

**Message of the Holy Father to the Youth of the World on the occasion of the XV
World Youth Day**

"The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14)

My dear people,

1. Fifteen years ago, at the close of the Holy Year of Redemption, I entrusted to you a great wooden Cross, asking you to carry it across the world as a sign of the love which the Lord Jesus has for mankind and to proclaim to every one that only in Christ who died and is risen is there salvation and redemption. Since that day, carried by generous hands and hearts, the Cross has made a long, uninterrupted pilgrimage across the continents, to demonstrate that the Cross walks with young people and young people walk with the Cross.

Around the "Holy Year Cross", World Youth Days were born and developed as meaningful "moments of rest" along your journey as young Christians; a constant, pressing invitation to build life on the rock that is Christ. How can we fail to bless the Lord for the countless fruits born in the hearts of individuals and in the whole Church thanks to the World Youth Days, which in this last part of the century have marked the journey of young believers towards the new millennium?

After spanning the continents, that Cross now returns to Rome bringing with it the prayers and commitment of millions of young people who have recognised it as a simple and sacred sign of God's love for humanity. Because Rome, as you know, will host World Youth Day of the Year 2000, in the heart of the Great Jubilee.

Dear young people, I invite you therefore to undertake with joy the pilgrimage to Rome for this important ecclesial appointment, which will rightly be the "Youth Jubilee". Prepare to enter the Holy Door, knowing that to pass through it is to strengthen faith in Him in order to live the new life which he has given to us. (1)

2. I chose as the theme for your 15th World Day the lapidary phrase with which Saint John the Apostle describes the profound mystery of God made man: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). What distinguishes the Christian faith from all other religions, is the certainty that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the Word made flesh, the second person in the Trinity who came into the world. "Such is the joyous conviction of the Church from her beginning, whenever she sings 'the mystery of our religion': 'He was manifested in the flesh.'" (2) God, the invisible one is alive and present in the person of Jesus, Son of Mary, the Theotokos, Mother of God. Jesus of Nazareth is God with us, Emmanuel: he who knows Him knows God, he who sees Him sees God, he who follows Him follows God, he who unites himself with Him is united with God (cf Jn 12:44-50). In Jesus, born in Bethlehem, God embraces the human condition, making himself accessible, establishing a covenant with mankind.

On the eve of the new millennium, I make again to you my pressing appeal to open wide the doors to Christ who "to those who received him, gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12). To receive Jesus Christ means to accept from the Father the command to live, loving Him and our brothers and sisters, showing solidarity to everyone, without distinction; it means believing that in the history of humanity even though it is marked by evil and suffering, the final word belongs to life and to love, because God came to dwell among us, so we may dwell in Him.

By his incarnation Christ became poor to enrich us with his poverty and he gave us redemption, which is the fruit above all of the blood he shed on the Cross. (3) On Calvary, "ours were the sufferings he bore....he was pierced through our faults" (Is 53:4-5). The supreme sacrifice of his life, freely given for our salvation, is proof of God's infinite love for us. Saint John the Apostle writes: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone that believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). He sent Him to share in every way, except sin, our human condition, he "gave" him totally to men, despite their obstinate and homicidal rejection (cf Mt 21:33-39), to obtain, through his death, their reconciliation. "the God of creation is revealed as the God of redemption, as God who is 'faithful to himself' and faithful to his love for man and the world which he revealed on the day of creation....how precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he gained so great a Redeemer". (4)

Jesus went towards his death. He did not draw back from any of the consequences of his being "with us", Emmanuel. He took our place, ransoming us on the Cross from evil and sin. (5) Just as the Roman Centurion, seeing the manner in which Jesus died, understood that he was the Son of God (cf Mk 15:39) so we too, seeing and contemplating the Crucified Lord, understand who God really is, as he reveals in Jesus the depth of his love for mankind. (6) "Passion" means a passionate love, unconditioned self-giving: Christ's passion is the summit of an entire life "given" to his brothers and sisters to reveal the heart of the Father. The Cross, which seems to rise up from the earth, in actual fact reaches down from heaven, enfolding the universe in a divine embrace. The Cross reveals itself to be "the centre, meaning and goal of all history and of every human life". (7)

"One man has died for all" (2 Cor 5:14): Christ "gave himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:2). Behind the death of Jesus there is a plan of love, which the faith of the Church calls the "mystery of the redemption": the whole of humanity is redeemed, that is, set free from the slavery of sin and led into the kingdom of God. Christ is Lord of heaven and earth. Whoever listens to his word and believes in the Father, who sent him, has eternal life (cf Jn 5:24). He is the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29.36), the high priest who, having suffered like us, is able to share our infirmity (cf Heb 4:14) and "made perfect" through the painful experience of the Cross, becomes "for all who obey him, the source of eternal salvation" (Heb 5:9).

3. My dear young people, faced with these great mysteries, learn to lift your hearts in an attitude of contemplation. Stop and look with wonder at the infant Mary brought into the world, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger: the infant is God himself who has come among us. Look at Jesus of Nazareth, received by some and scorned by others, despised and rejected: He is the Saviour of all, Adore Christ, our Redeemer, who ransoms us and frees us from sin and death: He is the living God, the source of Life.

Contemplate and reflect! God created us to share in his very own life; he calls us to be his children, living members of the mystical Body of Christ, luminous temple of the Spirit of Love. He calls us to be his: he wants us all to be saints. Dear young people, may it be your holy ambition to be holy, as He is holy.

You will ask me: but is it possible today to be saints? If we had to rely only on human strength, the undertaking would be truly impossible. You are well aware, in fact, of your successes and your failures, you are aware of the heavy burdens weighing on man, the many dangers which threaten him and the consequences caused by his

sins. At times we may be gripped by discouragement and even come to think that it is impossible to change anything either in the world or in ourselves.

Although the journey is difficult, we can do everything in the One who is our Redeemer. Turn then to no one, except Jesus. Do not look elsewhere for that which only He can give you, because "of all the names in the world given to men this is the only one by which we can be saved" (Act 4:12). With Christ, saintliness - the divine plan for every baptised person - becomes possible. Rely on Him; believe in the invincible power of the Gospel and place faith as the foundation of your hope. Jesus walks with you, he renews your heart and strengthens you with the vigour of his Spirit.

Young people of every continent, do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium! Be contemplative, love prayer, be coherent with your faith and generous in the service of your brothers and sisters, be active members of the Church and builders of peace. To succeed in this demanding project of life, continue to listen to His Word, draw strength from the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance. The Lord wants you to be intrepid apostles of his Gospel and builders of a new humanity. In fact, how could you say you believe in God made man without taking a firm position against all that destroys the human person and the family? If you believe that Christ revealed the Father's love for every person, you cannot fail to strive to contribute to the building of a new world, founded on the power of love and forgiveness, on the struggle against injustice and all physical, moral and spiritual distress, on the orientation of politics, economy, culture and technology to the service of man and his integral development.

4. I sincerely wish that the Jubilee, now at the door, may be an opportune time for courageous spiritual renewal and an exceptional celebration of God's love for humanity. From the whole Church may there rise up "a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Father, who in his incomparable love granted us in Christ to be 'fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God' (Eph 2,19)". (8) May we draw comfort from the certainty expressed by Saint Paul the Apostle: If God did not spare his only Son but gave him for us, how can he fail to give us everything with him? Who can separate us from the love of Christ? In every event of life, including death, we can be more than winners, by the virtue of the One who loved us to the Cross (cf Rm 8:31-37).

The mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God and that of the Redemption he worked for all men, constitute the central message of our faith. The Church proclaims this down through the centuries, walking "amidst the misunderstanding and persecutions of the world and the consolations of God" (9) and she entrusts it to her children as a precious treasure to be safeguarded and shared.

You too, dear young people, are the receivers and the trustees of this heritage: "This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. And we are proud to profess it, in Jesus Christ Our Lord". (10) We will proclaim it together on the occasion of the next World Youth Day, in which I hope very many of you will take part. Rome is a "city-shrine" where the memory of the Apostles Peter and Paul and other martyrs remind pilgrims of the vocation of every baptised person. Before the world, in August next year, we will repeat the profession of faith made by Saint Peter the Apostle: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68) because "you are the Christ the Son of the Living God!" (Mt 16:16).

Also to you boys and girls who will be adults in the next century, is entrusted the "Book of Life", which on Christmas Eve this year the Pope, the first to cross the

threshold of the Holy Door, will show to the church and to the world as the wellspring of life and hope for the third millennium. (11)

May it become your most precious treasure: In the careful study and generous acceptance of the Word of the Lord, you will find nourishment and strength for your daily life, you will find motivation for tireless commitment to the building of a civilisation of love.

5. Let us now turn our eyes to the Virgin Mother of God, of whom the city of Rome treasures one of the earliest and most honoured monuments which the devotion of the Christian people has dedicated to her: the Basilica of Saint Mary Major.

The Incarnation of the Word and the Redemption of mankind are closely linked with the Annunciation when God revealed to Mary his plan and found in her, a young person like yourselves, a heart totally open to the action of his love. For centuries Christian devotion has recalled every day, with recitation of the Angelus Domini, God's entrance into the history of man. May this prayer become your daily meditated prayer.

Mary is the dawn which precedes the rising of the Sun of justice, Christ our Redeemer. With her "yes" at the Annunciation, as she opened herself completely to the Father's plan, she welcomed and made possible the incarnation of the son. The first disciple, with her discreet presence she accompanied Jesus all the way to Calvary and sustained the hope of Apostles as they waited for the Resurrection and Pentecost. In the life of the Church she continues to be mystically the one who precedes the Lord's coming. To Mary, who fulfils without interruption her ministry as Mother of the Church and of each Christian, I entrust with confidence the preparation of the 15th World Youth Day. May Most Holy Mary teach you, dear young people, how to discern the will of the heavenly Father in your life. May she obtain for you the strength and the wisdom to speak to God and to speak about God. Through her example may she encourage you to be in the new millennium announcers of hope, love and peace.

Looking forward to meeting many of you in Rome next year, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace that has power to build you up and to give you your inheritance among all the sanctified" (Acts 20:32), while, gladly and with great affection, I bless all of you, with your families and your loved ones.

From the Vatican, June 29th 1999, solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul.

John Paul II

Endnotes:

(1) Cf Incarnationis Mysterium, 8.(2) Catechism of the Catholic Church, 463(3) Cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, 517(4) Redemptor Hominis. 9.10.(5) Cf Evangelium Vitae, 50(6) Cf Redemptor Hominis, 9(7) Evangelium Vitae, 50(8) Incarnationis Mysterium, 6(9) S. Augustine, De Civ. Dei 18 51, 2; PL 41, 614(10) Roman Pontifical, Rite of Confirmation(11) Incarnationis Mysterium, 8.