



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ZIMBABWE, BOTSWANA, LESOTHO,
SWAZILAND AND MOZAMBIQUE

**MEETING OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUTH IN 'PITSO GROUNDS' OF MASERU**

*Maseru (Lesotho)
Thursday, 15 September 1988*

1. *Bacha ba Lesotho, kea le rata!*
(*Young people of Lesotho, I love you!*)

Bacha ba Lesotho, kea le rata!
(*Young people of Lesotho, I love you!*)

Bacha ba Lesotho, ka le rata haholo!
(*Young people of Lesotho, I love you very much!*)

My dear Young People of Lesotho,

I am very happy to be with you this afternoon. Thank you for your warm welcome. Thank you for your *love for Jesus and the Church*. I am grateful for this opportunity to listen to you and speak to you, to hear what you wish to say to me in your words, in your songs and in our being together.

My time in Lesotho has truly been a time of celebration: a time to give thanks to God for the gift of our faith in Christ, a time to praise God for the faithful witness of Blessed Joseph Gérard, a time to ask the Lord's blessings on the future of the Church in this country. And I see *in you* that future, *a future full of hope*. It is a future built on the wonderful blessing of knowing and loving the Lord Jesus Christ.

By your Baptism, you were given this gift of faith, the same faith that nourished the soul of Blessed

Joseph Gérard, the same faith that he handed on to your ancestors and which you in turn must hand on. Faith is our great treasure, faith in Christ the Lord, and it is this treasure that holds the key to the future. And so, as we begin, let us make our own the words of the Psalm which we have just prayed together: “*I will hear what the Lord God has to say*”. Yes, let us listen to the Lord who loves us all.

2. Dear young friends, *faith comes from listening to the Lord*. And it grows through continuous listening – listening to the word of God, listening to his Body, the Church. That is why it is so important that, early in life, you should develop a habit of listening, above all to “what the Lord God has to say”. Like Blessed Joseph Gérard, every member of the Church should become *a lifelong student of the word of God*. Many young people today find it helpful to study the Gospel together in small groups. In this way they profit from one another’s insights and learn to apply the inspired word to daily life and problems. And yet nothing can ever take the place of personal meditation on God’s word: nothing can take the place of that one-to-one dialogue between myself and the Lord.

By listening to the word of God, you will discover *your own identity*, you will come to know yourself as God knows you. Scripture says: “You are God’s chosen race, *his saints: he loves you*”^[1]. In God’s eyes, that is who you are. You are each called by name and you are loved by God with an everlasting love. This is the truth we learn in faith.

3. By listening to the word of God, you will hear “*a voice that speaks of peace*”. Yes, to his faithful people God speaks words of peace. For he is the source of reconciliation. He is the living foundation of peace, especially that peace which comes through God’s gift of *conversion*.

We human beings could never attain peace and reconciliation through our own efforts and plans. We must begin by listening “to what the Lord God has to say, a voice that speaks of peace”. And then we must act on what we hear. For listening leads to action. Far from being something merely passive, listening spurs us on to serve the needs of others, to break down barriers of prejudice and hostility, to *become servants of reconciliation and peace*. And this begins in concrete ways, like those suggested by Saint Paul in the reading we have just listened to: “You should be clothed in *sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience*”^[2]. To be servants of peace for others, we must nourish in our own hearts these virtues recommended by the Apostle.

4. Above all, if peace is to reign in your hearts, you must *renounce every form of violence and hatred*. Violence only begets further violence. Hatred closes us off from others, making communication and reconciliation impossible. The increase of violence in the world can never be halted by responding with more of the same. But it can be disarmed by the response of love, not a sentimental love that is nothing more than emotion, but a love that is rooted in God, a love like that of Christ, a love that remains non-violent.

Some people may say to you that the choice of non-violence is, in the end, a passive acceptance

of situations of injustice. They may claim that it is cowardly not to use violence against what is wrong, or to refuse to defend with violence the oppressed. But nothing could be further from the truth. There is nothing passive about non-violence when it is chosen out of love. It has nothing to do with indifference. It has everything to do with actively seeking to “*resist evil and conquer it with good*”, as Saint Paul urges[3]. To choose non-violence means to make a courageous choice in love, a choice which includes the active defence of human rights and a firm commitment to justice and ordered development.

In making this choice, the *first course of action is prayer*. For unless the Lord guides our steps we soon lose the way. If our efforts are not rooted in God and his will, then everything we do is useless. As the Psalmist says: “If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labour; if the Lord does not watch over the city, in vain does the watchman keep vigil”[4]. Prayer keeps us rooted in the Lord; prayer keeps our faith bright and burning; prayer leads to action that is in harmony with the designs of God.

5. If peace is to reign in your hearts, you must *be willing to forgive*, to forgive completely and sincerely. No community can survive without forgiveness. No family can live in harmony, no friendship can endure, without repeated forgiveness. Forgiveness is a free and undeserved gift that God offers to us so that we in turn can offer it to others. To forgive is to open the door to a new beginning. It makes possible a communion in love based on truth and compassion. Forgiveness lets go of hurtful memories from the past and hopes in a future built on what is right and good. It makes possible reconciliation and peace.

I urge you, then, in your personal lives as well as in your family and in society, to follow the advice of Saint Paul. He exhorts us in these words: “Bear with one another; *forgive each other* as soon as a quarrel begins. *The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same*”[5]. Yes, let your faith, which depends on the mercy of God and on his gift of forgiveness, foster in your own hearts a constant readiness to forgive.

6. If peace is to reign in your hearts, one thing more is needed: *you must put your faith into practice* by working for justice and the good of others, especially *for the good of the family*.

In Lesotho, as in other countries today, the vocation of marriage is facing *an increasing number of obstacles*. Irregular unions are rising at an alarming rate, often as the result of evils such as “*chobelo*” or “*chobeliso*”, elopement or abduction. Such practices are contrary to Christian morality and to the demands of human dignity. They do not lead to lasting personal happiness, nor to any form of stability in marriage; they are a recipe for disaster.

One of the underlying problems is a loss of appreciation of *the virtue of chastity*. How important it is to recover this virtue in our own time, for chastity helps us to harmonize all the dimensions of our sexuality and thus to live joyfully in accordance with God’s will. While chastity demands a habit

of selfdiscipline, it is also a gift of the Holy Spirit who lives in our bodies as in a temple.

Christian family life is *a reflection of the life of the Blessed Trinity*, where there is mutual giving and receiving of love among the three Divine Persons. The family is a kind of little Church where this love of the Blessed Trinity and love of neighbour are learned and can grow strong. The Christian vocation will call you as adults to make sacrifices to protect the divine institution of the family and to seek to remedy all the social ills which threaten its integrity. I therefore encourage you, during this time of your youth, to prepare well for the serious responsibilities of family life.

What is needed is a preparation based upon *a continuing conversation with Christ*. In his Church, Christ will teach you about the Sacrament of Marriage, about the intimate communion of life and love which is an image of the loving union of Christ and the Church[6]. Christian marriage is based on a free and mature consent of the wife as well as of the husband, and thus any form of abduction or constraint is clearly opposed to the will of God and to the equal dignity of man and woman.

Dear young friends, let the Lord Jesus teach you about love, for he himself is the source of all love. The human being cannot live without love, and yet how easily our understanding of love can be distorted, especially by selfishness and pride, as well as by the empty slogans and false attractions of materialistic society. That is why I urge you again, as I did in my Apostolic Letter to Youth: “*Do not be afraid of the love that places clear demands on people*. These demands – as you find them in the constant teaching of the Church – are precisely capable of making your love a true love”[7].

I also wish to encourage those of you whom the Lord is calling to follow him in *the priesthood or the religious life*. I say to you: be generous. The words of Jesus remain only too true: “The harvest is rich but the labourers are few”[8]. I have no doubt that Christ is calling some of you, perhaps many of you, to serve him and his people as his priests and religious. Be eager and willing to respond to his call! Remember the example of *Blessed Joseph Gérard*. See all the good you can accomplish and the joy that will be yours when you follow in the footsteps of Christ the Lord.

7. Dear young people of Lesotho, how good it is to be with you in your beautiful land. When I leave this country I shall carry with me many happy memories of this meeting with *the future leaders of Lesotho*; and I shall remember all the special moments of this pastoral visit, especially the beatification of Father Joseph Gérard. Before closing, I want to leave you with one last appeal: *let Christ be your model in life*. Yes, let him be your only standard and measure, Christ who is “*the Way, and the Truth, and the Life*”[9]. Do not settle for anything less than Christ. May he guide you, protect you and keep you safe in his love. May Christ be your joy and your crown. “*May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts*, because it is for this that you were called”[10].

Praised be Jesus Christ!

[1] *Col.* 3, 12.

[2] *Col.* 3, 12.

[3] *Rom.* 12, 21.

[4] *Ps.* 127 (126), 1.

[5] *Col.* 3, 13.

[6] Cfr. *Eph.* 5, 21-35.

[7] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Epistula Apostolica ad iuvenes internationali vertente anno iuventuti dicato*, 10, 26 mar. 1985: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VIII, 1 (1985) 782.

[8] *Matt.* 9, 37.

[9] *Io.* 14, 16.

[10] *Col.* 3, 15.

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