



The Holy See

MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

*Lviv (Sykhiv Square)
Tuesday, 26 June 2001*

1. *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68).*

Dear young people of Ukraine, the Apostle Peter spoke these words to Jesus, who had presented himself to the crowds as the bread come down from heaven to give life to men (cf. *Jn 6:58*). Today I have the joy of repeating these words in your presence, indeed of repeating them *in your name and together with you*.

Today Christ asks you the same question that he asked the Apostles: "Will you also go away?". And you, young people of Ukraine, how do you reply? I am sure that with me you too will make your own the words of Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life".

Seeing so many of you, and so enthusiastic, my thoughts go back to the *World Youth Day* which took place in Rome in August last year and at which many of you were present. There I invited the young people of the whole world to open a great "school of faith", a place in which to search for and examine more deeply the reasons for following Christ the Saviour. Today we are experiencing a significant moment of the "school of faith" here in your land, where the proclamation of the Gospel arrived more than a thousand years ago.

Once again, at the beginning of the third millennium, Christ asks you: "Who do you say that I am?" (*Mt 16:15*). Dear young people, the Pope has come among you to encourage you to answer: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (*Mt 16:16*); "You have the words of eternal life" (*Jn 6:68*).

2. *Yes, dear young people, Christ has the "words of eternal life". His words last for ever and above*

all *they open for us the gates of eternal life*. When God speaks, his words give life, they call things into existence, they direct our journey, they restore disappointed and broken hearts and pour fresh hope into them.

Reading the Bible, we discover right from the first page that *God speaks to us*. He speaks to us *as he gives life to creation*: the heavens, the earth, light, water, living things, man and woman, everything exists by his word. His word gives meaning to all things, rescuing them from chaos. For this reason nature is an immense book in which we can see with ever fresh wonder the traces of divine Beauty.

Even more than in creation, *God speaks in the story of humanity*. He reveals his presence in world events, by beginning time after time a *dialogue* with men and women created in his image, in order to establish with each one of them a communion of life and love. History becomes a journey in which the Creator and the individual come to know each other, a dialogue of which the ultimate purpose is to lead us *our of the slavery of sin to the freedom of love*.

3. Dear young people, when lived in this way, history becomes a *path to freedom*. Do you wish to travel this path? Do you too wish to be part of this adventure? The future of Ukraine and of the Church in this country depends also on your reply. You are not alone on this journey. You are part of a great people of believers who look back to an ancient Patriarch, *Abraham*. He listened to the call of the Lord and set out, becoming our "father in faith", because he believed and trusted the Lord who promised him land and descendants.

From Abraham's faith came the chosen people, who under the guidance of Moses undertook the exodus from slavery in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. At the centre of the exodus is the Sinai covenant, based on the *ten words of God*: the "Decalogue", the "Ten Commandments". These are "words of eternal life", because they are always valid, and because they give life to those who observe them.

4. Dear friends! One day a young man, who was very rich, asked Jesus: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" (*Mt 19:16*). And Jesus replied: "If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (*Mt 19:17*). Christ did not come to abolish the first covenant but to bring it to fulfilment. The Ten Commandments *have permanent value*, because they are the *fundamental law of humanity, written in the conscience of every person*. They are the first step to freedom and eternal life, because by observing them man places himself in the right relationship with God and neighbour. They "make explicit the response of love that man is called to give to his God" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2083*). This law is written naturally in the heart of every human person and is to be faithfully accepted and carried out. It should become the rule of our daily life.

In today's world we see *profound and rapid social changes* and many moral points of reference have become shaky, throwing people into confusion and sometimes despair. The Decalogue is

like a compass in a stormy sea which enables us to keep on course and reach land. This is why today I wish to present the commandments of the Decalogue to you anew, young people of Ukraine, in a symbolic way, so that they will be your "compass", the solid point of reference for building your present and your future.

5. "You shall love the Lord your God." We must give God the first place in our lives. For this reason the first three commandments are concerned with our relationship with him. He rightly deserves to be loved with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength (cf. *Dt 6:5*). God is one, and he is not to be exchanged for false gods. To you too, dear young people, he says: "I am the Lord your God, I wish to lead you into the fullness of life: do not put something else in my place".

The pressure is strong today to replace the true God with false gods and deceptive aims. *Material things are today's idols*. If they are sought and used as means and instruments of good, they are a help to us. However, they should never occupy the first place in man's heart, even less in the heart of young people, who are called to fly high, towards the most beautiful and most noble ideals!

The name of God is Father, Love, Faithfulness, Mercy. How can we fail to desire that everyone should know and love him? *His day* – the Sabbath, which for us Christians became Sunday, the day of the Lord's Resurrection – is an anticipation of the Promised Land. How can we fail not to make it holy by taking part in the Eucharist, the festive meeting of the Christian community?

6. "Love your neighbour." The other *seven commandments* refer to our relations with our neighbours. They show us the path which enables us to establish relationships with other human beings marked by respect and love, based on truth and justice.

Those who put this divine law into practice often find themselves going against the current. Young people of Ukraine, *Christ asks you to go against the current!* He asks you to be defenders of his law and to put it into practice in proper behaviour in daily life. This ancient and ever valid law finds its perfect fulfilment in the Gospel. *It is love that animates our lives*, and it is to true, free and profound love that faithful observance of the ten commandments leads. With this divine law solidly rooted in your hearts, do not be afraid: you will fulfil yourselves and contribute to the building of a world marked by greater solidarity and justice.

7. Dear young people, your country is going through a difficult and complex transition from the totalitarian regime which oppressed it for so many years to a society at last free and democratic. *Freedom however needs strong, responsible and mature consciences*. Freedom is demanding, and in a sense is more costly than slavery!

For this reason, as I embrace you like a father, I say to you: choose *the narrow path* that the Lord is showing you *through his commandments*. They are words of truth and life. The path that often

seems wide and easy later shows itself to be deceptive and false. Do not go from the slavery of the Communist regime to the slavery of consumerism, another form of materialism which, without explicitly rejecting God, actually does deny him by excluding him from life.

Without God you will not be able to do anything good. With his help, however, you will be able to face all the challenges of the present moment. You will succeed in making demanding choices, against the current, as for example the decision *to stay confidently in your own country*, without giving in to the illusions of an easy life abroad. You are needed here, young people, ready to make your contribution to improving the social, cultural, economic and political situation of your own country. Here the talents in which you are rich are needed for the future of your land, which has such a glorious history behind it.

The future of Ukraine depends in large part on you and the *responsibilities that you will undertake*. God will not fail to bless your efforts, if you commit your lives to generous service to family and society, placing the common good before private interests. Ukraine needs men and women dedicated to serving society, having as their aim the promotion of the rights and well-being of all, especially the weakest and most deprived. This is the logic of the Gospel, but it is also the logic that makes the civil community grow. True civilization, in fact, is measured not by economic progress alone but also and mainly by the human, moral and spiritual progress of a people.

8. Dear young people! I thank God who has given me the joy of meeting you! Before leaving you, I wish to add a final word: *love the Church!* She is your family and the spiritual building of which you are called to be the living stones. She has a particularly fascinating appearance here on account of the different traditions which enrich her. In a spirit of brotherhood, go on your way and grow in unity as you are today, so that the different traditions will not be a reason for division but rather an encouragement towards mutual knowledge and esteem.

May the *Virgin Mary*, who is so greatly venerated here in the land of Ukraine, accompany you on this journey. Love her and listen to her. She will teach you to make a sincere and generous gift of yourselves to God and to others. She will inspire you to seek in Christ the fullness of life and joy. In this way you will be in the Church the new generation of saints of your land, faithful to God and man, apostles of the Gospel, above all among your own contemporaries.

Let your spiritual food be the Eucharistic Bread, Christ himself! Strengthened by him in the Eucharist, you will remain always in his love and you will bear much fruit. And if the path will sometimes be steep, if the path of faithfulness to the Gospel will appear too demanding, because it will certainly require sacrifice and courageous decisions, remember our meeting. In this way you will be able to relive the enthusiasm of the profession of faith that we have made together today: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Repeat it and do not fear! Christ will be your strength and your joy.

Thank you, dear friends! The Pope loves you and sees you as *the sentinels of a new dawn of hope*. He praises God for your generosity, while he prays for you with affection and with all his heart he blesses you.

The Holy Father then greeted the young people from Russia and Poland:

I am pleased to greet the young people who have come from Russia. Dear friends, thank you for your presence! When you go back home, take your relatives and friends my greeting and witness to the joy of the meeting with your fidelity to Christ. Bring my blessing to everyone.

Dear young friends, you are here, with the community of your peers, to meet the Pope and hear what he has to tell you. So I would like to say what I said to the whole Church at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000: *Duc in altum!* Put out into the deep! Do not give into despair which can be caused by the crisis of social relations, by your own failures in the search for the meaning of daily life or by any other conditioning of the contemporary world. Never lose sight of Christ! Fix his Face in your mind - the Face of the Son of God incarnate, the Teacher, the Healer, the suffering Servant of the Lord, of the risen Lord. See in his eyes how he loves you! Do not be afraid of this love! Do not be afraid to respond to it with sincere young love! May this love shape your world, your personality and your human relations! With Christ, put out into the deep of your own humanity! Never lose hope! Fidelity to his call will bear blessed fruit in your lives.

Dear young people! Remember the martyrs. Remember what a high price your grandparents and parents paid to keep their fidelity to Christ and to the Church. May their faith, hope and charity bear fruit in your hearts.

I ask you to take my greetings to your families, your schools, your workplaces. Take them to your peers. I carry you all in my heart and embrace you with my prayer. I pray God that you will be the generation to lay solid foundations under the building of the faith of the generations in the third millennium. God bless you!