



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE GATHERED IN THE VATICAN BASILICA

21 March 1979

This meeting of yours with the Pope, dear boys and girls, seems to take on a particular meaning today because of the circumstance in which it takes place: the coming of spring! This circumstance confers on my greeting of "welcome", which I address to each of you with fatherly affection, a more lively and varied tonality, because it recalls your condition to the mind: you are the spring of life, the spring of the Church, the spring of God! May you appreciate then, my greeting and my good wish, as it is suggested to me by the Holy Book: "Bud like a rose growing by a stream of water; send forth fragrance like frankincense, and put forth blossoms like a lily. Scatter the fragrance, and sing a hymn of praise; bless the Lord for all his works" (Sir 39:13-14).

In order that this wish may not remain a mere verbal expression but may be changed into consoling reality, keep in mind that nature does not grant anything beautiful without effort and without work. The Lenten time teaches us, precisely, what must be the generous activity of the Christian in order that the spring of the spirit may occur, the blooming of good, the rising to new life with Jesus and in Jesus. The Church, a wise and loving Mother, indicates suitable means to attain this admirable purpose, these are, precisely, *prayer, fasting, and almsdeeds*. With a prayer one contacts and establishes a living and interesting dialogue with the Lord.

Fasting, to which I intend to draw your attention briefly today, is the second element necessary for the spring of the spirit. More than mere abstinence from nourishment or material food, it represents a complex and deep reality. Fasting is a symbol, a sign, a serious and stimulating call to accept or to make renunciations. What renunciation? Renunciation of the "ego", that is, of so many caprices or unhealthy aspirations; renunciation of one's own defects, of impetuous passion, of unlawful desires. Fasting is being able to say "no", bluntly and firmly, to what is suggested or asked by pride, selfishness, and vice; listening to one's own conscience, respecting the good of others, remaining faithful to God's holy Law.

Fasting means putting a limit on so many desires, sometimes good ones, in order to have full mastery of oneself, to learn to control one's own instincts, to train the will in good. Acts of this kind were once known as "fioretti" (small acts of sacrifice). The name changes, but the substance remains! They were and remain acts of renunciation, carried out for love of the Lord or of Our Lady, with a noble purpose to attain. They were and are a "sport", and indispensable training in order to be victorious in the competitions of the Spirit! Fasting, finally, means depriving oneself of something in order to meet the need of one's brother, becoming, in this way, and exercise of goodness, of charity.

Fasting, understood, put into practice, lived in this way, becomes *repentance*, that is, *conversion to God*. For it purifies the heart from so much dross of evil, beautifies the soul with virtues, trains the will to good, dilates the heart to receive the abundance of divine grace. In this conversion faith becomes stronger, hope more joyful, and charity more active!

Be converted to God, fill yourself with the Spirit of the Lord, and you will have in your heart a real, deep, and irrepressible joy; you will show a genuine, winning smile; you will see your youth as a stupendous gift, worthy of being lived in fullness and authenticity of human and Christian life.

With these brief considerations, which I hope will find a deep echo in your spirit and in your behaviour, receive, as testimony of great good will and a token of abundant heavenly graces, my fatherly Blessing, which I willingly extend to your families and to all the persons dear to you.

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