

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER
BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH WORLD YOUTH DAY
(MARCH 28, 2010)**



*“Good Teacher, what must I do
to inherit eternal life?” (Mk 10:17)*

Dear Friends,

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the inauguration of World Youth Day in response to the desire of the Venerable John Paul II for an annual gathering of young people of faith from throughout the world. It was a prophetic initiative that has borne abundant fruits, enabling the new generations of Christians to meet one another, to listen to the Word of God, to discover the beauty of the Church, and to have a deep experience of faith. This led many of them in turn to decide to give themselves completely to Christ.

The present 25th World Youth Day is one step along the way leading to the next international encounter of young people, scheduled for Madrid in August 2011. I hope that many of you will be there to experience this grace-filled event.

To prepare ourselves for this celebration, I would like to offer you some reflections on this year’s theme: *“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* (Mk 10:17). It is drawn from Gospel passage where Jesus meets the rich young man. It is a theme that Pope John Paul II reflected on in 1985, in a very beautiful Letter, the first ever addressed to young people.

1. Jesus meets a young man

“As [Jesus] was setting out on a journey” – the Gospel of Saint Mark tells us – “a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honour your father and your mother.’ He replied and said to him, ‘Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth’. Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, ‘You are lacking in one thing.

Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me'. At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions" (Mk 10: 17-22).

This Gospel passage shows us clearly how much Jesus was concerned with young people, with all of you, with your expectations and your hopes, and it shows how much he wants to meet you personally and to engage each of you in conversation. Christ interrupted his journey to stop and answer the young man's question. He gave his full attention to this youth who was moved with an ardent desire to speak to the "good Teacher" and to learn from him how to journey through life. My Predecessor used this Gospel passage to urge each of you to "develop your own conversation with Christ – a conversation which is of fundamental and essential importance for a young person" (*Letter to Young People*, No. 2).

2. Jesus looked at him and loved him

In his Gospel account, Saint Mark emphasises that "*Jesus, looking at him, loved him*" (Mk 10: 21). The Lord's gaze is at the heart of this very special encounter and the whole Christian experience. To be sure, Christianity is not primarily a moral code. It is an experience of Jesus Christ who loves each of us personally, young and old, poor and rich. He loves us even when we turn away from him.

When Pope **John Paul II** commented on this scene, he turned to you and added: "May you experience a look like that! May you experience the truth that he, Christ, looks upon you with love!" (*Letter to Young People*, No. 7). It was love, revealed on the Cross so completely and totally, that led Saint Paul to write in amazement: "He loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). Pope John Paul II wrote that "the awareness that the Father has always loved us in his Son, that Christ always loves each of us, becomes a solid support for our whole human existence" (*ibid.*). It enables us to overcome all our trials: the realization of our sins, our sufferings and our moments of discouragement.

In this love we find the source of all Christian life and the basic reason for evangelization: if we have really encountered Jesus, we cannot help but bear witness to him before those who have not yet met his gaze!

3. Finding a plan in life

If we look at the young man in the Gospel, we can see that he is much like each of you. You too are rich in talents, energy, dreams and hopes. These are resources which you have in abundance! Your age itself is a great treasure, not only for yourselves but for others too, for the Church and for the world.

The rich young man asks Jesus: "What must I do?" The time of life which you are going through is one of discovery: discovery of the gifts which God has bestowed upon you and your own responsibilities. It is also a time when you are making crucial choices about how you will live your lives. So it is a time to think about the real meaning of life and to ask yourselves: "Am I satisfied with my life? Is there something missing?"

Like the young man in the Gospel story, perhaps you too are experiencing situations of uncertainty, anxiety or suffering, and are yearning for something more than a life of mediocrity. It makes you ask yourselves: "What makes a life successful? What do I need to do? How should I plan my life? "What must I do for my life to have full value and full meaning?" (*ibid.*, No. 3).

Do not be afraid to ask yourselves these questions! Far from troubling you, they are giving voice to the great aspirations that you hold in your hearts. That is why you should listen to them. The answers you give to them must not be superficial, but capable of satisfying the longing you truly feel for life and happiness.

In order to discover the life-project that will make you completely happy, listen to God. He has a loving plan for each one of you. You can confidently ask him: "Lord, what is your plan, as Creator and Father,

for my life? What is your will? I want to carry it out". You can be certain that he will answer you. Do not be afraid of his answer! "For God is greater than our hearts and knows everything" (1 Jn 3:20).

4. Come and follow me!

Jesus invites the rich young man to do much more than merely satisfy his aspirations and personal plans. He says to him: "Come and follow me!" The Christian vocation derives from a love-filled invitation made by the Lord, and it can be lived out only by a love-filled response: "Jesus invites his disciples to give their lives completely, without calculation or personal interest, with unreserved trust in God. The saints accept this demanding invitation and set out with humble docility in following the crucified and risen Christ. Their perfection, in the logic of faith which is at times humanly incomprehensible, consists in no longer putting themselves at the centre but in choosing to go against the tide, by living in line with the Gospel" (Benedict XVI, *Homily at Canonizations*, 11 October 2009).

Following the example of so many of Christ's disciples, may you too, dear friends, joyfully welcome his invitation to follow him, and so live your lives intensely and fruitfully in this world. Through Baptism, in fact, he calls each of us to follow him concretely, to love him above all things and to serve him in our brothers and sisters. The rich young man, unfortunately, did not accept Jesus' invitation and he went away saddened. He did not find the courage to leave behind his material goods in order to find the far greater good proposed by Jesus.

The sadness experienced by the rich young man in the Gospel story is the sadness that arises in the heart of all those who lack the courage to follow Christ and to make the right choice. Yet it is never too late to respond to him!

Jesus never tires of turning to us with love and calling us to be his disciples; to some, however, he proposes an even more radical choice. In this *Year for Priests*, I would like to urge young men and boys to consider if the Lord is inviting them to a greater gift, along the path of priestly ministry. I ask them to be willing to embrace with generosity and enthusiasm this sign of a special love and to embark on the necessary path of discernment with the help of a priest or a spiritual director. Do not be afraid, then, dear young men and women, if the Lord is calling you to the religious, monastic or missionary life, or a life of special consecration: He knows how to bestow deep joy upon those who respond to him with courage!

I also invite those who feel called to marriage to embrace this vocation with faith, working to lay a solid foundation for a love that is great, faithful and receptive to the gift of life. This vocation is a treasure and grace for society and for the Church.

5. Directed towards eternal life

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?". This question which the young man in the Gospel asks may seem far from the concerns of many young people today. As my Predecessor observed, "Are we not the generation whose horizon of existence is completely filled by the world and temporal progress? (*Letter to Young People*, No. 5). Yet, the question of "eternal life" returns at certain painful moments of our lives, as when we suffer the loss of someone close to us or experience failure.

But what is the "eternal life" to which the rich young man is referring? Jesus describes it to us when he says to his disciples: "But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you" (Jn 16: 22). These words point to an exciting possibility of unending happiness, to the joy of being surrounded by God's love for ever.

Wondering about the definitive future awaiting each of us gives full meaning to our existence. It directs our life plan towards horizons that are not limited and fleeting, but broad and deep, and which motivate us to love this world which God loves so deeply, to devote ourselves to its development with the freedom and joy born of faith and hope. Against these horizons we do not see earthly reality as absolute, and we

sense that God is preparing a greater future for us. In this way we can say with Saint Augustine: “Let us long for our home on high, let us pine for our home in heaven, let us feel that we are strangers here” (*Tractates on the Gospel of Saint John*, Homily 35:9). His gaze fixed on eternal life, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, who died in 1925 at the age of 24, could say: “I want to live and not simply exist!” On a photograph taken while mountain-climbing, he wrote to a friend: “To the heights”, referring not only to Christian perfection but also to eternal life.

Dear young friends, I urge you to keep this perspective in developing your life plan: we are called to eternity. God created us to be with him, for ever. This will help you to make meaningful decisions and live a beautiful life.

6. The commandments, the way to authentic love

Jesus reminded the rich young man that obedience to the Ten Commandments is necessary in order to “inherit eternal life”. The Commandments are essential points of reference if we are to live in love, to distinguish clearly between good and evil, and to build a life plan that is solid and enduring. Jesus is asking you too whether you know the Commandments, whether you are trying to form your conscience according to God’s law, and putting the Commandments into practice.

Needless to say, these are questions that go against the grain in today’s world, which advocates a freedom detached from values, rules and objective norms, and which encourages people to refuse to place limits on their immediate desires. But this is not the way to true freedom. It leads people to become enslaved to themselves, to their immediate desires, to idols like power, money, unbridled pleasure and the entrapments of the world. It stifles their inborn vocation to love.

God gives us the Commandments because he wants to teach us true freedom. He wants to build a Kingdom of love, justice and peace together with us. When we listen to the Commandments and put them into practice, it does not mean that we become estranged from ourselves, but that we find the way to freedom and authentic love. The commandments do not place limits on happiness, but rather show us how to find it. At the beginning of the conversation with the rich young man, Jesus reminds him that the law which God gives is itself good, because “God is good”.

7. We need you

Being young today means having to face many problems due to unemployment and the lack of clear ideas and real possibilities for the future. At times you can have the impression of being powerless in the face of current crises and their repercussions. Despite these difficulties, do not let yourselves be discouraged, and do not give up on your dreams! Instead, cultivate all the more your heart’s great desire for fellowship, justice and peace. The future is in the hands of those who know how to seek and find sound reasons for life and hope. If you are willing, the future lies in your hands, because the talents and gifts that the Lord has placed in your hearts, shaped by an encounter with Christ, can bring real hope to the world! It is faith in his love that, by making you stronger and more generous, will give you courage to face serenely the path of life and to take on family and professional responsibilities. Try hard to build your future by paying serious attention to your personal development and your studies, so that you will be able to serve the common good competently and generously.

In my recent Encyclical Letter on integral human development, *Caritas in Veritate*, I listed some of the great and urgent challenges essential for the life of our world: the use of the earth’s resources and respect for ecology, the fair distribution of goods and control of financial mechanisms, solidarity with poor countries within our human family, the fight against world hunger, greater respect for the dignity of human labour, service to the culture of life, the building of peace between peoples, interfaith dialogue, and the proper use of social communications.

These are challenges to which you are called to respond in order to build a more just and fraternal world. They are challenges that call for a demanding and passionate life plan, in which you use all your many gifts in accordance with the plan that God has for each of you. It is not a matter of accompanying heroic or extraordinary acts. It means allowing your talents and abilities to flourish, and trying to make constant progress in faith and love.

In this **Year for Priests**, I ask you to learn about the lives of the saints, and in particular of those saints who were priests. You will see how God was their guide and how they made their way through each day in faith, in hope and in love. Christ is calling each of you to work with him and to take up your responsibilities in order to build the civilization of love. If you follow his Word, it will light up your path and lead you to high goals that will give joy and full meaning to your lives.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, watch over and protect you. With the assurance of my prayers, and with great affection, I send my blessing to all of you.

From the Vatican, 22 February 2010

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