



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF SICILY
AS THEY PREPARE TO MAKE A PILGRIMAGE
TO THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF TEARS IN SYRACUSE**

Dear Young People of Sicily!

1. I am very pleased to address you, as you gather together to make a special Jubilee pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Tears in Syracuse, which I consecrated six years ago. With great satisfaction I learned that this Jubilee celebration is taking place in the presence of the Bishops of Sicily at the end of their spiritual exercises. This fact expresses the strong ecclesial nature of the programme and, more generally, the love and attention of the Church in Sicily for the younger generation. My most affectionate greeting goes to all of you, young Sicilians, and to you, dear Brother Bishops and priests.

2. Your regional Jubilee, dear young people, is linked to the recent *World Youth Day* held in Rome, especially to the memorable vigil of 19 August last, in which many of you took part. With this Message, I would like to continue the dialogue that I had with young people at Tor Vergata. At the time I said: "Dear friends, at the dawn of the third millennium I see in you the 'morning watchmen' (cf. *Is 21: 11-12*)".

"Morning watchmen"! These words of the prophet Isaiah struck you, and you chose them as the theme of your pilgrimage-vigil, to encourage and direct your commitment. The generous way you accepted my invitation was a comfort to me! The Pope's heart rejoices and gives thanks to God, because young people not only listen but welcome, reflect and, above all, try to put into practise the word they have received, which is not the word of men, but the word of God, which is at work in you believers (cf. *1 Thes 2: 13*).

2. Because you, dear young people, want to believe in Christ! Faith, as you will recall, was the essential content of the great vigil of Tor Vergata. In Rome, the city of Peter and Paul, I "entrusted" the young people of the whole world with the task of courageously professing their faith in Christ, a profession for which the Apostles and martyrs gave their lives. Young people of Sicily, are you also willing to give your lives for this faith?

Some think that following Christ means infringing on own humanity, lessening its value. Nothing could be falsier! Indeed,

as I said at Tor Vergata, *"in saying 'yes' to Christ, you say 'yes' to all your noblest ideals"* (n. 6). Certainly, choosing Jesus involves renouncing sin, but sin is not a fulfilment of human nature; it is an impoverishment of it! God did not make us for evil, but for goodness, truth and beauty, that is for him, our creator and Father. As St Augustine writes: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (*Conf.*, 1, 1, 1).

For this reason, dear friends, do not be afraid to say a total "yes" to Jesus, like Peter, like Paul, like Francis and Clare of Assisi, like Agatha of Catania and Lucy of Syracuse, like St Dominic Savio and Pier Giorgio Frassati, like *so many witnesses to the Gospel who have also arisen down the centuries in your own Sicily*. Shining examples of believers were not lacking in the 20th century in your land, and they are still a reference-point for you to look at as an inspiration for your concrete decisions. Sicilian young people, sustained by the eloquent testimony of these compatriots, *courageously follow the path of personal holiness* and diligently nourish yourselves with the word of God and the Eucharist. The holier you are, the more you can contribute to building up the Church and society.

3. Be *"living stones"* (cf. 1 Pt 2: 5) in your parish communities, generously assisting the priests and one another. *Learn to assume your responsibilities*, and educate yourselves for this in groups, associations and lay movements, among which I particularly recommend Catholic Action, a school of ecclesial and civil commitment. In this way, you will make an important contribution to the Church's journey in Sicily, also in view of the approaching Regional Ecclesial Convention, which will discuss precisely the laity.

Be missionaries! Faith is a gift that, when shared with other believers, grows and matures. Bring the Gospel to everyone, especially to your contemporaries, above all to those who are less respected and in greater difficulty. Always put your words into action; may your strength be the truth.

Resist negative ways of thinking, which unfortunately you sometimes find around you. Remember that Jesus said to his Apostles: "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (*Mt* 10: 16). Do not be satisfied with being fresh, fragrant bread: you must be a Gospel leaven in schools and universities, in the world of work and sport, in your families and among your friends. For this reason, commit yourselves to participating in public life and institutions, while remaining detached from every personal interest and always and only working for the common good.

4. *Your Sicily has a great natural and cultural heritage*: it is entrusted in a special way to you, young people of the third millennium. Know it, recognize it, appreciate it. You are fortunate to live in a region that has one of the richest histories: draw from these roots to make your humanity grow, and to make your own and to develop the religious, artistic, cultural and moral values to which you are heirs. In these values you will also find a meeting ground with people of other nationalities and cultures, and thus renew Sicily's vocation to be a crossroads of peoples in the heart of the Mediterranean.

Of this patrimony, there is no doubt that the most precious legacy is *faith in Christ and love for his Blessed Mother*. The shrine where you are headed as pilgrims recalls the mystery of Mary's tears and those of Jesus himself: set your hearts on this mystery in order to contemplate the immense love of God, who sent his Son as a victim of expiation for our sins. May those tears purify you inwardly and fill you with the peace and joy that are gifts of Christ and which nothing and no

one can take from you.

I ask you also to remember my intentions in your prayers, as I assure you that I am spiritually close to you. As a sign of my great affection, I sincerely send to each of you and to your Bishops my Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to the priests, your relatives and all who accompany you on your daily journey.

From the Vatican, 18 October 2000.

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