



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO BERN
ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL MEETING
OF THE YOUNG CATHOLICS OF SWITZERLAND

MEETING WITH THE CATHOLIC YOUTH OF SWITZERLAND

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Ice Palace of BEA Bern Expo in Bern

Saturday, 5 June 2004

Dear Swiss young people, I am glad to be with you here today. Your enthusiasm has rejuvenated my heart! Thank you, thank you for your cordiality. You are the good future of Switzerland.

Steh auf! Lève-toi! Alzati! Sto se! [arise!] (Lk 7: 14).1. The Lord's words to the young man of Nain ring out loudly at our gathering today and are addressed to you, dear young friends, young Catholics of Switzerland! The Pope has come from Rome once again to listen with you to these words from Christ's lips and to echo them. I greet you all with affection, dear friends, and thank you for your warm welcome. I also greet your Bishops, the priests, Religious and the animators who accompany you on your journey. I address an especially respectful greeting to Mr Joseph Deiss, President of the Swiss Confederation; to Pastor Samuel Lutz, President of the Synodal Council of the Reformed Churches of Bern-Jura-Soleure; and to your friends of other Confessions who have desired to take part in this event.2. The Gospel of Luke *tells the story of an encounter*: on the one hand there is the melancholy procession accompanying the young son of a widowed mother to the cemetery; on the other, the festive group of disciples who follow Jesus and listen to him. Today too, young friends, you can find yourselves part of that sad procession winding its way through the village of Nain. This is what happens if you allow yourselves to give in to desperation, if the mirages of the consumer society seduce you and detach you from true joy to swallow you up in transient pleasures, if indifference and superficiality envelop you, or if, as you face evil and suffering, you doubt in God's presence and God's love for every person and seek to appease your inner thirst for true, pure love in the drifting of confused emotions. At those very moments Christ comes close to each one of you and, as he said to the young man of Nain, he says a word to you which comes as a shock: "*arise*". "*Accept the invitation that will set you on your feet again*". These are not simply words: it is Jesus himself who stands before you, the Word of God made flesh. He is the "*true light that enlightens every man*" (Jn 1: 9), the truth that sets us free (cf. Jn 14: 6), the life that the Father gives us in abundance (cf. Jn 10: 10). Christianity is not just a book of culture or an ideology, nor is it merely a system of values or principles, however lofty they may be. *Christianity is a person*, a presence, a face: Jesus, who gives

meaning and fullness to human life.³ Well, I say to you, dear young people: *Do not be afraid to meet Jesus*: indeed, seek him in reading Sacred Scripture with attention and availability and in personal and communal prayer; seek him in active participation in the Eucharist; seek him as you meet a priest for the sacrament of Reconciliation; seek him in the Church which is manifest to you in parish groups, movements and associations; seek him in the face of the suffering brother who is in need and a stranger. This search marks the existence of so many of your young contemporaries on their way towards the World Youth Day that will be celebrated in Cologne next summer. I cordially invite you too, straightaway, to take part in this great event of faith and witness. *I too was 20*, like you. I enjoyed sports, skiing, acting. I studied and I worked. I had desires and worries. In those years, now so long ago, when my native Land was wounded by war and then by the totalitarian regime, I sought the meaning to give to my life. *I found it in following the Lord Jesus*.⁴ Dear young woman, dear young man, youth is the period in which you wonder what to do with your life, how to contribute to making the world a little better, how to encourage justice and build peace. This is the second invitation I am addressing to you: *"Listen!"*. Do not tire of training yourselves in the *difficult discipline of listening*. Listen to the voice of the Lord who is speaking to you through the events of daily life, through the joys and sufferings that go with it, the people who are close to you, the voice of your conscience thirsting for truth, happiness, goodness and beauty. If you are able to open your hearts and minds with availability, you will discover "your vocation", *in other words, the plan that God in his love has devised for you from eternity*.⁵ You will be able to build a family founded on marriage, that pact of love between a man and a woman who commit themselves to a communion of stable and faithful life. Through your own witness, you will be able to confirm that even amid all the difficulties and obstacles, it is possible to live Christian marriage to the full as an experience filled with meaning and, as it were, "good news" for all families. Or if this is your vocation, you will be a priest or a Religious, giving your life to Christ and to the Church with an undivided heart and thus becoming a sign of God's loving presence in today's world. Like so many who have gone before you, you will be able to be an undaunted and unflagging apostle, watchful in prayer, cheerful and welcoming in community service. Yes, you too can be one of these! I am well aware that you may feel hesitant when faced with such a proposal; but I say to you: *do not be afraid!* God does not let himself be outdone in generosity! After almost 60 years of being a priest, I am happy to bear my witness to all of you here: it is beautiful to be able to spend oneself without reserve for the cause of the Kingdom of God!⁶ There is yet another invitation, a third one: young people of Switzerland, *"Set out on your way!"*. Do not be content with discussion; do not wait to do good for opportunities that may never come. *The time for action is now!* At the beginning of this third millennium, you too, young people, are called to proclaim the message of the Gospel with the testimony of your lives. The Church needs your energies, your enthusiasm, your youthful ideals to ensure that the Gospel permeates the fabric of society and inspires a civilization of authentic justice and love without discrimination. Now more than ever, in a world all too often deprived of light and the courage of noble ideals, *it is not the time to be ashamed of the Gospel* (cf. Rom 1: 16). Rather, it is time to preach it from the rooftops (cf. Mt 10: 27). The Pope, your Bishops, the whole Christian community are counting on your commitment, on your generosity, and following you with confidence and hope: *young people of Switzerland, start out on your way! The Lord goes with you*. May you have *Christ's Cross* in your hands. Let the *words of Life* be on your lips; and in your hearts, *the saving grace* of the Risen Lord! *Steh auf! Lève-toi! Alzati! Sto se!* [arise]. It is Christ who is speaking to you. Listen to him!