



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CROATIA

(JUNE 4-5, 2011)

**PRAYER VIGIL WITH CROATIAN YOUTH**

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI***

*Bano Josip Jelačić Square - Zagreb*

*Saturday, 4 June 2011*

**(Video)**

*Dear Young People!*

I greet all of you with much affection. I am particularly happy to be with you in this historic Square which is really the heart of the city of Zagreb. It is a meeting-place and a centre of communication often overwhelmed by the noise and activity of daily life. Your presence has now transformed it into a kind of church whose vault is the sky itself, which this evening seems almost to bend low over us. In silence we want to receive the word of God which has just been proclaimed, so that it will enlighten our minds and warm our hearts.

I thank Archbishop Srakić, President of the Bishops' Conference, for his words introducing our gathering; and in a special way I greet and thank the two young people who offered us their fine testimonies. The experience recounted by Daniel evokes that of Saint Augustine: it is the experience of seeking love "outside", and then discovering that it is closer to me than I am to myself; love "touches" me deeply and purifies me. Mateja then spoke of the beauty of community, which opens the heart, the mind and the spirit... I thank you both!

In the reading we have just listened to, Saint Paul tells us to "rejoice in the Lord always" (*Phil 4:4*). These words are stirring if we consider the fact that the Apostle of the Nations is writing this letter

to the Christians of Philippi while imprisoned and awaiting trial. He is in chains, yet the preaching and testimony of the Gospel cannot be chained. Saint Paul's experience reveals how it is possible, along the journey of our lives, to preserve joy even in moments of darkness. But what is the joy to which he refers? We all know that lodged in the heart of every person is a strong desire for happiness. Every action, every decision, every intention holds hidden within itself this deep, natural desire. But all too often we realize that we put our trust in things that cannot fulfil that desire, things that turn out to be shifting sands. At such moments we recognize our need for something "greater", capable of giving meaning to our daily lives.

Dear friends: this time of youth is given to you by the Lord to enable you to discover life's meaning! It is a time of vast horizons, of powerful emotions, but also a time of concern about demanding, long-term choices, a time of challenges in your studies and in the workplace, a time of wondering about the mystery of pain and suffering. What is more, this wonderful time of life is marked by a deep longing which, far from cancelling everything else, actually lifts it up and fulfils it. In the Gospel of John, Jesus asks his disciples: "What are you looking for?" (*Jn* 1:38). Young friends, these words, this question reaches beyond time and space, it challenges every man and woman who is open to life and in search of the right path... And, startlingly, the voice of Jesus also says to you: "what are you looking for?" Jesus speaks to you today, through the Gospel and his Holy Spirit. He is your contemporary! He seeks you even before you seek him! While fully respecting your freedom, he approaches each one of you and offers himself as the authentic and decisive response to the longing deep within your hearts, to your desire for a life worth living. Let him take you by the hand! Let him become more and more your friend and companion along life's journey. Put your trust in him and he will never disappoint you! Jesus enables you to know at first hand the love of God the Father; he helps you realize that your happiness comes from his friendship, from fellowship with him. Why? Because we have been created and saved by love, and it is only in love, the love which desires and seeks the good of others, that we truly experience the meaning of life and find happiness in living it, even amid difficulties, trials and disappointments, even when it means swimming against the tide.

Dear young people: if you are rooted in Christ, you will fully become the person you are meant to be. As you know, this is the theme I chose for my [Message](#) for the coming [World Youth Day](#), which will see us gathered this August in Madrid and towards which we are now making our way. I began with an incisive expression of Saint Paul: "Rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith" (*Col* 2:7). As you grow in friendship with the Lord through his word, the Eucharist and life in the Church, you will be able, with the help of your priests, to testify to the complete joy of having encountered the One who always stands at your side and enables you to live in confidence and hope. The Lord Jesus is not a Teacher who deceives his disciples: he tells us clearly that walking by his side calls for commitment and personal sacrifice, but it is worth the effort! Young friends: do not let yourselves be led astray by enticing promises of easy success, by lifestyles which regard appearances as more important than inner depth. Do not yield to the temptation of putting all your trust in possessions, in material things, while abandoning the search for the truth which is always

“greater”, which guides us like a star high in the heavens to where Christ would lead us. Let it guide you to the very heights of God!

In this springtime of your youth, you can find support in the witness which so many of the Lord's disciples gave in their own days by treasuring the newness of the Gospel in their hearts. Think of Francis and Clare of Assisi, Rose of Viterbo, Theresa of the Child Jesus, Dominic Savio: think of all the many young saints in the great company of the Church! Here in Croatia, though, you and I think of Blessed Ivan Merz. A brilliant young man, completely involved in social life, who began his university studies after the death of young Greta, his first love. During the years of the First World War he was confronted by destruction and death, but this experience shaped and forged him, helping him to overcome moments of crisis and spiritual struggle. Ivan's faith grew so strong that he devoted himself to the study of the liturgy and embarked upon an intense apostolate among other young people. He discovered the beauty of the Catholic faith and came to understand that his own calling in life was to experience, and to help others experience, the friendship of Christ. The path of his life was strewn with astonishing and moving acts of charity and goodness! He died on 10 May 1928, at only 32 years of age, after a few months of sickness, offering his life for the Church and for young people.

This young life, completely given over to love, bears the fragrance of Christ; it invites all of us not to be afraid and to entrust ourselves to the Lord as did the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, who is venerated and loved here under the title of Our Lady of the Stone Gate. This evening I wish to entrust each of you to her, asking her to accompany and protect you, and above all to help you to encounter the Lord and in him to discover the full meaning of your life. Mary did not fear to surrender herself completely to God's plan; in her we see the goal to which we are called: full communion with the Lord. Our entire life is a journey towards the Unity and Trinity of Love which is God; we can live our lives in the certainty that we will never be abandoned. Dear young people of Croatia, I embrace all of you as sons and daughters! You have a place in my heart and I leave you my blessing. “Rejoice in the Lord always!” May his joy, the joy of true love, be your strength. Amen. Praised be Jesus and Mary!