

MEETING WITH THE YOUTH OF ROME AND THE LAZIO REGION
IN PREPARATION OF THE [WORLD YOUTH DAY](#)

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Thursday, 25 March 2010

[\(Video\)](#)

Holy Father, the young man of the Gospel asked Jesus: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?". I do not even know what eternal life is. I cannot even imagine it, but I know one thing: I don't want to waste my life, I want to live it to the full and not alone. I'm afraid this mightn't happen, I am afraid of thinking only of myself, of making a mess of everything and of finding myself without a goal to attain, living from one day to the next. Is it possible to make something beautiful and great of my life?

Dear young people,

before answering the question I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to you all for coming, for this marvellous witness of faith, for wanting to live in communion with Jesus, for your enthusiasm in following Jesus and for living well. Thank you!

And now for the question. You have said that you do not know what eternal life is and cannot imagine it. None of us can imagine eternal life because it is outside our experience. Yet, we can begin to understand what eternal life is and I think that, with your question, you have given us a description of the essential of eternal life, that is, of true life: not to waste life, to live it in depth, not to live for oneself, not to live from one day to the next, but truly to live life in its riches and in its totality. And how can we do this? This is the big question which the rich young man of the Gospel came to ask the Lord (cf. Mk 10: 17). At first sight the Lord's response seems somewhat dry. In sum, he tells the young man to observe the Commandments (cf. Mk 10: 19). Yet, if we think carefully, if we listen carefully to the Lord, we find throughout the Gospel the great wisdom of the Word of God, of Jesus. The Commandments, according to another of Jesus' sayings, are summed up in this one alone: love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your life, and love your neighbour as yourself. Loving God implies knowing God, recognizing God. and this is the first step we must take: to seek to know God. And thus we know that our life does not exist by chance, it is not an accident. My life has been willed by God since eternity. I am loved, I am necessary. God has a plan for me in the totality of history: he has a plan specifically for me. My life is important and also necessary. Eternal love created me in depth and awaits me. So this is the first point: to know, to seek to know God and thus to understand that life is a gift, that it is good to be alive. Then the essential is love. To love this God who has created me, who has created this world, who governs among all the difficulties of man and of history and who accompanies me. It means loving my neighbour.

The Ten Commandments to which Jesus refers in his answer are only to clarify the commandment of love. They are, so to speak, rules of love, they indicate the way of love with these essential points; the family, as a foundation of society; life, to be respected as a gift of God; the order of sexuality, of relations between man and woman; the social order and, finally, truth. These essential elements describe the route of love, they explain how really to love and how to find the right route. Hence there is a fundamental will of God for us all, which is identical for us all. However its

application is different in every life, for God has a specific project for each person. St Francis de Sales once said: perfection, that is, being good, living faith and love, is substantially one but comes in many different forms. The holiness of a Carthusian and of a politician, of a scientist or of a peasant, and so forth, is very different. Thus God has a plan for every person and I must find, in my own circumstances, my way of living this one and, at the same time, common will of God whose great rules are indicated in these explanations of love. Consequently I must seek to do what is the essence of love, that is, not to live selfishly, but to give life; not to "possess" life but to make life a gift, not to seek for myself but to give to others. This is the essential. And it entails sacrifices, that is, it means coming out of myself and not seeking myself. And it is precisely by not seeking myself but by giving myself for important and true things that I find true life. Thus each person will find different possibilities in his life: he may devote himself to volunteer work in a community of prayer, in a movement or in the activity of his parish, in his own profession. Finding my vocation and living it everywhere is important and fundamental, whether I am a great scientist or a farmer. Everything is important in God's eyes: life is beautiful if it is lived to the full with that love which really redeems the world.

Lastly I would like to tell a little story about [Josephine Bakhita](#), the small African Saint who found God and Christ in Italy and who never fails to make a great impression on me. She was a Sister in an Italian convent; one day, the local Bishop visited that monastery, saw this little African sister, about whom it seems nothing was known, and said, "Sister, what are you doing here?". And Bakhita answered him: "the same thing as you, Your Excellency". The Bishop, visibly irritated, said: "But Sister, do you do the same as me? How come?". "Yes", the Sister said, "we both want to do God's will, don't we?". In the end, this is the essential: knowing, with the help of the Church, of the Word of God and of friends, the will of God, both in its broad lines that are common to all and in the concreteness of my personal life. Thus life becomes not too easy, perhaps, but beautiful and happy. Let us pray the Lord to help us always to discover his will and to do it joyfully.

The Gospel has told us that Jesus, looking upon that young man, loved him. Holy Father, what does it mean to be looked at lovingly by Jesus? How can we have this experience today? And is it really possible to live this experience also in this life in our time? I would of course say "yes", because the Lord is ever present and looks at each one of us with love. Except that we have to find this gaze and to encounter him. How can we do this?

I would say that the first point for an encounter with Jesus, for an experience of his love, is getting to know him. Knowing Jesus involves different ways. A first condition is to know the figure of Jesus as he appears to us in the Gospels that give us a very detailed portrait of the figure of Jesus in the great parables; let us think of the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, Lazarus, etc. In all the parables, in all his words, in the Sermon on the Mount, we really discover the Face of Jesus, the Face of God, until the Cross, on which, for love of us, he gave himself without reserve to death, and at the end could say: Father, into your hands, I commend my life, my spirit (cf. Lk 23: 46).

Consequently: to know, to meditate on Jesus together with friends, with the Church, and to know Jesus not solely in an academic, theoretical way but with the heart, that is, to speak to Jesus in prayer. A person cannot be known in the same way in which I can study mathematics. Reason is necessary and sufficient for mathematics, but to know a person, above all the great person of Jesus, God and Man, also requires reason, but, at the same time the heart. Only by opening our heart to him, only by knowing all that he said and did, can we, with our love, our moving toward him, gradually get to know him a little better and thus also experience being loved. Consequently: listening to Jesus' word, listening to it in the communion of the Church, in her broad experience and responding with our prayers, with out personal conversation with Jesus, in which we tell him about what we cannot understand, our needs, our questions. In a true conversation we are increasingly

able to find this way of knowledge which becomes love. Naturally it is not only thinking, not only prayer, but also doing that is part of the journey to Jesus: doing good things, taking trouble for our neighbour. There are different ways; each one knows his own possibilities, in the parish and in the community in which he lives, for working with Christ and for others, for the vitality of the Church, so that faith may truly be a formative force of our milieu, and thus also of our time. Therefore I would say these elements: listening, responding, entering the community of believers, communion with Christ in the sacraments, in which he gives himself to us, both in Eucharist and in Confession, etc., and lastly, putting the words of faith into practice so that they become the force of my life and that Jesus' gaze truly appears also to me, and that his love helps and transforms me.

Jesus invited the rich young man to give up everything and to follow him but he went away sorrowful. Like him I also find it hard to follow Jesus, because I'm frightened of giving up my possessions and sometimes the Church asks me to give up things that are difficult. Holy Father, how can I find the strength for courageous decisions and who can help me?

Well, let us start with these words that are difficult for us: giving up something. Renunciation is possible, and in the end, also becomes beautiful if it is done with a reason and if this subsequently also justifies the difficulty of the renunciation. In this context St Paul used the image of the Olympic Games and of the athletes involved in the Olympics (cf. 1 Cor 9: 24-25). He said: in order to win the medal at last in those days it was a wreath they must abide by a very difficult discipline, they must give up many things, they must practice their sport and make great sacrifices and renunciations, because they have a motive, it is worthwhile. Even if, in the end, they are not among the winners it is nevertheless something beautiful to have disciplined themselves and to have been able to do these things with some degree of perfection. The same thing that applies, like St Paul's image, to the Olympics, to all sports, is also true for the other things of life. A good professional life cannot be achieved without making sacrifices, without an adequate training, which always demands a discipline, demands that we must give up something, and so on, even in art and in all the elements of life. We all understand that to attain an objective, whether it is professional, athletic, artistic or cultural, we must deny ourselves and learn, if we are to make headway. Even the art of living, of being oneself, the art of being a human being, demands making sacrifices, true renunciations, that help us to find our way in life, the art of life, they are indicated in the word of God and help us not to fall shall we say into the abyss of drugs, alcohol, the slavery of sexuality, the slavery of money, of laziness. All these things seem at first like actions of freedom. In fact they are not actions of freedom but the beginning of a slavery that becomes ever more insurmountable. To succeed in resisting the temptation of the moment, to move towards the good, creates true freedom and makes life precious. In this regard it seems to me that we should see that without a "no" to certain things the great "yes" to true life cannot grow, as we see in the figures of the Saints. Let us think of St Francis, of the Saints of our time, [Mother Teresa](#), Fr Gnocchi and so many others who made sacrifices and won. Not only did they themselves become free, but they also became a treasure for the world and show us how we can live. Thus, to the question "who can help me", I would answer that the great figures of the Church's history help us, the word of God helps us, the parish community, movements, voluntary service, etc. And the friendship of people who "move ahead" helps us, of people who have already made progress on their way through life and who can convince me that walking this way is the right way. Let us pray the Lord always to give us the gift of friends, of communities who help us to discern the way of good and thereafter to find the beautiful and joyful life.