



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO YOUNG PEOPLE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Tuesday, 23 August 1983

Dear young people of England and Wales,

1. Tonight, once again, the Pope belongs to you! We are united in Jesus Christ and in his Church, and you have come here to be with me, so that together we can *proclaim in prayer the word of God*. Yes, dear young people, you have come, above all, to pray, and to pray with me. And together we are praying with Christ to his Father. Do you remember those words I spoke to you in Cardiff: "I, John Paul II, came to Britain to call you to Christ, to invite you to pray!"?

2. And tonight *our prayer is centred on God's inspired word*. In the Letter to the Thessalonians Saint Paul says: ". . . it was with the joy of the Holy Spirit that you took to the Gospel, in spite of the great opposition all around you" (1 Thess. 1, 6). What we are celebrating in prayer is joy - the joy that is yours in the Holy Spirit because you have "taken to" the Gospel, because you have received the word of God into your lives, despite all the obstacles and difficulties involved. Let us reflect on what this means.

God has given you a great gift; he has offered you his message of salvation in Jesus Christ. And *Jesus has invited you to embrace his way of life*; to live by his teaching - in a word, to accept, or "to take to" his Gospel. And not only has Jesus invited you, but he has given you the strength to accept. And in your acceptance he has given you the privilege of experiencing joy in the Holy Spirit. There is joy in your hearts precisely because you have accepted the message of Jesus, precisely because you have opted for his way of life, despite criticism and scorn from the world.

3. And tonight as we celebrate in prayer the joy of your acceptance, I want you *to realize how much opposition there is*, not that you should be fearful, but rather that you should face realistically and confidently the challenge that is yours as Christian young people living in today's world.

Precisely because of “the great opposition all around you”, you must take the necessary means to stand firm, to persevere. *You must pray*. You must pray daily; you must pray alone with God, and together. You must pray in union with our Lord Jesus Christ, especially on Sundays - every Sunday - sharing in the Eucharistic offering of himself to his Father. You must invoke the power of his death and Resurrection, the power that he is ready to unleash when you ask him to do so, using those simple words “Give us this day our daily bread . . . deliver us from evil”. Yes, through prayer and the intercession of Mary the Mother of God, the grace of Jesus Christ inundates your hearts, giving you the strength to stand firm in your Christian vocation, which is to follow Christ, to accept his way, to live by his word, to apply his Gospel to all the real situations of your daily lives.

4. But this evening all of you are here to bear witness in prayer to the fact that there is joy - immense joy - in the Holy Spirit for those who embrace Christ’s word as it is proclaimed by his Church, and follow him with constancy. At the same time you must be prepared to admit that the opposition to Christ’s was is widespread. It is no surprise to you - the experience of your young lives has already confirmed it over and over again - that a thousand and one deceptive voices are telling you that there is another way to live: without Christ, apart from him, without effort, more naturally, more easily, more pleasurably. There is a current life style that is totally opposed to the truth of Jesus Christ. There is behaviour all around you in the world that is totally incompatible with the dignity of baptized Christians, children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ. Very often the world will try to convince you to conduct yourselves in a way that is foreign to the thinking of Christ. By some people you will be told, in effect, that the commandments of God are outmoded, that the beatitudes of Christ are irrelevant, and that the pleasure of permissiveness is the goal of your lives. In some other quarters you will be told that Christ’s teaching is an ideal, but that it is not geared to the real situations of today’s world, and hence not applicable to modern youth. But you yourselves have already experienced in your hearts, and *you must continue to bear witness to the joy that comes from accepting the word of God*, the joy that comes from saying “yes” to the Christ who knows so well what you are capable of accomplishing through his grace.

5. In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul says to you: “Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you” (*Rom. 12, 2*). You are being called *to look steadfast at Jesus*, to put your trust in his way of living and not in the life style of the world, no matter how much opposition you meet. And tonight *I ask you to listen again to the message of Jesus*. He tells you the exact opposite that you hear from the world. Jesus speaks of the value of effort, sacrifice and discipline. He is telling you again, how important it is to honour God in prayer, to lift up your hearts to the Lord periodically each day, to confess your sins, to assist at Mass. Jesus is repeating to you his commandment to love your brothers and sisters, to work hard to alleviate suffering and pain, to strive to dispel hatred and injustice and to be open to the needs of all your fellow human beings - even though much effort and sacrifice are involved.

And Jesus proclaims anew tonight the Christian virtues of humility, meekness and mercy, which the world will call “weakness”. Jesus proposes to you honesty and uprightness in all your dealings

with others, and the world will say that you are “naïve”. Jesus calls you again, as young people, to chastity. He asks you to be open to others through all the dynamism inherent in your human sexuality, but he confirms the value of discipline and restraint as an essential part of God’s plan, and as a positive preparation for that total sexual self-giving that is meaningful and true in marriage alone. The world will call you “backward”, “benighted”, even “reactionary”, when you accept Christ’s command to be pure, and on its part will offer you the facile option of pre-marital sex. But God’s word and his truth are for ever, and Jesus will continue to hold out to you the value of chaste human relations and the real satisfaction that is found in Christian married love prepared for in purity. And that purity remains a positive expression of human sexuality and true love. Purity for young people is the opposite of selfishness, the opposite of escape.

6. Young people of England and Wales: *you have a choice to make*, a choice to renew, a choice to confirm. You have made it before, but you must make it again. I am talking about *the choice for Christ* and his way of life, and his commandment of love. It is the choice that Saint Paul has written about: “To take to the Gospel in spite of the great opposition all around you”.

Let us make this choice again, now, in the joy of the Holy Spirit. And let us make it together, bearing witness before the world to the grace that comes from our Lord Jesus Christ and is actuated in the mutual fraternal support of brothers and sisters in Christ. Young people, you have to tell the world - mainly through your actions, because they speak louder than words - that you freely choose Christ and that you really do believe in his commandment of love. And remember always that *the Pope is with you*, and with all the young people of England and Wales, and of the whole Church, as you face the opposition of the world, defy the allurements of the devil, and humbly and prayerfully strive repeatedly to overcome, through the power of Christ’s Redemption, the weaknesses of humanity and the effects of original sin.

But remember, above all, that *Jesus Christ is with you and in you*. And the power of his Redemption is stronger than all human weakness and sin put together. And it is he, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world, the Incarnate Word of God, the Son of the Eternal Father and of Mary, who repeats to you tonight: Walk in path! Stand by my side! Remain in my love! Follow me.

Young people of England and Wales: Follow Christ! He is the way and the truth and the life! He is *your way and your truth and your life! Follow Christ for ever!*