



The Holy See

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

Wednesday, 20 December 1978

Dear boys and girls, and dear young people,

This Wednesday, too, there takes place, in this Vatican Basilica, the usual, but cordial and significant meeting between the Pope and all of you, so numerous, joyful and eloquent with your lively faces and your affectionate tributes.

The Pope, who represents the youth of Christ and the Church, is always happy to meet those who are the expression of the youth of life and mankind!

There is, therefore, an affinity of spirit between us; a need, as it were, to talk to one another as among real friends, is established; a taste to communicate joys, hopes, ideals is perceived; the desire for dialogue emerges, lively and spontaneous. On the part of the Pope, this dialogue consists of teachings of truth and goodness, of exhortation and encouragement, benevolence and blessing; while on the part of you, children and young people, it is manifested in the free and willing acceptance of these fatherly teachings, it is expressed in the promise to carry out what is said to you, it takes on concrete shape in the commitment to be witnesses among those of your own age, to the true joy that flourishes in good, pure heart, rich in the Lord's grace.

Today I intend to call your attention to this grace, which is manifested in a quite particular and moving way in the Incarnation of the Word of God, that is, in the temporal Birth of Jesus, so that you too, contemplating the great mystery of love and light which radiates from the Heavenly Child, may be able, like the shepherds of Bethlehem, to return to your homes full of joy praising God in the heavens above for the ineffable gift of his Only begotten Son to men, and bestowing this same joy also on others.

"The Lord is near!", the Liturgy repeats to us in more and more stirring and moved tones, in these days. We must say sincerely that, if the heart rejoices at this announcement, the mind asks itself the question: why does the Lord come to us? I will answer this question, resuming and completing the talk on Advent, started in the last few weeks. In it three great fundamental truths were outlined: God who creates and in creating reveals, at the same time, himself; the man created in the image and likeness of God "reflects" God in the visible created world; God bestows his grace, that is, he wills "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth". He wishes every man to share in his truth, his love, his mystery, so that he can share in His divine life itself.

What a marvellous destiny! To live by God and with God always, to be happy for ever together with him!

God, however, does not want us to be safe and happy in an unconscious way or unwillingly, but he calls for our conscious and free collaboration, placing us before the "tree of the knowledge of good and of evil", that is, he proposes to us a choice, he demands from test of faithfulness.

We know very well how Adam and Eve first of all and then their descendants, following their fatal example, had more "knowledge of evil" than of good. In this way *original sin*, the beginning and symbol of so many sins, of immense ruin, of physical and spiritual death, made its appearance in the world.

Sin! The catechism tells us that it is transgression of God's commandment. We know that the Lord is offended, friendship with him is broken, his grace is lost, one strays from the right path, heading for ruin. God, by means of his commandments teaches us in practice how we must behave in order to live in a dignified, human and serene way; with them he instils in us respect for our parents superiors (IV commandment), respect for life in all its manifestations (V commandment), respect for the body and love (VI commandment), respect for what belongs to others (VII commandment), respect for truth (VIII commandment).

Sin is to ignore, trample upon, and transgress these wise and useful rules which the Lord gave us; that is why it is disorder and ruin! With so many "voices" inside and outside us, it tempts us, that is, urges us not to believe in God, not to listen to his fatherly invitations, to prefer our whim to his friendship. Committing sin, we are far from God, against God, without God!

Advent tells us that the Lord comes "for us and for our salvation", that is, to set us free from sin, to give back to us his friendship, to illuminate our minds with his light and warm our hearts with his love.

Jesus is about to come: on Christmas night we go to him to express to him our sincere and heartfelt "thank you", to ask him for the strength to keep us always far from sin and to remain constantly faithful to his infinite love.

I cannot leave you without extending to you a cordial fatherly greeting: may the Child of Bethlehem, together with his and our Sweet Mother, smile upon you and lavish upon you and all Your dear ones the gifts of joy, peace and prosperity; may he grant you, finally, his heavenly Blessing, of which mine is an anticipation and a sign.

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