



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO LEBANON (MAY 10-11, 1997)

**HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL
DURING THE MEETING
WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF LEBANON**

Saturday, 10 May 1997

So, what a *Belo Horizonte*! Do you know what *Belo Horizonte* means? You know too much! Ah! It is located in Brazil. It was in Brazil in 1980 that I visited that country for the first time and met the young people in the city called Belo Horizonte. When I looked at them, as I am looking at you now, I said: what a Belo Horizonte! Seventeen years have passed and today I remember that moment and repeat: What a Belo Horizonte! The day of Pentecost: you must celebrate that “happy birthday”, that day, that Sunday. But today’s programme is scheduled to take place indoors, so I think we will endure the heat inside, or else we will come back here.

Dear Young People of Lebanon,

1. I am particularly pleased to meet you this evening, during my apostolic visit to your country. I first thank Cardinal Nasrallah Pierre Sfeir, Patriarch of Antioch for Maronites, for his words of welcome, and Bishop Habib Bacha, President of the Episcopal Commission for the Lay Apostolate, for presenting the young people of Lebanon.

Dear young people, I particularly appreciate the words which through your representatives you will address to me with honesty and trust. I understand the aspirations that motivate you and your impatience as you face the daily situation which you think cannot change. I thus discover the faces of young men and women who with youthful enthusiasm and energy are anxious to prepare themselves for the future by praying to the Lord to give them strength and courage, to communicate his love and his hope to them, as we will be asking him to do in the opening prayer

of our celebration. As years pass, I have supported you with prayer, imploring Christ to help you in your journey towards peace and in your personal and social life.

2. We will listen to the Gospel passage about the disciples of Emmaus. Their experience can help you, for it is like each of yours. Saddened by the events of Holy Week, disoriented by Jesus' death and disappointed that they had not realized their expectations, the two disciples decide to leave Jerusalem on Easter Day and return to their village. The hope brought by Christ during the three years they had spent with him in the Holy Land seemed to have been dispelled by his death. However, as they walk along the road, the pilgrims of Emmaus remember the Lord's message, a message of love and fraternal charity, a message of hope and salvation. In their hearts they retain the memory of the deeds and actions he had performed throughout his public life, from the banks of the Jordan to Golgotha, passing through Tyre and Sidon.

Each of them recalls words and meetings with the Lord which showed his tenderness, compassion and love for every human being. They were all impressed by his teaching and goodness. Christ looked beyond the stain of sin to the inner beauty of the being created in God's image. He could perceive the deep desire for truth and the thirst for happiness present in every person's soul. By his look, his outstretched hand and his words of comfort, Jesus called each one to pick himself up after sin, for every person has a value that goes beyond what he has done and there is no sin that cannot be forgiven. On thinking all this over, the disciples begin to meditate on the Good News brought by the Messiah.

On their way to Emmaus, as they were contemplating the person of Christ, his words and his life, the disciples are joined by the Risen One himself, who reveals to them the depth of the Scriptures and helps them discover God's plan. The events of Jerusalem, his death on the Cross and the Resurrection, bring salvation to every man and woman. Death is overcome and the way to eternal life definitively opened. But the two men do not yet recognize the Lord. Their hearts are confused and troubled. Only at the end of the road, when Jesus breaks bread with them, when he re-enacts the memorial of his sacrifice as in the Upper Room, are their eyes opened to accepting the truth: Jesus is risen; he goes before them on the paths of the world. Hope is not dead. They immediately return to Jerusalem to proclaim the Good News. Fortified by these promises, we also know that Christ is living and really present among his brothers and sisters, every day and until the end of time.

3. Christ constantly repeats this journey to Emmaus, this synodal journey with his Church; in fact, the word "synod" means to walk together. He walked this way again with the Pastors of the Catholic Church in Lebanon during the Special Assembly that was held in Rome in November and December 1995. Dear young people, he also wants to walk it again with you. With you, because the Synod of Bishops for Lebanon was held for you: you are the future. When you perform your daily tasks, in study or work, when you serve your brothers and sisters, when you share your doubts and hopes, when you reflect on Scripture, alone or in church, when you take part in the

Eucharist, Christ joins you; he walks beside you; he is your strength, your nourishment and your light.

Dear young people, in your every day life do not be afraid to let Christ join you like the disciples of Emmaus. In your personal life, in ecclesial life, the Lord accompanies you and puts his hope in you. Christ trusts you to be responsible for your own life and for that of your brothers and sisters, for the Church's future in Lebanon and for your country's future. Long live peace! Today and tomorrow, Jesus invites you to leave your ways to travel with him, united with all the faithful of the Catholic Church and all the Lebanese people.

4. So, are you willing to follow Christ? If you are willing to follow Christ and to let yourselves be seized by him, he will show you that the mystery of his Death and Resurrection is the key *par excellence* to understanding the Christian life and human life. In fact, in every life there are times when God seems to be silent, like Holy Thursday night; times of distress like Good Friday when God seems to abandon those he loves; times of light like the dawn of Easter morning which saw the definitive victory of life over death. After the example of Christ, who put his life in the Father's hands, it is by putting your trust in God that you will achieve great things. For if we rely only on ourselves, our projects all too often reveal individual and partisan interests. But everything can change when one relies first of all on the Lord who comes to transform, purify and bring peace to one's inner self. The changes to which you aspire in your land first call for a change of heart.

5. Indeed, it is your task to pull down the walls built up during the painful periods of your nation's history; do not build new walls in your country. On the contrary, it is your task to build bridges between people, between families and between the different communities. In your daily life, may you achieve works of reconciliation in order to pass from mistrust to trust! It is also your task to see that every Lebanese, especially every young person, can take part in social life, in your common home. Thus a new brotherhood will be born and solid bonds woven in order to build up Lebanon, since the principal and decisive weapon is love. By drawing on intimate life with the Lord, the source of love and peace, you in turn will be artisans of peace and love. In this way, the Apostle says, we will be recognized as his disciples.

You are the treasure of Lebanon, you who hunger for peace and brotherhood, and wish to commit yourselves every day to this land to which you are deeply attached. With your parents, teachers and all the adults who have social and ecclesial roles, you must prepare the Lebanon of the future, to make it a united people, with its cultural and spiritual diversity. Lebanon is a heritage full of promise. Apply yourselves to acquiring a sound civic and moral education, to become fully aware of your responsibilities in the reconstruction of the nation. One of the factors that create unity in a nation is a sense of dialogue with every brother and sister, with respect for their particular sensitivities and different community histories. Far from distancing people from one another, this basic attitude of openness is one of the essential moral elements of democratic life and one of the essential means for developing solidarity, renewing the social fabric and giving a new vitality to

national life.

6. To express my esteem and trust to you, in a moment at the end of the address, I will sign the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation in your presence. Through your reflections you made a notable contribution to the preparation of the Assembly, where you were represented and heard. Today I choose you as privileged witnesses and trustees of the message of renewal which is necessary to the Church and to your country. I urge you fervently to take an active part in putting the guidelines of the Synod Assembly into practice. With the Patriarchs and Bishops, Pastors of the flock, with the priests, religious and all the Christian people, you are responsible for being witnesses to the risen Lord by your words and by your whole life. In the Christian community each one of you is called to have a share in its responsibility. By listening to Christ who calls you and who wants you to succeed in life, you will respond to your particular vocation in the priesthood, the consecrated life or marriage. In every state of life, being committed to following the Lord is a source of great joy.

The church where we are is on the top of a mountain: it is visible to the inhabitants of Beirut and of the region, and to visitors who come to your land; thus may your witness be an enlightening example for your companions! Do not forget your Christian identity and your status as disciples of the Lord. It is your glory; it is your hope; it is your mission. Receive the Exhortation as a gift from the universal Church to the Church in Lebanon and to your country, in the certainty that your energy and courage will be at the root of deep transformations in yourselves and in society as a whole. Put your faith and hope in Christ. In him you will not be disappointed.

7. Let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Lebanon, to watch over your country and its inhabitants and help you with her motherly tenderness to be worthy heirs of the saints of your land and to make Lebanon flourish again, this country which is one of the Holy Places God loves, because he came to make his home here and to remind us that we must build the earthly city with our eyes fixed on the values of the kingdom.

After his homily, the Holy Father spoke extemporaneously to those present:

Now I must tell you that you have followed my address attentively. And I must tell you that I have also paid attention to you: are they reacting at the right moment? Are they applauding when they ought to? This is how I knew. So you have passed your examination! And now we must return to the basilica, to celebrate the liturgical part. You must continue to participate and at the end I will come back and see you!

