

XXIII WORLD YOUTH DAY

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE WORLD ON THE OCCASION OF THE XXIII WORLD YOUTH DAY, 2008

*“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;
and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8)*

My dear young friends!

1. The XXIII World Youth Day

I always remember with great joy the various occasions we spent together in Cologne in August 2005. At the end of that unforgettable manifestation of faith and enthusiasm that remains engraved on my spirit and on my heart, I made an appointment with you for the next gathering that will be held in Sydney in 2008. This will be the XXIII World Youth Day and 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)*. The underlying theme of the spiritual preparation for our meeting in Sydney is the Holy Spirit and mission. In 2006 we focussed our attention on the Holy Spirit as the *Spirit of Truth*. Now in 2007 we are seeking a deeper understanding of the *Spirit of Love*. We will continue our journey towards World Youth Day 2008 by reflecting on the *Spirit of Fortitude and Witness* that gives us the courage to live according to the Gospel and to proclaim it boldly. Therefore it is very important that each one of you young people - in your communities, and together with those responsible for your education - should be able to reflect on this Principal Agent of salvation history, namely the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Jesus. In this way you will be able to achieve the following lofty goals: to recognize the Spirit's true identity, principally by listening to the Word of God in the Revelation of the Bible; to become clearly aware of his continuous, active presence in the life of the Church, especially as you rediscover that the Holy Spirit is the “soul”, the vital breath of Christian life itself, through the sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist; to grow thereby in an understanding of Jesus that becomes ever deeper and more joyful and, at the same time, to put the Gospel into practice at the dawn of the third millennium. In this message I gladly offer you an outline for meditation that you can explore during this year of preparation. In this way you can test the quality of your faith in the Holy Spirit, rediscover it if it is lost, strengthen it if it has become weak, savour it as fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, brought about by the indispensable working of the Holy Spirit. Never forget that the Church, in fact humanity itself, all the people around you now and those who await you in the future, expect much from you young people, because you have within you the supreme gift of the Father, the Spirit of Jesus.

2. The promise of the Holy Spirit in the Bible

Attentive listening to the Word of God concerning the mystery and action of the Holy Spirit opens us up to great and inspiring insights that I shall summarize in the following points.

Shortly before his Ascension, Jesus said to his disciples: “And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you” (Lk 24:49). This took place on the day of Pentecost when they were together in

prayer in the Upper Room with the Virgin Mary. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the nascent Church was the fulfilment of a promise made much earlier by God, announced and prepared throughout the Old Testament.

In fact, right from its opening pages, the Bible presents the spirit of God as the *wind* that “was moving over the face of the waters” (cf. *Gen* 1:2). It says that God *breathed* into man’s nostrils the *breath* of life (cf. *Gen* 2:7), thereby infusing him with life itself. After original sin, the life-giving spirit of God is seen several times in the history of humankind, calling forth prophets to exhort the chosen people to return to God and to observe his commandments faithfully. In the well-known vision of the prophet Ezekiel, God, with his spirit, restores to life the people of Israel, represented by the “dry bones” (cf. 37:1-14). Joel prophesied an “outpouring of the spirit” over all the people, excluding no one. The sacred author wrote: “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh ... Even upon the menservants and maidservants, in those days, I will pour out my spirit” (3:1-2).

In “the fullness of time” (cf. *Gal* 4:4), the angel of the Lord announced to the Virgin of Nazareth that the Holy Spirit, “the power of the Most High”, would come upon her and overshadow her. The child to be born would be holy and would be called Son of God (cf. *Lk* 1:35). In the words of the prophet Isaiah, the Messiah would be the one on whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest (cf. 11:1-2; 42:1). This is the prophecy that Jesus took up again at the start of his public ministry in the synagogue in Nazareth. To the amazement of those present, he said: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (*Lk* 4:18-19; cf. *Is* 61:1-2). Addressing those present, he referred those prophetic words to himself by saying: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (*Lk* 4:21). Again, before his death on the Cross, he would tell his disciples several times about the coming of the Holy Spirit, the “Counselor” whose mission would be to bear witness to him and to assist believers by teaching them and guiding them to the fullness of Truth (cf. *Jn* 14:16-17, 25-26; 15:26; 16:13).

3. Pentecost, the point of departure for the Church’s mission

On the evening of the day of resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples, “he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (*Jn* 20:22). With even greater power the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. We read in the Acts of the Apostles: “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them” (2:2-3).

The Holy Spirit *renewed* the Apostles *from within*, filling them with a power that would give them courage to go out and *boldly proclaim* that “Christ has died and is risen!” Freed from all fear, they began to speak openly with *self-confidence* (cf. *Acts* 2:29; 4:13; 4:29,31). These frightened fishermen had become courageous heralds of the Gospel. Even their enemies could not understand how “uneducated and ordinary men” (cf. *Acts* 4:13) could show such courage and endure difficulties, suffering and persecution with joy. Nothing could stop them. To those who tried to silence them they replied: “We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (*Acts* 4:20). This is how the Church was born, and from the day of Pentecost she has not ceased to spread the Good News “to the ends of the earth” (*Acts* 1:8).

4. The Holy Spirit, soul of the Church and principle of communion

If we are to understand the mission of the Church, we must go back to the Upper Room where the disciples remained together (cf. *Lk* 24:49), praying with Mary, the “Mother”, awaiting the Spirit that had been promised. This icon of the nascent Church should be a constant source of inspiration for every Christian community. Apostolic and missionary fruitfulness is not principally due to programmes and pastoral methods that are cleverly drawn up and “efficient”, but is the result of the community’s constant prayer (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75). Moreover, for the mission to be effective, communities must be united, that is, they must be “of one heart and soul” (cf. *Acts* 4:32), and they must be ready to witness to the love and joy that the Holy Spirit instils in the hearts of the faithful (cf. *Acts* 2:42). The Servant of God John Paul II wrote that, even prior to action, the Church’s mission is to witness and to live in a way that shines out to others (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 26). Tertullian tells us that this is what happened in the early days of Christianity when pagans were converted on seeing the love that reigned among Christians: “See how they love one another” (cf. *Apology*, 39 § 7).

To conclude this brief survey of the Word of God in the Bible, I invite you to observe how the Holy Spirit is the highest gift of God to humankind, and therefore the supreme testimony of his love for us, a love that is specifically expressed as the “yes to life” that God wills for each of his creatures. This “yes to life” finds its fullness in Jesus of Nazareth and in his victory over evil by means of the redemption. In this regard, let us never forget that the Gospel of Jesus, precisely because of the Spirit, cannot be reduced to a mere statement of fact, for it is intended to be “good news for the poor, release for captives, sight for the blind ...”. With what great vitality this was seen on the day of Pentecost, as it became the grace and the task of the Church towards the world, her primary mission!

We are the fruits of this mission of the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit. We carry within us the seal of the Father’s love in Jesus Christ which is the Holy Spirit. Let us never forget this, because the Spirit of the Lord always remembers every individual, and wishes, particularly through you young people, to stir up the wind and fire of a new Pentecost in the world.

5. The Holy Spirit as “Teacher of the interior life”

My dear young friends, the Holy Spirit continues today to act with power in the Church, and the fruits of the Spirit are abundant in the measure in which we are ready to open up to this power that makes all things new. For this reason it is important that each one of us know the Spirit, establish a relationship with Him and allow ourselves to be guided by Him. However, at this point a question naturally arises: who is the Holy Spirit for me? It is a fact that for many Christians He is still the “great unknown”. This is why, as we prepare for the next World Youth Day, I wanted to invite you to come to know the Holy Spirit more deeply at a personal level. In our profession of faith we proclaim: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son” (*Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*). Yes, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the love of the Father and of the Son, is the Source of life that makes us holy, “because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (*Rom* 5:5). Nevertheless, it is not enough to know the Spirit; we must welcome Him as the guide of our souls, as the “Teacher of the interior life” who introduces us to the Mystery of the Trinity, because He alone can open us up to faith and allow us to live it each day to the full. The Spirit impels us forward towards others, enkindles in us the fire of love, makes us missionaries of God’s charity.

I know very well that you young people hold in your hearts great appreciation and love for Jesus, and that you desire to meet Him and speak with Him. Indeed, remember that it is precisely the presence of the Spirit within us that confirms, constitutes and builds our person on the very Person

of Jesus crucified and risen. So let us become familiar with the Holy Spirit in order to be familiar with Jesus.

6. *The Sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist*

You might ask, how can we allow ourselves to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and to grow in our spiritual lives? The answer, as you know, is this: we can do so by means of the Sacraments, because faith is born and is strengthened within us through the Sacraments, particularly those of Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, which are complementary and inseparable (cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1285). This truth concerning the three Sacraments that initiate our lives as Christians is perhaps neglected in the faith life of many Christians. They view them as events that took place in the past and have no real significance for today, like roots that lack life-giving nourishment. It happens that many young people distance themselves from their life of faith after they have received Confirmation. There are also young people who have not even received this sacrament. Yet it is through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and then, in an ongoing way, the Eucharist, that the Holy Spirit makes us children of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus, members of his Church, capable of a true witness to the Gospel, and able to savour the joy of faith.

I therefore invite you to reflect on what I am writing to you. Nowadays it is particularly necessary to rediscover the sacrament of Confirmation and its important place in our spiritual growth. Those who have received the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation should remember that they have become “temples of the Spirit”: God lives within them. Always be aware of this and strive to allow the treasure within you to bring forth fruits of holiness. Those who are baptized but have not yet received the sacrament of Confirmation, prepare to receive it knowing that in this way you will become “complete” Christians, since Confirmation perfects baptismal grace (cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1302-1304).

Confirmation gives us *special strength* to witness to and glorify God with our whole lives (cf. *Rom* 12:1). It makes us intimately aware of our belonging to the Church, the “Body of Christ”, of which we are all living members, in solidarity with one another (cf. *1 Cor* 12:12-25). By allowing themselves to be guided by the Spirit, each baptized person can bring his or her own contribution to the building up of the Church because of the *charisms* given by the Spirit, for “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the *common good*” (*1 Cor* 12:7). When the Spirit acts, he brings his fruits to the soul, namely “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (*Gal* 5:22). To those of you who have not yet received the sacrament of Confirmation, I extend a cordial invitation to prepare to receive it, and to seek help from your priests. It is a special occasion of grace that the Lord is offering you. Do not miss this opportunity!

I would like to add a word about the Eucharist. In order to grow in our Christian life, we need to be nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ. In fact, we are baptized and confirmed with a view to the Eucharist (cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1322; *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 17). “Source and summit” of the Church’s life, the Eucharist is a “perpetual Pentecost” since every time we celebrate Mass we receive the Holy Spirit who unites us more deeply with Christ and transforms us into Him. My dear young friends, if you take part frequently in the eucharistic celebration, if you dedicate some of your time to adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Source of love which is the Eucharist, you will acquire that joyful determination to dedicate your lives to following the Gospel. At the same time it will be your experience that whenever our strength is not enough, it is the Holy Spirit who transforms us, filling us with his strength and making us witnesses suffused by the missionary fervour of the risen Christ.

7. *The need and urgency of mission*

Many young people view their lives with apprehension and raise many questions about their future. They anxiously ask: How can we fit into a world marked by so many grave injustices and so much suffering? How should we react to the selfishness and violence that sometimes seem to prevail? How can we give full meaning to life? How can we help to bring it about that the fruits of the Spirit mentioned above, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (no. 6), can fill this scarred and fragile world, the world of young people most of all? On what conditions can the life-giving Spirit of the first creation and particularly of the second creation or redemption become the new soul of humanity? Let us not forget that the greater the gift of God - and the gift of the Spirit of Jesus is the greatest of all – so much the greater is the world’s need to receive it and therefore the greater and the more exciting is the Church’s mission to bear credible witness to it. You young people, through World Youth Day, are in a way manifesting your desire to participate in this mission. In this regard, my dear young friends, I want to remind you here of some key truths on which to meditate. Once again I repeat that only Christ can fulfil the most intimate aspirations that are in the heart of each person. Only Christ can humanize humanity and lead it to its “divinization”. Through the power of his Spirit he instils divine charity within us, and this makes us capable of loving our neighbour and ready to be of service. The Holy Spirit enlightens us, revealing Christ crucified and risen, and shows us how to become more like Him so that we can be “the image and instrument of the love which flows from Christ” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 33). Those who allow themselves to be led by the Spirit understand that placing oneself at the service of the Gospel is not an optional extra, because they are aware of the urgency of transmitting this Good News to others. Nevertheless, we need to be reminded again that we can be witnesses of Christ only if we allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit who is “the principal agent of evangelization” (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75) and “the principal agent of mission” (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 21). My dear young friends, as my venerable predecessors Paul VI and John Paul II said on several occasions, to proclaim the Gospel and bear witness to the faith is more necessary than ever today (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 1). There are those who think that to present the precious treasure of faith to people who do not share it means being intolerant towards them, but this is not the case, because to present Christ is not to impose Him (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80). Moreover, two thousand years ago twelve Apostles gave their lives to make Christ known and loved. Throughout the centuries since then, the Gospel has continued to spread by means of men and women inspired by that same missionary fervour. Today too there is a need for disciples of Christ who give unstintingly of their time and energy to serve the Gospel. There is a need for young people who will allow God’s love to burn within them and who will respond generously to his urgent call, just as many young blessed and saints did in the past and also in more recent times. In particular, I assure you that the Spirit of Jesus today is inviting you young people to be bearers of the good news of Jesus to your contemporaries. The difficulty that adults undoubtedly find in approaching the sphere of youth in a comprehensible and convincing way could be a sign with which the Spirit is urging you young people to take this task upon yourselves. You know the ideals, the language, and also the wounds, the expectations, and at the same time the desire for goodness felt by your contemporaries. This opens up the vast world of young people’s emotions, work, education, expectations, and suffering ... Each one of you must have the courage to promise the Holy Spirit that you will bring one young person to Jesus Christ in the way you consider best, knowing how to “give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but [to] do it with gentleness and reverence” (cf. *1 Pet 3:15*).

In order to achieve this goal, my dear friends, you must be holy and you must be missionaries since we can never separate *holiness* from *mission* (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 90). Do not be afraid to become holy missionaries like Saint Francis Xavier who travelled through the Far East proclaiming the Good News until every ounce of his strength was used up, or like Saint Thérèse of the Child

Jesus who was a missionary even though she never left the Carmelite convent. Both of these are “Patrons of the Missions”. Be prepared to put your life on the line in order to enlighten the world with the truth of Christ; to respond with love to hatred and disregard for life; to proclaim the hope of the risen Christ in every corner of the earth.

8. Invoking a “new Pentecost” upon the world

My dear young friends, I hope to see very many of you in Sydney in July 2008. It will be a providential opportunity to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit’s power. Come in great numbers in order to be a sign of hope and to give appreciative support to the Church community in Australia that is preparing to welcome you. For the young people of the country that will host you, it will be an exceptional opportunity to proclaim the beauty and joy of the Gospel to a society that is secularized in so many ways. Australia, like all of Oceania, needs to rediscover its Christian roots. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*, Pope John Paul II wrote: “Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church in Oceania is preparing for a new evangelization of peoples who today are hungering for Christ... A new evangelization is the first priority for the Church in Oceania” (no. 18).

I invite you to give time to prayer and to your spiritual formation during this last stage of the journey leading to the XXIII World Youth Day, so that in Sydney you will be able to renew the promises made at your Baptism and Confirmation. Together we shall invoke the Holy Spirit, confidently asking God for the gift of a new Pentecost for the Church and for humanity in the third millennium.

May Mary, united in prayer with the Apostles in the Upper Room, accompany you throughout these months and obtain for all young Christians a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit to set their hearts on fire. Remember: the Church has confidence in you! We Pastors, especially, pray that you may love and lead others to love Jesus more and more and that you may follow Him faithfully. With these sentiments I bless you all with deep affection.

From Lorenzago, 20 July 2007

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