



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER
ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 14TH WORLD YOUTH DAY**

“The Father loves you” (cf. *Jn* 16:27)

Dear young friends!

1. In the perspective of the Jubilee which is now drawing near, 1999 is aimed at “broadening the horizons of believers so that they will see things in the perspective of Christ: in the perspective of the ‘Father who is in heaven’ from whom the Lord was sent and to whom he has returned” (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 49). It is, indeed, not possible to celebrate Christ and his jubilee without turning, with him, towards God, his Father and our Father (cf. *Jn* 20:17). The Holy Spirit also takes us back to the Father and to Jesus. If the Spirit teaches us to say: “Jesus is Lord” (cf. *1Cor* 12:3), it is to make us capable of speaking with God, calling him “Abba! Father!” (cf. *Gal* 4:6).

I invite you also, together with the whole Church, to turn towards God the Father and to listen with gratitude and wonder to the amazing revelation of Jesus: “The Father loves you!” (cf. *Jn* 16:27). These are the words I entrust to you as theme for the XIV World Youth Day. Dear young people, receive the love that God first gives you (cf. *1Jn* 4:19). Hold fast to this certainty, the only one that can give meaning, strength and joy to life: his love will never leave you, his covenant of peace will never be removed from you (cf. *Is* 54:10). He has stamped your name on the palms of his hands (cf. *Is* 49:16).

2. It may not always be conscious and clear, but in the human heart there is a deep nostalgia for God. St. Ignatius of Antioch expressed this eloquently: “There is in me a living water that murmurs within me: ‘Come to the Father’” (*Ad Rom.*7). “Lord, show me your glory”, Moses begged on the mountain (*Ex* 33:18).

“No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him

known” (*Jn* 1:18). So, is it enough to know the Son in order to know the Father? Philip does not let himself be so easily convinced. “Show us the Father”, he asks. His insistence brings us a reply beyond all that we could hope for: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father” (*Jn* 14:9).

After the incarnation, there exists a human face in which it is possible to see God: “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me” (*Jn* 14:11). Jesus says this not only to Philip, but to all who will believe. And so, whoever receives the Son of God receives the One who sent him (cf. *Jn* 13:20). On the contrary, “he who hates me hates my Father also” (*Jn* 15:23). So a new relationship is possible between the Creator and the creature, that of the son with his own Father: When the disciples want to enter into the secrets of God and ask to learn how to pray as support for their journey, Jesus, in reply, teaches them the *Our Father*, “synthesis of the whole Gospel” (Tertullian, *De oratione*, 1). Here there is confirmation of our state as sons and daughters (cf. *Lk* 11:1-4). “On the one hand, in the words of this prayer, the only Son gives us the words the Father gave him; he is the Master of our prayer. On the other, as Word incarnate, he knows in his human heart the needs of his human brothers and sisters and reveals them to us: he is the Model of our prayer” (*Catholic Church Catechism*, 2765).

Bringing us the direct witness of the life of the Son of God, John’s Gospel points out the road to follow in order to know the Father. Calling upon the “Father” is the secret, the breath, the life of Jesus. Is he not the only Son, the first-born, the loved one towards whom everything is directed, present to the Father even before the world existed, sharing in his same glory? (cf. *Jn* 17:5). From the Father Jesus receives power over all things (cf. *Jn* 17:2), the message to be proclaimed (cf. *Jn* 12:49), the work to be accomplished (cf. *Jn* 14:31). The disciples themselves do not belong to him: it is the Father who has given them to him (cf. *Jn* 17:9), entrusting him with the task of keeping them from evil, so that none should be lost (cf. *Jn* 18:9).

In the hour of passing from this world to the Father, the “priestly prayer” reveals the mind of the Son: “Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made” (*Jn* 17:5). As Supreme and Eternal Priest, Christ takes his place at the head of the immense procession of the redeemed. First-born of a multitude of brothers, he leads back to the one fold the sheep of the scattered flock, so that there may be “one flock and one shepherd” (*Jn* 10:16).

Thanks to his work, the same loving relationship that exists within the Trinity was brought into the relation between the Father and redeemed humanity: “The Father loves you!” How could this mystery of love be understood without the action of the Spirit poured out from the Father over the disciples thanks to the prayer of Jesus (cf. *Jn* 14:16)? The incarnation in time of the eternal Word and the birth for eternity of all who are incorporated in him through Baptism would be inconceivable without the life-giving action of the same Spirit.

3. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (*Jn* 3:16). The world is loved by God! And, in spite of the refusals of which it is capable, it will continue to be loved to the very end. “The Father loves you” always and for ever: this is the unheard-of novelty, “the very simple yet profound proclamation owed to humanity by the Church” (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 34). If the Son also had given us only this word, it would be enough. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (*1Jn* 3:1). We are not orphans, love is possible. Because – as you know – we are not capable of loving if we are not loved.

But how are we to proclaim this good news? Jesus points out the way to follow: Listen to the Father in order to be “taught by God” (*Jn* 6:45) and keep the commandments (cf. *Jn* 14:23). This knowledge of the Father will then grow: “I made known to them your name, and I will make it known” (*Jn* 17:26); and this will be the work of the Holy Spirit, guiding into “all truth” (cf. *Jn* 16:13).

In our time, the Church and the world have need more than ever of “missionaries” capable of proclaiming by word and example this fundamental and consoling certainty. Being aware of this, young people of today and adults of the new millennium, let yourselves be “formed” in the school of Jesus. In the Church and in the various environments of your daily existence, become credible witnesses to the Father’s love! Make it visible in your choices and attitudes, in your way of receiving people and placing yourselves at their service, in faithfully respecting God’s will and his Commandments.

“The Father loves you”. These wonderful words are uttered within the heart of the believer who, like the disciple beloved of Jesus, rests his head on Jesus’ breast and hears what is spoken in confidence: “He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (*Jn* 14:31), for “this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (*Jn* 17:3).

There is a reflection of the Father’s love in the various forms of fatherhood encountered along your way. I am thinking especially of your parents, who cooperate with God in giving you life and in caring for you: honour them (cf. *Ex* 20:12) and be grateful to them! I am thinking of the priests and other persons consecrated to the Lord, who for you are friends, witnesses and teachers of life, “for your progress and joy in the faith” (*Phil* 1:25). I am thinking of the authentic educators who, with their humanity, their wisdom and their faith make a significant contribution to your growth, your Christian and therefore fully human growth. For each one of these worthy persons, who walk beside you along the paths of life, give thanks always to the Lord.

4. The Father loves you! Awareness of God’s special love cannot fail to encourage believers “to undertake, by hot cling fast to Christ the Redeemer of man, a journey of authentic conversion... This is the proper context for a renewed appreciation and more intense celebration of the sacrament of Penance in its most profound meaning” (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 50).

“Sin is an abuse of the freedom that God gives to created persons so that they are capable of loving him and loving one another” (*Catholic Church Catechism*, 387); it is refusal to live the life of God received in Baptism, to let ourselves be loved by the true Love: the human being has in fact the terrible power to be an obstacle to God who wills to give all that is good. Sin, which has its origin in the person’s free will (cf. *Mk 7:20*), is failure in genuine love; it wounds the nature of the human person and injures human solidarity by attitudes, words and actions steeped in self-love (cf. *Catholic Church Catechism*, 1849-1850). It is in the innermost self that freedom opens up or closes itself to love. This is the constant drama of the human person, who often chooses slavery, subjecting himself or herself to fears, caprices, wrong attitudes, creating idols that dominate and ideologies that degrade his or her humanity. In John’s Gospel we read: “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (*Jn 8:34*).

Jesus says to everyone: “Repent and believe in the Gospel” (*Mk 1:15*). At the origin of every genuine conversion there is God looking upon the sinner. It is a look that becomes a search filled with love; a passion, even that of the Cross; a will to pardon that, showing the guilty one the esteem and love in which he or she is still held, in contrast to the disorder in which they are plunged, calls for the decision to change their way of life. This is the case of Levi (cf. *Mk 2:13-17*), of Zacchaeus (cf. *Lk 19:1-10*), of the woman taken in adultery (cf. *Jn 8:1-11*), of the thief (cf. *Lk 23:39-43*), of the Samaritan woman (cf. *Jn 4:1-30*): “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it” (*Redemptor Hominis*, 10). The human being who has discovered and experienced the God of mercy and pardon can live only in a state of being continually converted to God (cf. *Dives in Misericordia*, 13).

“Go and do not sin again” (*Jn 8:11*): the pardon is given freely, but the person is invited to respond with a serious commitment to renewal of life. God knows his creatures too well! He is not unaware that an ever greater manifestation of his love will finally arouse in the sinner disgust for the sin. So God’s love is acted out in a continual offer of pardon.

How eloquent is the parable of the prodigal son! From the moment the son leaves home, the father lives in a state of anxiety: he waits, hopes, scans the horizon. He respects the son’s freedom, but he suffers. And when the son decides to return, the father sees him in the distance and goes to meet him, clasps him tightly in his arms and joyfully gives the order: “Put the ring on his finger – symbol of covenant – bring the best robe and put it on him – symbol of new life – put shoes on his feet – symbol of dignity regained – and let us make merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!” (cf. *Lk 15:11-32*).

5. Before ascending to the Father, Jesus entrusted to his Church the ministry of reconciliation (cf. *Jn 20:23*). So, a repentance that is only interior does not suffice in order to obtain God’s pardon. Reconciliation with God is obtained through reconciliation with the ecclesial community. So,

acknowledgment of sin is made through a concrete sacramental gesture: repentance and confession of the sins, with the intention of amendment, in presence of the Church's minister.

Today, unfortunately, the more people lose the sense of sin the less they have recourse to the pardon of God. This is the cause of many of the problems and difficulties of our time. This year, I invite you to rediscover the beauty and the wealth of grace in the sacrament of Penance by carefully rereading the parable of the prodigal son, where what is stressed is not so much the sin as the tenderness of God and his mercy. Listening to the Word in an attitude of prayer, contemplation, wonder and certainty, say to God : "I need you, I count on you in order to exist and to live. You are stronger than my sin. I believe in your power over my life, I believe that you are able to save me just as I am now. Remember me. Pardon me!"

Look at yourselves from "within". Before being against a law or a moral norm, sin is against God (cf. *Ps* 50 [51],6), against your brothers and sisters and against yourselves. Stand in front of Christ, only Son of the Father and model for all brothers and sisters. He alone shows us what we must be in relation to the Father, to our neighbour, to society, in order to be at peace with ourselves. He shows this through the Gospel, which is one with Jesus Christ. Faithfulness to one is the measure of faithfulness to the other.

Approach trustfully the sacrament of Confession: with the confession of sins you will show that you want to acknowledge infidelity and to put an end to it; you will admit the need for conversion and reconciliation, in order to find again the peace and fruitfulness of being children of God in Christ Jesus; you will express solidarity with the brothers and sisters who also undergo the trial of sin (cf. *Catholic Church Catechism*, 1445).

Finally, receive with a grateful heart the absolution given by the priest. This is the moment when the Father pronounces over the repentant sinner the life-giving word: "This my son is alive again!" The Source of love regenerates and makes us capable of overcoming egoism and of loving again, with greater intensity.

6. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (*Mt* 22: 37-40). Jesus does not say that the second commandment is identical with the first, but that it is "like it". So the two commandments are not interchangeable, as if we could automatically satisfy the commandment to love God by observing that to love our neighbour, or *viceversa*. Each has its own consistency, and they must both be observed. But Jesus puts them side by side to make it clear for everyone that they are closely connected. It is impossible to observe one without practicing the other. "Their inseparable unity is attested to by Christ in his words and by his very life: his mission culminates in the Cross of our Redemption, the sign of his indivisible love for the Father and for humanity" (*Veritatis Splendor*, 14).

To know whether we truly love God, we have to see whether we seriously love our neighbour. And if we want to test the quality of love for our neighbour, we have to ask ourselves whether we truly love God. Because “he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1Jn 4:20); and “by this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments” (1Jn 5:2).

In the Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, I exhorted Christians to “lay greater emphasis on the Church’s preferential option for the poor and the outcast” (n. 51). This is a “preferential”, not an exclusive option. Jesus invites us to love the poor, because they should be given special attention precisely because of their vulnerability. As is well known, they are more and more numerous, even in the so-called rich countries, in spite of the fact that the goods of this world are meant for everyone! Every situation of poverty is a challenge to each one’s Christian charity. This charity, however, must become also social and political commitment, because the problem of poverty in the world depends on concrete situations that must be changed by men and women of good will, builders of the civilization of love. They are “structures of sin” that cannot be overcome without cooperation from everyone, in readiness to “lose oneself” for the sake of the other rather than exploiting him, to “serve” instead of oppressing him (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38).

Dear young people, I invite you especially to take concrete initiatives of solidarity and sharing alongside and with those who are poorest. Participate generously in one or another of the projects through which, in the different countries, others of your contemporaries are involved in gestures of fraternity and solidarity. This will be a way of “restoring” to the Lord in the persons of the poor at least something of all He has given to you who are more fortunate. It can also give immediate visible expression to a fundamental option: to give your life a definite orientation towards God and for others.

7. Mary sums up in her person the whole mystery of the Church. She is “the highly favoured daughter of the Father” (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 54), who freely accepted and readily responded to the gift of God. “Daughter” of the Father, she merited to become the Mother of his Son: “Let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:37). She is the Mother of God, because she is perfectly daughter of the Father.

In her heart there is no desire other than that of helping Christians in their commitment to live as children of God. As a most tender mother, she constantly leads them to Jesus, so that, following him, they may learn to develop their relation with the Father in heaven. As at the wedding in Cana, she invites them to do whatever he tells them (cf. Jn 2:5), for she knows that this is the way to reach the house of “the Father of mercies” (cf. 2Cor 1:3).

The XIV World Youth Day, which will be held this year in the local Churches, is the last before the great appointment of the Jubilee. It has therefore particular significance in the preparation for the Holy Year 2000. I pray that for each one of you it may be the occasion for a renewed encounter

with the Lord of life and with his Church.

To Mary I entrust your journeying, and I ask her to make your hearts ready to receive the grace of the Father, so that you may become witnesses to his love.

With these sentiments, wishing you a year rich in faith and in evangelical commitment, I bless you all from my heart.

From the Vatican, 6 January 1999, Solemnity of the Lord's Epiphany.

Joannes Paulus II