will hear in the depths of your soul the call of Christ: "You go into my vineyard too ...". If you hear this voice addressed to you personally, do not hesitate to answer "yes" to Our Lord. Do not be afraid. Total service of Christ and his Church is a wonderful vocation and a magnificent gift. Christ will help you. This, in broad outline, is the substance of the theme for the next World Day, a day for rediscovering the Church.³ The V World Youth Day 1990 will be celebrated on Palm Sunday in each of your dioceses. It is precisely *the diocesan Church* that you must discover. The Church is not an abstract and disembodied reality. On the contrary, it is a very concrete reality: precisely, a diocesan Church gathered around the Bishop, successor of the Apostles. It is also the *parish Church* that you must discover, its life, its needs and the many communities that exist and work within it. You will bring to this Church the joy and the enthusiasm you have experienced in world-wide encounters like that of Santiago and in the meetings of the movements and associations to which you belong. In this concrete Church you young people must be living and fruitful branches; you must, that is, be conscious and responsible sharers in its mission. Welcome this Church with all its spiritual riches; welcome it in the person of your Bishops, of the Priests, of the Religious and also of your brothers and sisters in the faith; welcome it with faith and with filial love. The World

Day, as you see, is not only a festival, but also a serious spiritual commitment. To be able to gather its fruits, it is necessary to follow a *path of preparation* under the guidance of your Pastors in the dioceses, in the parishes, in the associations, the movements and the ecclesial communities for youth. Try to know the Church better: her nature, her two thousand years of history, and her present situation. Try to discover your place in the Church and your mission as young people. In this spiritual journey you can be helped by my Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988), dedicated precisely to meditation on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world. I invite your Pastors to help you in gaining a better understanding of its message. I entrust the process of spiritual preparation and the actual celebration of the forthcoming World Youth Day 1990 to the special intercession of Our Lady. May She, whom we venerate as Mother of the Church, be your Teacher and Guide in this renewal of your ecclesial commitment. To all of you I send, affectionately, my Blessing. *From the Vatican, 26 November 1989, Solemnity of O.L. Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.*

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