

Pope's World Youth Day Message

"Good Teacher, What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?"

VATICAN CITY, MARCH 15, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of the message Benedict XVI wrote for the 25th World Youth Day, which will be celebrated Palm Sunday, March 28, at the diocesan level.

* * *

Dear Friends,

This year we observe the 25th anniversary of the institution of World Youth Day, desired by the Venerable John Paul II as an annual meeting of believing young people of the whole world. It was a prophetic initiative that has borne abundant fruits, enabling new generations of Christians to come together, to listen to the Word of God, to discover the beauty of the Church and to live experiences of faith that have led many to give themselves totally to Christ.

The present 25th Youth Day represents a stage toward the next World Youth meeting, which will take place in August 2011 in Madrid, where I hope a great number of you will live this event of grace.

To prepare ourselves for such a celebration, I would like to propose to you some reflections on this year's theme: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17), treating the evangelical episode of Jesus' meeting with the rich young man, a topic already addressed in 1985 by Pope John Paul II in a most beautiful Letter, addressed for the first time to young people.

1. Jesus Meets a Young Man

And as he [Jesus] was setting out on his journey," recounts the Gospel of St. Mark, "a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"

And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:17-22).

This account expresses effectively Jesus' great attention to youth, to you, to your expectations, your hopes, and shows how great his desire is to meet with you personally and open a dialogue with each one of you. In fact, Christ interrupts his journey to respond to his interlocutor's question, manifesting full availability to that young man, who was moved by an ardent desire to speak with the "good Teacher," to learn from him how to follow the way of life. With this evangelical passage, my Predecessor wished to exhort each one of you to "develop your own conversation with Christ -- a conversation that is of fundamental and essential importance

ZENIT

for a young man (Letter to Young People, No. 2).

2. Jesus Looking Upon Him Loved Him

In the evangelical account, St. Mark stresses how "Jesus looking upon him loved him" (cf. Mark 10-21). In the Lord's look is the heart of the very special encounter and of all the Christian experience. In fact, Christianity is not primarily a morality, but experience of Jesus Christ, who loves us personally, young and old, poor and rich; he loves us even when we turn our back to him.

Commenting on the scene, Pope John Paul II added, turning to young people: "I hope you will experience such a look! I hope you will experience the truth that he, the Christ, keeps for you with love!" (Letter to Young People, No. 7). A love, manifested on the cross in such a full and total way, that it made St. Paul write with amazement: "who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). "The awareness that the Father has always loved us in his Son, that Christ loves every one and always," writes, again, Pope John Paul II, "becomes a firm point of support for the whole of our human existence" (Letter to Young People, No. 7), and enables us to overcome all trials: the discovery of our sins, suffering, discouragement.

In this love is found the source of the whole of Christian life and the fundamental reason of evangelization: If we have truly encountered Jesus, we cannot do other than witness him to those who have not yet crossed his look!

3. The Discovery of the Plan of Life

In the young man of the Gospel, we can perceive a very similar condition to that of each one of you. You are also rich in qualities, energies, dreams, hopes: Resources that you possess in abundance! Your very age constitutes a great richness, not only for you, but also for others, for the Church and for the world.

The rich young man asks Jesus: "What must I do?" The stage of life in which you are immersed is a time of discovery: of the gifts that God has lavished on you and of your responsibilities. It is, moreover, a time of fundamental choices to build your plan of life. It is the moment, therefore, to ask yourselves about the authentic meaning of existence and to ask yourselves: "Am I satisfied with my life? Is there something lacking?"

As the young man of the Gospel, perhaps you also live situations of instability, of disturbance or of suffering, which lead you to aspire to a life that is not mediocre, and to ask yourselves: In what does a successful life consist? What must I do? What might be my plan of life? "What must I do, for my life to have full value and full meaning?" (Ibid., No. 3).

Do not be afraid to address these questions! Far from overwhelming you, they express great aspirations, which are present in your heart. Hence, they are to be listened to. They await answers that are not superficial, but able to satisfy your authentic expectations of life and happiness.

To discover the plan of life that could render you fully happy, listen to God, who has a plan of love for each one of you. With trust, ask him: "Lord, what is your plan of Creator and Father for my life? What is your will? I want to fulfill it." Be sure that he will respond. Do not be afraid of his answer! "God is greater than our heart and knows everything!" (1 John 3:20).

4. Come and follow me!

Jesus invited the rich young man to go far beyond the satisfaction of his aspirations and of his plans, he says to him: "Come and follow me!" The Christian vocation springs from a proposal of love of the Lord and can be

ZENIT

realized only thanks to a response of love: "Jesus invites his disciples to the total gift of their life, without human calculation or benefit, with a trust without reservations in God. The saints accepted this exacting invitation, and with humble docility followed the crucified and risen Christ. Their perfection, in the logic of faith at times humanly incomprehensible, consists in no longer putting oneself at the center, but in choosing to go against the current living according to the Gospel" (Benedict XVI, Homily at Canonization Mass, L'Osservatore Romano, 12-13, October 2009, p. 6).

On the example of so many disciples of Christ, you also, dear friends, accept with joy the invitation to follow, to live intensely and fruitfully in this world. With Baptism, in fact, he calls each one to follow him with concrete actions, to love him above all things and to serve him in brothers. The rich young man, unfortunately, did not accept Jesus' invitation and left saddened. He did not find the courage to detach himself from his material goods to find the greatest good proposed by Jesus.

The sadness of the rich young man of the Gospel is that which is born in the heart of each one when one does not have the courage to follow Christ, to make the right choice. However, it is never too late to respond to him!

Jesus never tires of turning his look of love and of calling to be his disciples, but He proposes to some a more radical choice. In this Year for Priests, I would like to exhort boys and girls to be attentive if the Lord invites to a great gift, in the way of the Ministerial Priesthood, and to make oneself available to accept with generosity and enthusiasm this sign of special predilection, undertaking with a priest or spiritual director the necessary path of discernment. Do not be afraid, then, dear boys and girls, if the Lord calls you to the religious, monastic, missionary life or one of special consecration: He is able to give profound joy to one who responds with courage!

Moreover, I invite all those who feel the vocation to marriage to accept it with faith, committing themselves to lay the solid base to live a great love, faithful and open to the gift of life, which is richness and grace for society and for the Church.

5. Oriented to Eternal Life

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" This question of the young man of the Gospel seems far from the concerns of many contemporary young people, because, as my predecessor observed, "are we not the generation, whose horizon of existence the world and temporal progress fill completely? (Letter to Young People, No. 5). But the question on "eternal life" flowers in particularly painful moments of existence, when we suffer the loss of a close person or when we live the experience of failure.

But what is the "eternal life" to which the young man refers? It is illustrated by Jesus when, turning to his disciples, he affirms: "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). They are words that indicate an exalted proposal of endless happiness, of joy of being filled with divine love forever.

To ask oneself about the definitive future that awaits each one of us gives full meaning to existence, because it orients the plan of life toward horizons that are not limited and passing, but ample and profound, which lead to loving the world, so loved by God himself, to dedicate oneself to its development, but always with the liberty and joy born from faith and hope. They are horizons that help not to absolutize earthly realities, seeing that God prepares a greater prospect for us, and to repeat with St. Augustine: "We desire together the heavenly homeland, we sigh for the heavenly homeland, we feel ourselves pilgrims down here" (Commentary on St. John's Gospel, Homily 35, 9). Keeping his gaze fixed on eternal life, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, who died in 1925 at the age of 24, said: "I want to live and not just get along!" and on the photo of an ascent sent to a friend, he wrote: "Toward on high," alluding to Christian perfection, but also to eternal life.

ZENIT

Dear young people, I exhort you not to forget this prospect of your plan of life: We are called to eternity. God has created us to be with Him, forever. This will help you to give full meaning to your choices and to give quality to your existence.

6. The Commandments, the Way of Authentic Love

Jesus reminds the rich young man of the Ten Commandments, as necessary conditions to "inherit eternal life." They are essential points of reference to live in love, to clearly distinguish good from evil and build a solid and lasting plan of life. Jesus also asks you if you know the commandments, if you are concerned to form your conscience according to the divine law and if you will put it into practice.

They certainly are questions that go against the current of the present-day mentality, which proposes a liberty disconnected from values, rules, objective norms and invites to reject every limitation to desires of the moment. But this type of proposal instead of leading to true liberty, leads man to become a slave of himself, of his immediate desires, of idols such as power, money, unbridled pleasure and the seductions of the world, rendering him incapable of following his original vocation to love.

God gives us the commandments because he wants to educate us to true liberty, because he wants to build with us a Kingdom of love, justice and peace. To listen to them and to put them into practice does not mean to be alienated, but to find the path of authentic liberty and love, because the commandments do not limit happiness, but indicate how to find it. At the beginning of his dialogue with the rich young man, Jesus reminds him that the law given by God is good because "God is good."

7. We Have Need of You

One who lives the condition of youth finds himself facing many problems derived from unemployment, the lack of sure ideal references and of concrete prospects for the future. At times one can have the impression of being impotent in face of the present crises and drifts. Despite the difficulties, do not let yourselves be discouraged and do not give up your dreams! Instead, cultivate in your heart great desires of fraternity, justice and peace. The future is in your hands, because the gifts and riches that the Lord has enclosed in the heart of each one of you, molded by the encounter with Christ, can bring authentic hope to the world! It is faith in his love that, rendering you strong and generous, will give you the courage to address with serenity the journey of life and to assume family and professional responsibilities. Be committed to build your future through serious courses of personal formation and study, to serve the common good in a competent and generous way.

In my encyclical letter "Caritas in Veritate" on integral human development, I listed some of the great present challenges, which are urgent and essential for the life of this world: The use of the resources of the earth and respect for the ecology, the just division of goods and the control of financial mechanisms, solidarity with poor countries in the ambit of the human family, the struggle against hunger in the world, the promotion of the dignity of human labor, service to the culture of life, the building of peace between peoples, the interreligious dialogue, the good use of the social means of communication.

They are challenges to which you are called to respond to build a more just and fraternal world. They are challenges that call for an exacting and passionate plan of life, into which you put all your richness according to the plan that God has for each one of you. It is not a question of carrying out heroic or extraordinary gestures, but of acting by putting to good use one's talents and possibilities, committed to constantly progress in faith and love.

In this Year for Priests, I invite you to know the life of the saints, in particular that of holy priests. You will see that God guided them and that they found their way day after day, precisely in faith, in hope and in love.

ZENIT

Christ calls each one of you to be committed with him and to assume your responsibilities to build a civilization of love. If you follow his Word, your path will also be illumined and will lead you to lofty goals, which give joy and full meaning to life.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, accompany you with her protection. I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and bless you with great affection.

From the Vatican, Feb. 22, 2010

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

© Innovative Media, Inc.

Reprinting ZENIT's articles requires written permission from the editor.