



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO PARIS, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
12th WORLD YOUTH DAY
(AUGUST 21-24, 1997)

WELCOMING CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Champ de Mars

Thursday, 21 August 1997

Young People from throughout the world,

The Bishop of Rome greets you and he expresses his confidence in you and his joy at meeting you. You come from many different countries and from all continents. You represent not only young people from France and Europe, but also from North, Central and South America, the Archipelagos and the Islands of the Atlantic Ocean, young people from many African countries, the Islands of the Indian Ocean, young people from Asia, Australia, the Far East and all the seas encircling the continent of Asia, young people from the Pacific. This is a truly a "World" Youth Day . You are the hope of the world, you who aspire to an ever more beautiful life, based on the moral and spiritual values which make us free and guide our steps towards eternity.

You are continuing the history of the World Youth Day. It is worth recalling that history. The first World Youth Day was held in Rome in 1984. The next took place in Buenos Aires (1987). We then gathered in Santiago de Compostela, Spain (1989) and, in 1991, in Czestochowa, Poland. That Day was truly unique, since it was the first time that young people from the former Soviet Union were able to take part: young people from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, representatives from Kazakhstan and other republics of Central Asia, and Christians from the Caucasus. The international dimension of the Youth Day then took on new breadth. In 1993 we

met in Denver, in the United States. Then, in 1995, in Manila in the Philippines; this was the largest meeting ever, thanks to the nearness of great metropolitan centres. We are now gathered in Paris. I offer heartfelt thanks to Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, to Bishop Michel Dubost and to the organizers of this meeting, especially the young people of the different Dioceses of France who have been preparing for the arrival of their companions. I thank Archbishop Louis-Marie Billé, President of the French Episcopal Conference, for his words of welcome and the French Bishops for offering the hospitality of their dioceses to guests from around the world.

I extend respectful greetings to the distinguished representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, as well as to those of the Jewish and Muslim communities: I thank them heartily for having wished to join this festive assembly of Catholic youth.

I also thank the young Filipino and French delegates who now invite you to form the great chain of faith, solidarity, friendship and peace between the countries of the whole world.

You are following in the footsteps of the young people who, carrying olive branches, came forth to meet Christ as he entered Jerusalem. Today, young people from every continent, you acknowledge Christ who unites us in joyful fellowship and in firm solidarity, and you march together towards the happiness which he offers us. You have chosen the rainbow as the sign of your diverse origins and cultures; in this way you express your thanksgiving for God's covenants with creation up to the definitive covenant sealed by the blood of the Saviour.

A roll call of the nations represented at World Youth Day was then read. Afterwards the Holy Father continued in French. After welcoming the representatives of the different countries, I now cordially greet the delegations of the international movements, associations and communities. The Pope then greeted those present in their various languages. To the English-speaking young people he said: A special greeting to the English-speaking young people from all over the world. The Pope is delighted to meet so many of you here in Paris, at the World Youth Day. Christ has brought us together. He is the subject of our reflections during these days; he is at the centre of our prayer. He is the source of the spiritual bond which unites us in his Church, a bond which, perhaps, we feel more intensely as we look around and see so many young people whose hearts are beating with the message of the Gospel of hope, the Gospel of life. "'Teacher, where are you staying?'. He said to them, 'Come and see' ... and they stayed with him" (Jn 1:38-39). This is the challenge which the World Youth Day offers to the young people of Europe, Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. May this great event help you to know Jesus better and love him more. Then you will be his *apostles* to the world at the dawn of the approaching millennium. God bless you all! After offering greetings in Spanish, Italian, German, Portuguese, Polish, Russian, Romanian, Hungarian, Arabic, Tagalog, Swahili and Chinese, the Holy Father again spoke in French. Dear young people, Christ is our hope; Christ is our joy. In the days to come, open your hearts and minds to Christ. You are part of the Church, which wishes to open up to you the way of salvation and the path to happiness. I invite you to let yourselves be guided by the Lord and to make this journey together with him. In the course of this week, may each day

be filled with grace and peace. A handicapped youth then read the passage of St John's Gospel recounting the washing of the feet (Jn 13:1-15). Afterwards Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, greeted the Holy Father and thanked him for offering the young people a meditation on this Gospel passage, assuring him that in all their prayer vigils they would reflect on the words he entrusted to them. The Holy Father then led the young people in the Lord's Prayer and imparted his Blessing. Before taking his leave the Pope said in French: We now know why the engineer Eiffel built this tower — to have a great youth gathering here around the tower: the World Youth Day which we have just opened and which will continue tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, until Sunday. Now goodbye; see you later. One suggestion for this evening: sleep well!