



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN NEW ZEALAND

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE**

Auckland (New Zealand)

Domain Park, 22 November 1986

Dear Young People,

1. Thank you for your warm welcome. After the great joy of celebrating the Eucharist for the first time in New Zealand I am grateful to have this opportunity of being with you, the youth of Aotearoa.

This period in your life, the time of youth, is a period of special importance. The decisions you make now, the friendships you form, the values you choose to live by, the goals you set for yourselves – these will shape your personal future and have an impact on the future of society. I am always happy to be with young people because I enjoy your enthusiasm and hope. As you face the challenges of youth, I am eager to assure you of the love of Christ and to remind you of the Gospel he preached, the Good News of truth, freedom and salvation.

2. The Gospel passage which we have heard describes a turning point in the life of Saint Peter. It was very shortly after the death of Jesus. Peter and the other disciples were still stunned by the experience of the Cross. How aware they were of their own shortcomings! In the hour of their Master's Passion, when he needed them most, Judas betrayed him, Peter denied him, the rest of them fled in fear. Confused and saddened, the disciples seemed to think that the future was hopeless; they were uncertain what to do. So, they returned to what was familiar to them. Peter spontaneously says: "I'm going fishing". And the others say: "We'll come with you". However, this plan of theirs also seems to end in failure. For the Gospel tells us: " They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night".

But then, at this low point in their lives, in their discouragement and failure, the dawn of hope

begins to break. "It was light by now", we are told, and there stood Jesus on the shore". Precisely at the moment when Peter and the others would have felt uncomfortable in approaching Jesus – because of how they had behaved – he draws near to them in a simple gesture of friendship.

"Jesus called out, 'Have you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered 'No', he said 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something'. So they dropped their net, and there were so many fish that they could not haul it in". They did indeed "find something", and it was much more than a big catch of fish. They found renewed hope and joy in the presence of the Risen Lord.

3. This turning point in the life of Peter came about at the initiative of Jesus, not at the initiative of Peter. Peter's attempt ends in failure; but when he fishes at Jesus' command, the nets are filled to the breaking point.

The same thing happens in the life of each of us. While it is true that we ourselves decide what paths we will take, our decisions will lead us to true joy and fulfilment only if they are in accordance with God's will. As Saint Paul says: "It is God, for his own loving purpose, who puts both the will and the action into you .

The secret of the successful catch of fish is the obedience of Peter and his companions. As soon as Jesus spoke – even though they had been fishing all night and had caught nothing – they dropped the nets and tried again. Their obedience produced an amazing catch of fish. More importantly, it opened their eyes; it enabled them to recognize Jesus by faith. "The disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord' ". And Peter immediately responds in joy; he jumps out of the boat and makes his way to the shore, eager to be with Jesus.

4. But the desire of Jesus to be with Peter is even greater than Peter's desire to be with Jesus. Jesus not only acknowledges Peter but also invites him and his friends to share a meal that he has prepared. "Come and have breakfast", he says. The warmth of Jesus' friendship has overcome the Apostles' fears. The weight of guilt and sadness has given way to the light and peace of the Risen Lord.

At this point, Jesus looks directly at Peter and asks him: "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?" Peter answers: "Yes, Lord, you know I love you".

Jesus clearly wants Peter to love him; and he wants Peter to express his love in words, and to prove it by deeds. Jesus desires it so much that he repeats his question twice more. And each time he tells Peter to look after his lambs and sheep – to look after the Church which is being left in Peter's care. And, as we know, the rest of Peter's life was spent in providing food for God's people, food for the soul, the food of eternal life, that food which is both the word of God – the Good News of salvation – and the Body and Blood of Christ.

5. Dear young friends: you too are at a turning point in your lives, and by Christ's grace and his love it may happen today. Some of you may have known doubt and confusion; you may have experienced sadness and failure and serious sin. For all of you, however, this is an important time in your lives. It is a time of decision. It is a time to accept Christ: to accept his friendship and love, to accept the truth of his word and to believe in his promises; to acknowledge that his teaching will lead you to happiness and finally to eternal life. It is a time to accept Christ as he lives in his Body, the Church.

You have already been united with Christ in Baptism and the Eucharist, and now he is seeking you out in a particular way in these years of your youth. However great your love for Jesus may be, his love for you is far greater. He knows each of you by name. He knows when you need forgiveness and he knows your desire to forgive. He knows you better than you know yourself. Jesus loves you immensely, for he laid down his life for you.

All of us can get lost at times, lost within ourselves or lost in the world about us. Allow Christ to find you, to speak to you, to ask of you whatever he wants. Be sure of this: obedience to God's will is the way to a fruitful life, the way to loving union with Christ.

6. On one occasion in the Gospel, a rich young man approached Jesus with the question: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?". Jesus told him to keep the commandments, for there can be no genuine love of God or neighbour without obedience to God's will. That is why Jesus says: "If you love me you will keep my commandments". And again he says: "You are my friends if you do what I command you".

If you want to attain the fullness of joy, your obedience must be the full obedience of love. For although the rich young man in the Gospel had kept all the commandments, "Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, 'There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me'".

Dear young people of New Zealand: Is Jesus perhaps repeating to some of you today: "There is one thing you lack"? Is he perhaps asking for even more love, more generosity, more sacrifice? Yes, the love of Christ involves generosity and sacrifice. It takes personal discipline to obey the commandments of God; it takes effort to reach out in loving service to a brother or sister in need. To follow Christ and to serve the world in his name requires courage and strength. There is no place for selfishness – and no place for fear!

I noted your questions concerning the different evils of our contemporary world. It is good that you have this preoccupation, but the answers that can be given, you will find in the Gospel. And the Gospel, the whole Gospel, is waiting for you. You must realize that you must make real the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Only in this way is it possible to change the world. Your aspiration is that the world

should be changed. I say: you should change the world!

Perhaps some of you are meant to follow Christ in the chastity, poverty and obedience of the religious life, or to serve in the priesthood. These special vocations are a gift of the Lord to his Church. They are also a gift of Christ to the person he calls. If Christ is speaking to you in this way, be ready for service, ready for sacrifice, ready for love.

And to those of you whom Christ is calling to the vocation of married life I say this: be assured of the Church's love for you and for your vital role in the Church. Christian family life and lifelong fidelity in marriage are so needed in the world today, where the sacredness of human life is often ignored and even opposed, where the mystery of human sexuality is easily distorted and confused, where the beauty of human love is forgotten in a mad rush to satisfy selfish desires. Do not let yourselves be misled or discouraged. In Christ and in his Church, you will find the light and grace you need to live in fidelity and joy.

7. Dear young people of New Zealand: Jesus looks with love on each of you, as he did on Peter, on the faithful Apostles, and on the rich young man. Only one of these went away sad: the one who was afraid of sacrifice, the one who said no. Since the Cross of Christ is the sign of love and salvation, we should not be surprised that all true love requires sacrifice.

Do not be afraid, then, when love makes demands.

Do not be afraid when love requires sacrifice. Do not be afraid of the Cross of Christ. The Cross is the Tree of Life. It is the source of all joy and peace. It was the only way for Jesus to reach resurrection and triumph. It is the only way for us to share in his life, now and for ever.

Young people of New Zealand: Jesus is with you. Do not be afraid!

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