



The Holy See

8th WORLD YOUTH DAY

HOLY MASS FOR THE REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FORUM

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of Denver
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"Go into all the world" (Marc. 16, 15).

1. The final words of Christ to his Apostles in Saint Mark's Gospel are these: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation". This is *the missionary mandate*. This is the command which began the great expansion of the Church from the first group of disciples in Jerusalem to the great Christian family spread throughout the world. The Church lives among every people and nation: as is clearly demonstrated here by your presence, young representatives to the *International Youth Forum*, from almost every country in the world.

Christ addressed those challenging words to the Apostles; the same ones to whom he had already said, some time before: *"Follow me"* (Marc 1,17). He had said: "Follow me" to each one, individually, in a personal way. And between that initial *calling* and the final *sending* "into all the world", each one of those disciples underwent an experience, a process of growth, which prepared them intimately for the enormous challenge and adventure, which was Christ's parting summons to them.

Christ first *invites*, then he *reveals* himself more fully, and then he sends. He invites in order to make himself known to those whom he wishes to send. He sends those who have come to know the mystery of his person and of his kingdom. *For the Gospel must be proclaimed through the power of their witness*. And the strength of their witness depends on knowledge and love of Jesus Christ himself. Every apostle must be able to identify with what the First Letter of John says: "This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have

seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched – we speak of the word of life" (*1Io* 1,1).

2. *That same Gospel experience* penetrates the whole "*World Youth Day*". The young people who are gathering here from all parts of the world, and you in particular, participants in the *International Youth Forum*, are involved in a similar process: at some point Christ entered your lives and invited you to a greater awareness of your baptismal consecration; with God's grace and the help of a believing community you grew in understanding of your Christian identity and your role in the Church and in society. As mature Catholics, you began to take an active part in the apostolate.

Denver is the sum of countless experiences of this kind. In your families, parishes, schools, Catholic associations and movements, the seed of a genuine faith was planted and grew until you heard in your own hearts the echo of those original words: "Come, follow me" (*Luc* 18,22). Each one of you has followed a different path, but you have not been alone on this journey. At every stage the Church has assisted and encouraged you, through her ministers, her Religious, and so many active members of the laity. The path finally led to the International Youth Forum. And now, here in Denver, the challenge before you is to recognize the full implications of the Lord's words: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news" (*Marc* 16,15).

Yes, Christ the Lord is the very heart of the "*World Youth Day*", and *he continues to invite many young people to join him in the sublime task of spreading his Kingdom*. He is here because the Church is here. He is here in the Eucharist, and through the ministry of his priests and Bishops, in union with the Successor of Peter. Christ is here through the faith and love of so many young people who have prepared themselves spiritually for this Meeting and have worked hard and made sacrifices in order to be able to make this pilgrimage of hope and commitment.

3. In a sense, the *International Youth Forum* represents the nucleus of the "*World Youth Day*". Not only are you praying and reflecting on the theme of the Life in abundance which Christ came to give (cf. *Io* 10,10), but you are comparing experiences of the apostolate in different parts of the world, in order to learn from one another and to be confirmed in the Christian leadership which you are called to exercise among your contemporaries. Only *a great love of Christ and of the Church* will sustain you in the apostolate awaiting you when you return home.

As leaders in the field of the youth apostolate, your task will be to help your parishes, Dioceses, associations and movements to be truly open to the personal, social and spiritual needs of young people. You will have to find ways of involving young people in projects and activities of formation, spirituality and service, giving them responsibility for themselves and their work, and taking care to avoid isolating them and their apostolate from the rest of the ecclesial community. Young people need to be able to see the practical relevance of their efforts to meet the real needs of people, especially the poor and neglected. They should also be able to see that their apostolate belongs fully to the Church's mission in the world.

Have no fear! Denver, like the previous "*World Youth Days*", is a time of grace: *a great gathering of young people*, all speaking different languages but all united in proclaiming the mystery of Christ and of the new Life he gives. This is especially evident in the catecheses being given each day in various languages. In prayer and song, so many different tongues ring out in praise of God. All this

makes *Denver a reflection of what happened in Jerusalem at Pentecost* (cf. *Act 2,1-4*). Out of all the diversity of the young people gathered here – diversity of origin, race and language – *the Spirit of Truth will create the deep and abiding unity* of commitment to the new evangelization, in which the defense of human life, the promotion of human rights and the fostering of a civilization of love are urgent tasks.

4. To be committed to the new evangelization means that we are convinced that we have something of value to offer to the human family at the dawn of the new millennium. All of us who have come here – young people and their Pastors, Bishops and the Pope – must be aware that it is not enough to offer a "merely human wisdom, a pseudo – science of well-being" (*Redemptoris missio*, 11). We must be convinced that we have "a pearl of great price" (cf. *Matth 13,46*), a great "treasure" (cf. *Matth 13,44*), which is fundamental to the earthly existence and eternal salvation of every member of the human race.

The call of the Prophet Isaiah, narrated in the First Reading of this Mass, can begin to unveil the mystery to us. Whenever God communicates with a human being, the essence of that communication is *a revelation of his own holiness*: "My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts... Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" (*Is 6,5.3*). And our response can be none other than joyous openness to that divine glory and acceptance of its implications for the meaning and purpose of our lives.

The ineffable experience of *God's holiness lives on in the Church*. Every day in the very center of the Eucharistic Liturgy we repeat the words: "*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory*" (cf. *Is 6,3*).

This treasure lives on in the Church because the *holiness of God is revealed in all its fullness through Jesus Christ*: "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', *has shone in our hearts*, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ" (*2Cor 4,6*).

The holiness of God shines forth in Christ, the Emmanuel, God with us. Behold, "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son coming from the Father" (*Jo 1,14*) – and we have seen him, heard him and touched him: at the Lake of Galilee, on the Mount of the Beatitudes, on Mount Tabor, on Golgotha, along the road to Emmaus, in the Eucharist, in prayer, in the tangible experience of every *vocation*, especially when the Lord calls certain individuals to follow him more closely along the path of religious consecration or priestly ministry. We know that Christ never abandons his Church. At a time like this, when many are confused regarding the fundamental truths and values on which to build their lives and seek their eternal salvation, when many Catholics are in danger of losing their faith – the pearl of great price – when there are not enough priests, not enough Religious Sisters and Brothers to give support and guidance, not enough contemplative Religious to keep before people's eyes the sense of the absolute supremacy of God, we *must be convinced that Christ is knocking at many hearts*, looking for young people like you to send into the vineyard, where an abundant harvest is ready.

5. "But we – we human beings – have this *treasure* in *earthen vessels*" (cf. *2Cor* 4,7). That is why we are often afraid of the demands of the Redeemer's love. We may try to appease our conscience by giving of ourselves, but in limited and partial ways, or in ways that we like – not always in the ways that the Lord suggests. Yet, the fact that we carry this treasure in earthen vessels serves to make it clear that "*its surpassing power comes from God and not from us*" (cf. *2Cor* 4,7). Wherever young men and women allow the grace of Christ to work in them and produce new Life, the extraordinary power of divine Love is released into their lives and into the life of the community. It transforms their attitude and behavior, and inevitably attracts others to follow the same adventurous path. *This power comes from God and not from us.*

The One who has *invited* you to Denver, and who can call you at any stage of your pilgrimage through life, wants you to have the treasure of *knowing him more fully*. He wants to occupy the central place in your hearts, and therefore he purifies your love and tests your courage. The realization of his hidden but certain presence acts like *a burning coal that touches your lips* (cf. *Is* 6,7) and makes you able to repeat *the eternal "Yes" of the Son*, as the Letter to the Hebrews says: "Then I said, 'As it is written of me in the book, *I have come to do your will*, O God'" (*Hebr* 10,7). That "Yes" guided every step of the Son of Man: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing'" (*Io* 5,19). And Mary gave the very same "Yes" to God's plan for her life: "*Let it be done to me as you say*" (*Luc* 1,38).

6. *Christ is asking the young people of the "World Youth Day": "Whom shall I send?" (Is 6,8).*

And, with fervor, let each one respond: "*Here am I! Send me*" (*Is* 6,8).

Do not forget the needs of your homelands! Heed the cry of the poor and the oppressed in the countries and continents from which you come! Be convinced that the Gospel is the only path of genuine liberation and salvation for the world's peoples: "*Your salvation, O Lord, is for all the peoples*" (Psalmus Responsorius, 95).

Everyone who, in response to Christ's invitation, comes to Denver to take part in the World Youth Day must hear his words: "Go... and proclaim the good news" (*Marc* 16,15).

Let us earnestly pray the Lord of the harvest that the youth of the world will not hesitate to reply: "*Here am I! Send me!*" "*Send us!*" Amen.