

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER
BENEDICT XVI
TO THE YOUTH OF THE WORLD
ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 22nd WORLD YOUTH DAY, 2007**

*“Just as I have loved you, you also
should love one another” (Jn 13:34).*

My dear young friends,

On the occasion of the 22nd World Youth Day that will be celebrated in the dioceses on Palm Sunday, I would like to propose for your meditation the words of Jesus: *“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34).*

Is it possible to love?

Everybody feels the longing to love and to be loved. Yet, how difficult it is to love, and how many mistakes and failures have to be reckoned with in love! There are those who even come to doubt that love is possible. But if emotional delusions or lack of affection can cause us to think that love is utopian, an impossible dream, should we then become resigned? No! Love is possible, and the purpose of my message is to help reawaken in each one of you - you who are the future and hope of humanity-, trust in a love that is true, faithful and strong; a love that generates peace and joy; a love that binds people together and allows them to feel free in respect for one another. Let us now go on a journey together in three stages, as we embark on a “discovery” of love.

God, the source of love

The first stage concerns the source of true love. There is only one source, and that is God. Saint John makes this clear when he declares that “God is love” (1 Jn 4: 8,16). He was not simply saying that God loves us, but that the very being of God is love. Here we find ourselves before the most dazzling revelation of the source of love, the mystery of the Trinity: in God, one and triune, there is an everlasting exchange of love between the persons of the Father and the Son, and this love is not an energy or a sentiment, but it is a person; it is the Holy Spirit.

The Cross of Christ fully reveals the love of God

How is God-Love revealed to us? We have now reached the second stage of our journey. Even though the signs of divine love are already clearly present in creation, the full revelation of the intimate mystery of God came to us through the Incarnation when God himself became man. In Christ, true God and true Man, we have come to know love in all its magnitude. In fact, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, “the real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those conceptsCan unprecedented realism” (n. 12). The manifestation of divine love is total and perfect in the Cross where, we are told by Saint Paul, “*God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8). Therefore, each one of us can truly say: “*Christ loved me and gave*

himself up for me” (cf *Eph 5:2*). Redeemed by his blood, no human life is useless or of little value, because each of us is loved personally by Him with a passionate and faithful love, a love without limits. The Cross, - for the world a folly, for many believers a scandal-, is in fact the “wisdom of God” for those who allow themselves to be touched right to the innermost depths of their being, “*for God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength*” (1 *Cor 1:25*). Moreover, the Crucifix, which after the Resurrection would carry forever the marks of his passion, exposes the “distortions” and lies about God that underlie violence, vengeance and exclusion. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes upon himself the sins of the world and eradicates hatred from the heart of humankind. This is the true “revolution” that He brings about: love.

Loving our neighbour as Christ loves us

Now we have arrived at the third stage of our reflection. Christ cried out from the Cross: “*I am thirsty*” (*Jn 19:28*). This shows us his burning thirst to love and to be loved by each one of us. It is only by coming to perceive the depth and intensity of such a mystery that we can realise the need and urgency to love him as He has loved us. This also entails the commitment to even give our lives, if necessary, for our brothers and sisters sustained by love for Him. God had already said in the Old Testament: “*You shall love your neighbour as yourself*” (*Lev 19:18*), but the innovation introduced by Christ is the fact that to love as he loves us means loving everyone without distinction, even our enemies, “*to the end*” (cf *Jn 13:1*).

Witnesses to the love of Christ

I would like to linger for a moment on three areas of daily life where you, my dear young friends, are particularly called to demonstrate the love of God. The first area is the Church, our spiritual family, made up of all the disciples of Christ. Mindful of his words: “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (*Jn 13:35*), you should stimulate, with your enthusiasm and charity, the activities of the parishes, the communities, the ecclesial movements and the youth groups to which you belong. Be attentive in your concern for the welfare of others, faithful to the commitments you have made. Do not hesitate to joyfully abstain from some of your entertainments; cheerfully accept the necessary sacrifices; testify to your faithful love for Jesus by proclaiming his Gospel, especially among young people of your age.

Preparing for the future

The second area, where you are called to express your love and grow in it, is your preparation for the future that awaits you. If you are engaged to be married, God has a project of love for your future as a couple and as a family. Therefore, it is essential that you discover it with the help of the Church, free from the common prejudice that says that Christianity with its commandments and prohibitions places obstacles to the joy of love and impedes you from fully enjoying the happiness that a man and woman seek in their reciprocal love. The love of a man and woman is at the origin of the human family and the couple formed by a man and a woman has its foundation in God’s original plan (cf *Gen 2:18-25*). Learning to love each other as a couple is a wonderful journey, yet it requires a demanding “apprenticeship”. The period of engagement, very necessary in order to form a couple, is a time of expectation and preparation that needs to be lived in purity of gesture and words. It allows you to mature in love, in concern and in attention for each other; it helps you to practise self-control and to develop your respect for each other. These are the characteristics of true love that does not place emphasis on seeking its own satisfaction or its own welfare. In your prayer together, ask the Lord to watch over and increase your love and to purify it of all selfishness. Do not hesitate to respond generously to the Lord’s call, for Christian matrimony is truly and wholly a

vocation in the Church. Likewise, dear young men and women, be ready to say “yes” if God should call you to follow the path of ministerial priesthood or the consecrated life. Your example will be one of encouragement for many of your peers who are seeking true happiness.

Growing in love each day

The third area of commitment that comes with love is that of daily life with its multiple relationships. I am particularly referring to family, studies, work and free time. Dear young friends, cultivate your talents, not only to obtain a social position, but also to help others to “grow”. Develop your capacities, not only in order to become more “competitive” and “productive”, but to be “witnesses of charity”. In addition to your professional training, also make an effort to acquire religious knowledge that will help you to carry out your mission in a responsible way. In particular, I invite you to carefully study the social doctrine of the Church so that its principles may inspire and guide your action in the world. May the Holy Spirit make you creative in charity, persevering in your commitments, and brave in your initiatives, so that you will be able to offer your contribution to the building up of the “civilisation of love”. The horizon of love is truly boundless: it is the whole world!

“Dare to love” by following the example of the saints

My dear young friends, I want to invite you to “dare to love”. Do not desire anything less for your life than a love that is strong and beautiful and that is capable of making the whole of your existence a joyful undertaking of giving yourselves as a gift to God and your brothers and sisters, in imitation of the One who vanquished hatred and death forever through love (cf *Rev* 5:13). Love is the only force capable of changing the heart of the human person and of all humanity, by making fruitful the relations between men and women, between rich and poor, between cultures and civilisations. This is shown to us in the lives of the saints. They are true friends of God who channel and reflect this very first love. Try to know them better, entrust yourselves to their intercession, and strive to live as they did. I shall just mention Mother Teresa. In order to respond instantly to the cry of Jesus, “I thirst”, a cry that had touched her deeply, she began to take in the people who were dying on the streets of Calcutta in India. From that time onward, the only desire of her life was to quench the thirst of love felt by Jesus, not with words, but with concrete action by recognising his disfigured countenance thirsting for love in the faces of the poorest of the poor. Blessed Teresa put the teachings of the Lord into practice: “*Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me*” (*Mt* 25:40). The message of this humble witness of divine love has spread around the whole world.

The secret of love

Each one of us, my dear friends, has been given the possibility of reaching this same level of love, but only by having recourse to the indispensable support of divine Grace. Only the Lord’s help will allow us to keep away from resignation when faced with the enormity of the task to be undertaken. It instills in us the courage to accomplish that which is humanly inconceivable. Above all, the Eucharist is the great school of love. When we participate regularly and with devotion in Holy Mass, when we spend a sustained time of adoration in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, it is easier to understand the length, breadth, height and depth of his love that goes beyond all knowledge (cf *Eph* 3:17-18). By sharing the Eucharistic Bread with our brothers and sisters of the Church community, we feel compelled, like Our Lady with Elizabeth, to render “in haste” the love of Christ into generous service towards our brothers and sisters.

Towards the encounter in Sydney

On this subject, the recommendation of the apostle John is illuminating: *“Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth”* (1 Jn 3: 18-19). Dear young people, it is in this spirit that I invite you to experience the next World Youth Day together with your bishops in your respective dioceses. This will be an important stage on the way to the meeting in Sydney where the theme will be: *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses”* (Acts 1:8). May Mary, the Mother of Christ and of the Church, help you to let that cry ring out everywhere, the cry that has changed the world: *“God is love!”* I am together with you all in prayer and extend to you my heartfelt blessing.

From the Vatican, 27 January 2007

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