



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUTH OF ROME
PREPARING FOR WORLD YOUTH DAY**

Thursday, 21 March 2002

1. *"You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world"* (Mt 5,13-14).

Jesus' words echo in our hearts as we prepare for the celebration of the *17th World Youth Day* that will take place in Toronto, Canada, in July. These words issue a strong challenge to us; they ask us to join our lives with the One who is the true light of the world and the salt that gives unending savour to the earth: Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

I thank you, dear young people, for this meeting that you have organized, during which you wanted to ask one another: *"What does it mean to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth"*? Some of your friends have already helped you find an answer. Responding freely to God's call they live as engaged or married couples. Some are on their way to the priesthood, others are preparing for the religious or missionary life.

I thank them for their testimonies that are an incentive to you to ask yourselves sincerely, as they did: *"Lord, what would you have me do?"*, what do you want me to do *in order to live my Baptism to the full and to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world?* Before them, Francis of Assisi asked the same question at the foot of the crucifix of San Damiano. God wants to reveal his plan of love to them as well as to you, in order to carry out the project of life that from eternity he has thought of for each one.

2. I want to thank the Cardinal Vicar for his warm words in your name. I also thank the president of the youth of the diocesan Catholic Action.

I greet the *delegation of young people from the regions of Italy* who tomorrow will set out for Toronto, where they will meet their peers to prepare for the impending World Youth Day. I also

greet the group that is to make a *pilgrimage to the Holy Land* to bring a witness of solidarity to the young people in those places that have seen so much trouble. Lastly, I greet the *delegation of young people from Toronto*, who have come here to take part in this meeting and in the celebration of Palm Sunday.

I am grateful to the young men and women who have manifested to me their desire to respond to the call of the Lord, but at the same time have realized that it is not always easy to respond to him with an open and generous "yes".

Dear friends, I understand your difficulty. The numerous offers that you have to weigh in your mind that come from every side certainly do not make it any easier for you to discern the wonderful plan of life whose unifying centre and driving force are Christ. Isn't it true that some of your peers seem to *live for the moment*, choosing what appears to be the easiest course?

Listen to me! If you do not give time to prayer nor accept the counsel of a spiritual guide, *the confusion of the world can even succeed in drowning God's voice*. As some have quickly observed, by satisfying our own immediate needs we lose the capacity to love in the name of Christ and become incapable of giving our lives for others as he has taught us. What should we do then?

3. You asked me this question: "What must we do to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world?".

To respond, we must first remember that *God created man in his image*, calling him to his first and fundamental vocation: *communion with him!* It is this that gives human beings their highest dignity. "*From the very circumstances of his origin, man is invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by God's love and constantly preserved by it. And he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to his Creator*" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 19).

Yes, dear friends, we are created by God and for God, and *our longing for him is engraved on our hearts!* Since "*the glory of God is living man*", as St Irenaeus of Lyons observed, God never ceases to draw man to himself, so that in him man may find the truth, beauty and happiness that he seeks without pause. This attraction that God exercises on us is called "vocation".

4. Precisely because we are created in the image of God, we have also received from him *that great gift which is freedom*. However if it is not used well, freedom can distance us from God. It can cause us to lose the dignity with which he has clothed us. When it is not formed by the Gospel, freedom can be transformed into slavery: the slavery of sin and eternal death.

Dear young men and women of Rome! By straying far from God's will our first parents fell into sin,

that is, the wrong use of freedom. Yet the heavenly Father did not forsake us; *he sent his Son Jesus to heal our wounded freedom* and to restore the disfigured image, making it even more beautiful. Victorious over sin and death, Jesus affirmed his lordship over the world and history. He is alive and invites us not to submit our personal freedom to any earthly power, but only to him and to his almighty Father.

Young people of the new millennium, *do not misuse your freedom!* Do not lose the great dignity that God has conferred on you as his sons and daughters! Submit only to Christ, who wants your good and your true joy (cf. Mt 23,8-10); to him, who wants you to be men and women who are perfectly happy and fulfilled! In this way you will find that only by following God's will can we be the light of the world and the salt of the earth!

5. This sublime and demanding reality can only be grasped and lived in a spirit of constant prayer. This is the secret, if we are to enter into and dwell in God's will. Thus what are extremely helpful are the initiatives of prayer - especially *Eucharistic adoration* - that young people are spreading in the Diocese of Rome as a result of your work.

I would also like to say to each and every one: *read the Gospel*, personally and in community, meditate on it and live it. The Gospel is the living, active word of Jesus that initiates each one of us to the infinite love of God for us and for all humanity. The divine Master calls each one of you to be a labourer in his field; he is calling you to be his disciples, ready to communicate to your friends what he has communicated to you.

If you do this, you will be able to answer the question: "Lord, what would you have me do?". Indeed, the true answer can be found in the *Gospel* that, in spirit, *I consign to you this evening*. It is the missionary mandate of Jesus: "*You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world*" (Mt 5,13-14). I commend you to Mary, a shining example of fidelity to the vocation entrusted to her by the Lord.

I hope your preparations for Toronto go well! Take courage!