

PASTORAL VISIT TO SULMONA

MEETING WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Cathedral of Sulmona
Sunday, 4 July 2010*

(Video)

Dear Young People,

First of all I want to tell you that I am very glad to meet you! I thank God for this possibility to be with you for a while, like the father of a family, together with your Bishop and your priests. I thank you for the affection you have expressed to me with such warmth! And I also thank you for what you said to me through Francesca and Cristian, your two "spokespeople". You asked me questions with great frankness and at the same time showed that you have firm points, convictions. And this is very important. You are young men and women who think, who question themselves and who have a sense of truth and good. In other words you know how to use your minds and your hearts, and that is no small thing! Indeed I would say that it is the main thing in this world: to learn how to use the intelligence and wisdom that God has given to us properly! In the past, the population of your region did not have sufficient means to study or to assert itself in society, but it had what truly enriches men and women: faith and moral values. It is these that build both individuals and civil coexistence!

Two fundamental aspects emerge from your words: one positive and one negative. The positive aspect stems from your Christian vision of life, the education that you obviously received from your parents, your grandparents and your other educators: priests, teachers and catechists. The negative aspect lies in the shadows that darken your horizon: they are material problems that make it difficult to look to the future with serenity and optimism; but in addition false values and deceptive models are proposed to you and promise to fill your life, whereas they empty it. What should be done, therefore, to prevent these shadows from becoming too burdensome? First of all, I see that you are young people with good memories! Yes, I was struck by the fact that you used words I spoke in Sydney, in Australia, during the [World Youth Day of 2008](#). And then you recalled that the [World Youth Days](#) came into being 25 years ago. However, above all you showed that you have your own memory of the history linked to your land: you spoke to me of a famous figure born eight centuries ago, St Peter Celestine V, and you said that you still consider him very up to date! You see, dear friends, in this way you have, as people say "an extra gear". Yes, the memory of the past is truly an "extra gear" in life, because without memory there is no future. It was once said that history is a teacher of life! The contemporary consumer society tends instead to relegate human beings to the present, to make them lose their sense of the past, of history; but by so doing it also deprives them of the ability to understand themselves, to perceive problems and to build the future. Therefore, dear young women and dear young men, I want to say to you: the Christian is someone who has a good memory, who loves history and seeks to know it.

I therefore thank you because you speak to me of St Peter of Morrone, Celestine V, and can appreciate his experience today in a world that is so different but for this very reason needs to rediscover certain things that are always worthwhile, that are perennial, for example, the ability to

listen to God in external and above all internal silence. You have just asked me: how does one recognize God's call? Well, the secret of the vocation lies in the capacity for and joy of distinguishing, listening to, and obeying his voice. But to do this it is necessary to accustom our hearts to recognizing the Lord and to having an awareness of him as a Person who is close to me and loves me. As I said this morning, it is important to learn to live in our days moments of inner silence in order to hear the Lord's voice. You may be sure that if we learn to listen to this voice and to follow it generously, we have nothing to fear, we know and feel that God is with us, that God is Friend, Father and Brother. In a word: the secret of the vocation lies in the relationship with God, in prayer that develops, precisely, in inner silence, in the capacity for listening, hearing that God is close. And this is true both before the decision, that is, at the time of deciding and setting out, and afterwards, if one wants to be faithful and to persevere on the way. St Peter Celestine was first and foremost this: a man of listening, of inner silence, a man of prayer, a man of God. Dear young people, may you always make room in your day for God, to listen to him and pray to him!

And here I would like to say something else to you: true prayer is not at all foreign to reality. If prayer should alienate you, remove you from your real life, be on your guard it would not be true prayer! On the contrary, dialogue with God is a guarantee of truth, of truth with ourselves and with others and hence of freedom. Being with God, listening to his word, in the Gospel and in the Church's Liturgy, protects you from the dazzle of pride and presumption, from fashions and conformism, and gives you the strength to be truly free, even from certain temptations masked by good things. You asked me: how can we be "in" the world but not "of" the world? I answer you: precisely through prayer, through personal contact with God. It is not a question of multiplying words Jesus already said this to us but of being in God's presence, of making our own, in our minds and in our hearts, the words of the "Our Father" that embraces all the problems of our lives, or by adoring the Eucharist, meditating on the Gospel in our room or participating with recollection in the Liturgy. None of this removes us from life but instead helps us truly to be ourselves in every context, faithful to the voice of God who speaks to our conscience, free from the conditioning of the time! This is how it was for St Celestine V. He was able to act according to his conscience in obedience to God hence without fear and with great courage even in difficult moments such as those linked to his brief Pontificate, not fearing to lose his dignity but knowing that it consists in existing in truth. And the guarantee of truth is God. Those who follow him have no fear, not even of denying themselves, of giving up their own ideas, for, as St Teresa of Avila said, "Those who have God lack nothing".

Dear Friends, faith and prayer do not solve problems but rather enable us to face them with fresh enlightenment and strength, in a way that is worthy of the human being and also more serenely and effectively. If we look at the history of the Church we see that it is peopled by a wealth of Saints and Blesseds who, precisely by starting from an intense and constant dialogue with God, illumined by faith, were able to find creative, ever new solutions to respond to practical human needs in all the centuries: health, education, work, etc. Their entrepreneurial character was motivated by the Holy Spirit and by a strong and generous love for their brethren, especially for the weakest and most underprivileged. Dear young people, let yourselves be totally won over by Christ! And start out with determination yourselves too, on the path to holiness, that is by being in contact, in conformity with God a path that is open to all because this will also enable you to become more creative in seeking solutions to the problems you encounter, and in seeking them together! Here is another badge (distinctive sign) of the Christian: he is never an individualist. Perhaps you will say to me: but if we look, for example, at St Peter Celestine, in his choice of the heremital life might there not have been individualism or an escape from responsibility? This temptation does of course exist. But in the experiences approved by the Church, the solitary life of prayer and penance is always at the service of the community, open to others, it is never in opposition to the community's needs. Hermits and monasteries are oases and sources of spiritual life from which all may draw. The monk

does not live for himself but for others and it is for the good of the Church and of society that he cultivates the contemplative life, so that the Church and society may always be irrigated by new energies, by the Lord's action. Dear young people, love our Christian communities, do not be afraid to commit yourselves to live together the experience of faith! Love the Church: she has given you faith, she has introduced you to Christ! And love your Bishop and your priests: in spite of all our weaknesses, priests are precious presences in your life!

After Jesus suggested to the rich young man of the Gospel that he leave everything and follow him, the young man went away sadly because he was excessively attached to his many possessions (cf. Mt 19:22). In you, on the other hand, I read joy! And this is also a sign that you are Christians: that for you Jesus Christ is worth much, even though it is demanding to follow him, that he is worth more than anything else. You have believed that God is the precious pearl that gives value to all the rest: to the family, to studies, to work, to human love... to life itself. You have realized that God takes nothing from you but gives to you "a hundredfold" and makes your life eternal, for God is infinite Love, the only love that satisfies our hearts. I would like to recall St Augustine's experience. He was a young man who, with great difficulty spent a long time seeking something that would satisfy his thirst for truth and happiness. Yet at the end of this process of seeking he understood that our hearts are restless until they find God, until they rest in him (cf. *The Confessions*, 1, 1). Dear young people, keep your enthusiasm, your joy, the joy that is born from having encountered the Lord and may you communicate it also to your peers! I must now depart and I must say that I am sorry to leave you! With you I feel that the Church is young! But I am happy as I leave, like a father who is serene because he has seen that his children are growing up and growing up well. Dear young men and women, walk on! Walk on the path of the Gospel; love the Church our mother; be simple and pure in heart; be gentle and strong in truth; be humble and generous. I entrust you all to your holy Patrons, to St Peter Celestine and, especially, to the Virgin Mary, and I bless you with deep affection. Amen.