



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VISIT TO TORONTO,
TO CIUDAD DE GUATEMALA AND TO CIUDAD DE MÉXICO

17th WORLD YOUTH DAY

SOLEMN MASS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Toronto, Downsview Park, Sunday July 28, 2002

"You are the salt of the earth!

You are the light of the world!" (Mt 5:13-14)

*Dear Young People of the Seventeenth World Youth Day,
Chers Frères et Soeurs,*

1. On a hillside near the lake of Galilee, Jesus's disciples listened to his gentle and urgent voice; as *gentle* as the landscape of Galilee itself, as *urgent* as a call to choose between life and death, between truth and falsehood. The Lord spoke words of life that would echo for ever in the hearts of his followers.

Today he is speaking the same words to you, the young people of Toronto and Ontario, of the whole of Canada, of the United States, of the Caribbean, of Spanish-speaking America and Portuguese-speaking America, of Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania. Listen to the voice of Jesus in the depths of your hearts! His words tell you *who you are as Christians*. They tell you *what you must do to remain in his love*.

2. But Jesus offers one thing, and the "spirit of the world" offers another. In today's Reading from the Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul tells us that Jesus leads us *from darkness into light* (cf.

Eph 5,8). Perhaps the great Apostle is thinking of the light that blinded him, the persecutor of Christians, on the road to Damascus. When later he recovered his sight, *nothing was as before*. He had been born anew and nothing would ever take his new-found joy away from him.

You too are called to be transformed. *"Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light"* (Eph 5, 14), says Saint Paul.

The "spirit of the world" *offers many false illusions and parodies of happiness*. There is perhaps no darkness deeper than the darkness that enters young people's souls when false prophets extinguish in them the light of faith and hope and love. The greatest deception, and the deepest source of unhappiness, is *the illusion of finding life by excluding God*, of finding freedom by excluding moral truths and personal responsibility.

3. The Lord is calling you to choose between these two voices competing for your souls. *That decision is the substance and challenge of World Youth Day*. Why have you come together from all parts of the world? To say in your hearts: *"Lord, to whom shall we go?"* Who has the words of eternal life? *"You have the words of eternal life"* (Jn 6,68). Jesus - the intimate friend of every young person - has the words of life.

The world you are inheriting is a world which desperately needs a new sense of brotherhood and human solidarity. It is a world which needs to be touched and healed by the beauty and richness of God's love. *It needs witnesses to that love. The world needs salt. It needs you* - to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

4. *Salt is used to preserve and keep*. As apostles for the Third Millennium, your task is to preserve and keep alive *the awareness of the presence of our Savior Jesus Christ*, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, the *memorial* of his saving death and glorious resurrection. You must keep alive the memory of the *words of life* which he spoke, the marvellous works of mercy and goodness which he performed. You must constantly remind the world of the "power of the Gospel to save" (Rom 1, 16)!

Salt seasons and improves the flavour of food. Following Jesus, you have to change and improve the "taste" of human history. With your faith, hope and love, with your intelligence, courage and perseverance, you have to humanize the world we live in, in the way that today's Reading from Isaiah indicates: "loose the bonds of injustice ... share your bread with the hungry ... remove the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil.... *Then your light shall rise in the darkness*" (Is 58,6-10).

5. Even a tiny flame lifts the heavy lid of night. How much more light will you make, all together, if you bond as one in the communion of the Church! *If you love Jesus, love the Church!* Do not be discouraged by the sins and failings of some of her members. The harm done by some priests and religious to the young and vulnerable *fills us all with a deep sense of sadness and shame*. But

think of the vast majority of dedicated and generous priests and religious whose only wish is to serve and do good! There are many priests, seminarians and consecrated persons here today; be close to them and support them! And if, in the depths of your hearts, you feel the same call to the priesthood or consecrated life, do not be afraid to follow Christ on the royal road of the Cross! At difficult moments in the Church's life, the pursuit of holiness becomes even more urgent. And *holiness is not a question of age*; it is a matter of *living in the Holy Spirit*, just as Kateri Tekakwitha did here in America and so many other young people have done.

You are young, and the Pope is old, 82 or 83 years of life is not the same as 22 or 23. But the Pope still fully identifies with your hopes and aspirations. Although I have lived through much darkness, under harsh totalitarian regimes, I have seen enough evidence to be unshakably convinced that no difficulty, no fear is so great that it can completely suffocate *the hope that springs eternal in the hearts of the young*. You are our hope, the young are our hope.

Do not let that hope die! Stake your lives on it! *We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures*; we are the sum of the Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of his Son.

6. I finish with a prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, keep these young people in your love. Let them hear your voice and believe what you say, *for you alone have the words of life*.

Teach them how *to profess their faith, bestow their love, and impart their hope to others*.

Make them convincing witnesses to your Gospel in a world so much in need of your saving grace.

Make them the new people of the Beatitudes, that they may be the salt of the earth and the light of the world at the beginning of the Third Christian Millennium!

Mary, Mother of the Church, protect and guide these young men and women of the Twenty-first Century. Keep us all close to your maternal heart. Amen.