



“Making Memory of His Legacy to Strengthen Our Identity”

BL. JOHN PAUL II NEWMAN CENTER

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“Young People: Be protagonists of the future!”

APOSTOLIC LETTER DILECTI AMICI, 1985

LUMINOUS MYSTERIES

I. The Baptism of Our Lord

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. He came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:13-17)

Since man is the fundamental and at the same time the daily way of the Church,(2) it is easy to understand why the Church attributes special importance to the period of youth as a key stage in the life of every human being. You young people are the ones who embody this youth: you are the youth of the nations and societies, the youth of every family and of all humanity; you are also the youth of the Church. We are all looking to you, for all of us, thanks to you, in a certain sense continually become young again. So your youth is not just your own property, your personal property or the property of a generation: it belongs to the whole of that space that every man traverses in his life's journey, and at the same time it is a special possession belonging to everyone. It is a possession of humanity itself.

In you there is hope, for you belong to the future, just as the future belongs to you. For hope is always linked to the future; it is the expectation of "future good things". As a Christian virtue, it is linked to the expectation of those eternal good things which God has promised to man in Jesus Christ.(3) And at the same time, this hope, as both a Christian and a human virtue, is the expectation of the good things which man will build, using the talents given him by Providence.

In this sense the future belongs to you young people, just as it once belonged to the generation of those who are now adults, and precisely together with them it has become the present reality. Responsibility for this present reality and for its shape and many different forms lies first of all with adults. To you belongs responsibility for what will one day become reality together with yourselves, but which still lies in the future.

When we say that the future belongs to you, we are thinking in categories of human impermanence, which is always a journey towards the future. When we say that the future depends on you, we are thinking in ethical categories, according to the demands of moral responsibility, which requires us to

attribute to man as a person-and to the communities and societies which are made up of persons-the fundamental value of human acts, resolves, undertaking and intentions.

This dimension is also a dimension proper to Christian and human hope. And in this dimension the first and principal wish that the Church expresses for you young people, through my lips, in this Year dedicated to Youth, is this: that you should "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you".(Apostolic Letter to the Youth, 1985, n. 1)

Mother and Teacher of the Young hearts, pray for us!

II. The Wedding at Cana

"There was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' [And] Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come, 'His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you.'" (John 2:1-5)

"Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest", (58) continues Christ. And these words, especially in our times, become a programme of prayer and action for more priestly and religious vocations. With this programme the Church addresses herself to you, to youth. And you too: pray! And if the fruit of this prayer of the Church comes to life in the depths of your heart, listen to the Master as he says: "Follow me".

These words in the Gospel certainly concern the priestly or religious vocation; but at the same time they help us to understand more deeply the question of vocation in a still wider and more fundamental sense.

One could speak here of the "life" vocation, which in a way is identical with that plan of life which each of you draws up in the period of your youth. But "vocation" means something more than "plan". In this second case I myself am the subject who draws it up, and this corresponds better to the reality of the person which each of you is. This "plan" is a "vocation" inasmuch as in it there make themselves felt the various factors which call. These factors usually make up a particular order of values (also called a "hierarchy of values"), from which emerges an ideal to be realized, an ideal which is attractive to a young heart. In this process the "vocation" becomes a "plan", and the plan begins to be also a vocation.

But given the fact that we are in the presence of Christ and are basing our reflections about youth on Christ's conversation with the young man, that relationship of the "plan of life" to the "life vocation" needs to be stated even more precisely. A human being is a creature and at the same time an adopted child of God in Christ: he is a child of God. Hence during youth a person puts the question, "What must I do?" not only to himself and to other people from whom he can expect an answer, especially his parents and teachers, but he puts it also to God, as his Creator and Father. He puts it in the context of this particular interior sphere in which he has learned to be in a close relationship with God, above all in prayer. He therefore asks God: "What must I do?", what is your plan for my life? Your creative, fatherly plan? What is your will? I wish to do it.

In this context the "plan" takes on the meaning of a "life vocation", as something which is entrusted by God to an individual as a task. Young people, entering into themselves and at the same time entering into conversation with Christ in prayer, desire as it were to read the eternal thought which God the Creator and Father has in their regard. They then become convinced that the task assigned to them by

God is left completely to their own freedom, and at the same time is determined by various circumstances of an interior and exterior nature. Examining these circumstances, the young person, boy or girl, constructs his or her plan of life and at the same time recognizes this plan as the vocation to which God is calling him or her.

I desire therefore to entrust to all of you, the young people to whom this Letter is addressed, this marvelous task which is linked with the discovery before God of each one's life vocation. This is an exciting task. It is a fascinating interior undertaking. In this undertaking your humanity develops and grows, while your young personality acquires ever greater inner maturity. You become rooted in that which each of you is, in order to become that which you must become: for yourself- for other people-for God.

Parallel with the process of discovering one's own "life vocation" there should also be a progressively clearer realization of how this life vocation is at the same time a "Christian vocation". (Apostolic Letter to the Youth, 1985, n. 8 and 9)

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III. The Proclamation of the Kingdom

"After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: 'This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'" (Mark 1:14-15)

The Church looks to the young; or rather, the Church in a special way sees herself in the young -in you as a group and in each of you as individuals. This is how it has been since the beginning, since apostolic times. The words of Saint John in his First Letter offer a particular testimony of this: "I am writing to you, young people, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father... I write to you, young people, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you".(81)

The words of the Apostle can be linked with Christ's conversation with the young man in the Gospel, and they re-echo loud and clear from generation to generation.

In our own generation, at the close of the second millennium after Christ, the Church continues to see herself in the young. And how does the Church see herself? Let the teaching of the Second Vatican Council be a particular testimony of this. The Church sees herself as a sacrament, or sign and means of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind".(82) And so she sees herself in relationship to the whole great human family which is in constant growth. She sees herself in worldwide dimensions. She sees herself on the paths of ecumenism, on the paths towards the unity of all Christians, for which Christ himself prayed and which is of unquestionable urgency in our time. She also sees herself in dialogue with the followers of the non-Christian religions, and with all people of good will. This dialogue is a dialogue of salvation, which should also serve the cause of peace in the world and justice among people.

You young people are the hope of the Church that sees herself and her mission in the world precisely in this way. She speaks to you about this mission. An expression of this was the Message of 1 January 1985, for the celebration of the World Day of Peace. That Message was addressed to you, on the basis of the belief that "the path of peace is at the same time the path of the young" (Peace and youth go forward together). This belief is an appeal and at the same time a commitment: once again it is a question of

being always "prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" the hope that is linked with you. As you can see, this hope concerns fundamental and at the same time universal matters. (Apostolic Letter to the Youth, 1985, n. 15)

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IV. The Transfiguration of Our Lord

"Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with them. A bright cloud cast a shadow over them, and from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.'" (Matthew 17:1-5)

We shall begin from what we find at the end of the Gospel text. The young man goes away sorrowful, "for he had great possessions". There is no doubt that this expression refers to the material possessions of which the young man was owner or heir. Perhaps this is the situation of some, but it is not typical. And therefore the Evangelist's words suggest another way of putting the matter: it is a question of the fact that youth is in itself (independently of any material goods) a special treasure of man, of a young man or woman, and most often it is lived by young people as a specific treasure. I say most often, but not always, not invariably, for in the world there is no lack of people who for various reasons do not experience youth as a treasure.

There are however reasons-and they are also objective reasons-for thinking of youth as a special treasure that a person experiences at this particular period of his or her life. It is a period which is certainly distinguished from the period of childhood (it is precisely the time when one leaves the years of childhood), just as it is also distinguished from the period of full maturity. For the period of youth is the time of a particularly intense discovery of the human "I" and of the properties and capacities connected with it. Before the inner gaze of the developing personality of the young man or woman, there is gradually and successively revealed that specific and in a sense unique and unrepeatable potentiality of a concrete humanity, in which there is as it were inscribed the whole plan of future life. Life presents itself as the carrying-out of that plan: as "self-fulfillment" .

The question naturally deserves an explanation from many points of view; but to express it in a few words, one can say that the treasure which is youth reveals itself in precisely this shape or form. This is the treasure of discovering and at the same time of organizing, choosing, foreseeing and making the first personal decisions, decisions that will be important for the future in the strictly personal dimension of human existence. At the same time, these decisions are of considerable social importance. The young man in the Gospel was precisely in this existential phase, as we can deduce from the questions he asks in his conversation with Jesus. Therefore also the final words about "great possessions"-meaning wealth-can be understood precisely in this sense: the treasure which is youth itself.

But we must ask the question: does this treasure of youth necessarily alienate man from Christ? The Evangelist certainly does not say this: rather, an examination of the text leads us to a different conclusion. The decision to go away from Christ was definitively influenced only by external riches, what the young man possessed ("possessions"). Not by what he was! What he was, as precisely a young man-the interior treasure hidden in youth-had led him to Jesus. And it had also impelled him to ask those questions which in the clearest way concern the plan for the whole of life. What must I do? "What must I do to inherit eternal life?". What must I do so that my life may have full value and full meaning?

The youth of each one of you, dear friends, is a treasure that is manifested precisely in these questions. Man asks himself these questions throughout his life. But in the time of youth they are particularly urgent, indeed insistent. And it is good that this is so. These questions precisely show the dynamism of the development of the human personality, the dynamism which is proper to your age. You ask yourselves these questions sometimes with impatience, and at the same time you yourselves understand that the reply to them cannot be hurried or superficial the reply must have a specific and definitive weight. It is a question here of a reply that concerns the whole of life, that embraces the whole of human existence.

These essential questions are asked in a special way by those members of your generation whose lives have been weighed down since childhood by suffering: by some physical lack or defect, some handicap or limitation, or by a difficult family or social situation. If at the same time their minds develop normally, the question about the meaning and value of life becomes for them all the more essential and also particularly tragic, for from the very beginning the question is marked by the pain of existence. And how many such young people there are among the multitudes of young people all over the world! In the different nations and societies; in individual families! How many are forced from childhood to live in an institution or hospital, condemned to a certain passivity which can make them begin to feel that they are of no use to humanity! (Apostolic Letter to the Youth, 1985, n. 3)

So can we say that their youth too is a interior treasure? To whom should we put this question? To whom should they put this essential question? It seems that here Christ alone is the competent one to ask, the one whom no one can fully replace.

As we have said, the question about the value of life, about the meaning of life, forms part of the singular treasure of youth. It comes from the very heart of the riches and the anxieties linked with that plan for life that must be undertaken and carried out. Still more so, when youth is tested by personal suffering, or is profoundly aware of the suffering of others; when it experiences a powerful shock at the sight of the many kinds of evil that exist in the world; finally, when it comes face to face with the mystery of sin, of human iniquity (mysterium iniquitatis).(14) Christ's reply is this: "Only God is good"; only God is love. This reply may seem difficult, but at the same time it is firm and it is true; it bears within itself the definitive solution. How I pray that you, my young friends, will hear Christ's reply in the most personal way possible; that you will and the interior path which enables you to grasp it, accept it and undertake its accomplishment! (Apostolic Letter to the Youth, 1985, n. 3 and 4)

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V. The Institution of the Eucharist

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying ‘Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.’” (Matthew 26:26-28)

It seems nevertheless that when faced by certain questions these many different communities of young people feel, think and react in a very similar way. For example, it seems that they are all united by a common attitude towards the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are living in extreme poverty and are even dying of hunger, while at the same time vast sums are being spent on the production of nuclear weapons, the stocks of which at this very moment are capable of bringing about humanity's self-

destruction. There are other similar tensions and threats, on a scale never before known in the history of humanity. We are all aware that the horizon of the lives of the billions of people who make up the human family at the close of the second millennium after Christ seems to portend the possibility of calamities and catastrophes on a truly apocalyptic scale.

In this situation you young people can rightly ask the preceding generations: How have we come to this point? Why have we reached such a degree of peril for humanity all over the world? What are the causes of the injustice that affronts our eyes? Why are so many dying of hunger? Why so many millions of refugees at the different borders? Why so many cases in which fundamental human rights are trampled on? So many prisons and concentration camps, so much systematic violence and the murder of innocent people, so much abuse of men and women, so much torture and torment inflicted on human bodies and human consciences? And in the midst of all this there is also the fact of young men who have on their consciences so many innocent victims, because it has been instilled into them that only in this way-through organized terrorism-can the world be made a better place. So again you ask: Why?

You young people can ask all these questions, indeed you must! For this is the world you are living in today, and in which you will have to live tomorrow, when the older generation has passed on. So you rightly ask: Why does humanity's great progress in science and technology-which cannot be compared with any preceding period of history-why does man's progress in mastering the material world turn against humanity itself in so many ways? So you rightly ask, though also with a sense of inner foreboding: Is this state of affairs irreversible? Can it be changed? Shall we succeed in changing it? You rightly ask this. Yes, this is the fundamental question facing your generation.

"What must we do to ensure that life-the flourishing life of the human family-will not be turned into the graveyard of nuclear death? What must we do to avoid being dominated by the sin of universal injustice? The sin of holding people in contempt and scorning their dignity, notwithstanding so many declarations confirming all human rights? What must we do? And also: Will we be able to do it.?"

Christ answers as he answered the young people of the first generation of the Church through the words of the Apostle: "I am writing to you, young people, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father... I write to you, young people, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you".(1 Jn 2:13-14). In you, in your young hearts, there is a strong desire for genuine brotherhood between all people, without divisions, conflicts or discrimination. Yes! You young people are bearers of the yearning for brotherhood and widespread solidarity-and certainly you do not want conflict between human beings, one against the other, in any form. Does not this yearning for brotherhood (each one is neighbor to the other! all are brothers and sisters of one another!) witness to the fact that, as the Apostle writes, "you have known the Father"? Because there can only be brothers and sisters where there is a father. And only where the Father is are people brothers and sisters.

So if you cherish a desire for brotherhood, this means that "the word of God abides in you". There abides in you that teaching which Christ brought, and which is rightly called the "Good News". And on your lips, or at least in the depths of your hearts, there abides the prayer of the Lord which begins with the words "Our Father". The prayer which reveals the Father and at the same time confirms that people are brothers and sisters of one another -and whose whole essence is contrary to all programs based on the principle of conflict between human beings in any form. The "Our Father" leads human hearts away from enmity, hatred, violence, terrorism, discrimination-from the situations in which human dignity and human rights are trampled upon.

The Apostle writes that you young people are strong in the strength of divine doctrine: the doctrine contained in Christ's Gospel and summed up in the "Our Father". Yes! You are strong in this divine teaching, you are strong in this prayer. You are strong because it instills into you love, good will, respect for people, for their life, their dignity, their conscience, their beliefs and their rights. If "you know the Father", you are strong with the power of human brotherhood.

You are also strong for the struggle: not for the struggle of one against another in the name of some ideology or practice separated from the very roots of the Gospel, but strong for the struggle against evil, against the real evil: against everything that offends God, against every injustice and exploitation, against every falsehood and deceit, against everything that insults and humiliates, against everything that profanes human society and human relationships, against every crime against life: against every sin.

The Apostle writes: "You have overcome the evil one"! And so it is. It is necessary to keep going back to the origin of evil and of sin in the history of mankind and the universe, just as Christ went back to these same roots in the Paschal Mystery of his Cross and Resurrection. There is no need to be afraid to call the first agent of evil by his name: the Evil One. The strategy which he used and continues to use is that of not revealing himself, so that the evil implanted by him from the beginning may receive its development from man himself, from systems and from relationships between individuals, from classes and nations-so as also to become ever more a "structural" sin, ever less identifiable as "personal" sin. In other words, so that man may feel in a certain sense "freed" from sin but at the same time be ever more deeply immersed in it.

The Apostle says: "Young people, you are strong": all that is needed is that "the word of God abide in you". Then you are strong: thus you will succeed in getting at the hidden workings of evil, its sources, and thus you will gradually succeed in changing the world, transforming it, making it more human, more fraternal-and at the same time more of God. For it is impossible to detach the world from God or set it up in opposition to God in the human heart. Nor is it possible to detach man from God and set him up in opposition to God. For this would be against the nature of man -against the intrinsic truth that constitutes the whole of reality! Truly the human heart is restless until it rests in God.(85) These words of the great Augustine never lose their validity. (Apostolic Letter to the Youth, 1985, n. 15)

Mother and Teacher of the Young hearts, pray for us!



Totus Tuus!