

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUTH OF THE WORLD
ON THE OCCASION
OF THE XIX WORLD YOUTH DAY 2004
“We wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21)**

My dear young people!

1. This year 2004 is the final stage before the great event in Cologne, where the 20th World Youth Day will be celebrated in 2005. I therefore invite you to intensify your path of spiritual preparation by reflecting on the theme I have chosen for this 19th World Youth Day: “*We wish to see Jesus*” (Jn 12:21).

This is a request made to the Apostles one day by some “Greeks”. They wanted to know who Jesus was. They had come not simply to see what kind of impression the man Jesus would make. Moved by great curiosity and a presentiment that they had found the answer to their deepest questions, they wanted to know who he really was and whence he came.

2. My dear young people, I want you too to imitate those “Greeks” who spoke to Philip, moved by a desire to “see Jesus”. May your search be motivated not simply by intellectual curiosity, though that too is something positive, but be stimulated above all by an inner urge to find the answer to the question about the meaning of your life. Like the rich young man in the Gospel, you too should go in search of Jesus to ask him: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mk 10:17). Mark the Evangelist states clearly that Jesus looked at him and loved him. You may remember another episode in which Jesus says to Nathaniel: “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you”, drawing from the heart of that Israelite, in whom there was no guile (cf. Jn 1:47), a fine profession of faith: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God!” (Jn 1:49). Those who approach Jesus with a heart free of prejudice can quite easily come to have faith because Jesus himself has already seen them and loved them first. The most sublime aspect of human dignity is precisely man’s vocation to communicate with God in a profound exchange of glances that is life transforming. In order to see Jesus, we first need to let him look at us!

The desire to see Jesus dwells deep in the heart of each man and each woman. My dear young people, allow Jesus to gaze into your eyes so that the desire to see the Light, and to experience the splendor of the Truth, may grow within you. Whether we are aware of it or not, God has created us because he loves us and so that we in turn may love him. This is the reason for the unquenchable nostalgia for God that man preserves in his heart: “Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me” (Ps 27: 8-9). That Face - we know - was revealed to us by God in Jesus Christ.

3. My dear young people, don’t you too wish to contemplate the beauty of that Face? That is the question I address to you on this World Youth Day 2004. Don’t be too hasty in your reply. First of all, create a silence within yourselves. Allow this ardent desire to see God emerge from the depth of your hearts, a desire that is sometimes stifled by the distractions of the world and by the allurements of pleasures. Allow this desire to emerge and you will have the wonderful experience of meeting Jesus. Christianity is not simply a doctrine: it is an encounter in faith with God made present in our history through the incarnation of Jesus.

Try by every means to make this encounter possible, and look towards Jesus who is passionately seeking you. Seek him with *the eyes of the flesh* through the events of life and in the faces of others; but seek him too with the *eyes of the soul* through prayer and meditation on the Word of God, because “The contemplation of Christ’s face cannot fail to be inspired by all that we are told about him in Sacred Scripture” (Novo millennio ineunte, 17).

4. To see Jesus, to contemplate his Face, is an unquenchable desire, but it is a desire that man unfortunately may also deform. This is what happens with sin, because it is the very essence of sin to draw our eyes away from the Creator and to turn them towards what he has created.

Those “Greeks” in search of the truth would not have been able to approach Christ if their desire, animated by a free and voluntary act, had not been expressed through a clear decision: “We wish to see Jesus”. To be truly free means having the strength to choose the One for whom we were created and accepting his lordship over our lives. You perceive it in the depths of your heart: all that is good on earth, all professional success, even the human love that you dream of, can never fully satisfy your deepest and most intimate desires. Only an encounter with Jesus can give full meaning to your lives: “for you made us for yourself, and our heart finds no peace until it rests in you” (Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, book 1, chapter 1). Do not let yourselves be distracted from this search. Persevere in it because it is your fulfillment and your joy that is at stake.

5. Dear friends, if you learn to discover Jesus in the Eucharist, you will also know how to discover him in your brothers and sisters, particularly in the very poor. The Eucharist received with love and adored with fervor becomes a school of freedom and

charity in order to fulfill the commandment to love. Jesus speaks to us in the wonderful language of the gift of self and of love so great as to give our own life for it. Is that an easy thing? You know very well that it is not! It is not easy to forget our self, but if we do, it draws us away from possessive and narcissistic love and opens us up to the joy of a love that is self-giving. This Eucharistic school of freedom and charity teaches us to overcome superficial emotions in order to be rooted firmly in what is true and good; it frees us from self-attachment in order to open ourselves to others. It teaches us to make the transition from an *affective* love to an *effective* love. For love is not merely a feeling; it is an act of will that consists of preferring, in a constant manner, the good of others to the good of oneself: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lays down his life for his friends” (*Jn 15:13*).

It is with such inner freedom and such burning charity that Jesus teaches us to find him in others, first of all in the disfigured face of the poor. *Blessed Teresa of Calcutta* loved to distribute her “visiting card” on which were written the words: “The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service, the fruit of service is peace”. This is the way to meet Christ. Go out to meet all of human suffering spurred on by your generosity and with the love that God instills in your hearts by means of the Holy Spirit: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (*Mt 25:40*). The world is in urgent need of a great prophetic sign of fraternal charity! It is not enough to “speak” of Jesus. We must also let him be “seen” somehow through the eloquent witness of our own life (cf. *Novo millennio ineunte*, 16).

Do not forget to seek Christ and to recognize his presence *in the Church*, which is like the continuation of his saving action in time and space. It is in the Church and through her that Jesus continues to make himself visible today and to allow humanity to come to him. In your parishes, movements and communities, be welcoming to one another in order to build communion among yourselves. This is the visible sign of the presence of Christ in the Church, in spite of being so often blurred by human sin.

6. Do not be surprised, then, when you meet the Cross on your way. Did not Jesus say to his disciples that the grain of wheat must fall into the earth and die in order to bear much fruit (cf. *Jn 12:23-26*)? He was indicating in this way that his life given unto death would bear fruit. You know this: after the resurrection of Christ, death shall no longer have the last word. Love is stronger than death. If Jesus accepted death on the cross, thus making it the source of life and the sign of love, he did so not out of weakness, or because he wished to suffer. He did so to gain our salvation and to allow us henceforth to take part in his divine life.

It is just this truth that I wished to bring to the minds of the young people of the world when I entrusted them with a large wooden Cross at the end of the Holy Year of the Redemption in 1984. Ever since then, it has traveled through different countries in preparation for your *World Days*. Hundreds of thousands of young people have prayed around this Cross. By laying at the feet of the Cross the burdens that had lain heavily upon them, they discovered that they were loved by God. Many of them also found the strength to change their lives.

This year, on the 20th anniversary of that event, the Cross will be solemnly welcomed in Berlin. From there it will commence its pilgrimage throughout Germany, concluding in Cologne next year. Today I wish to repeat the words I said to you back then: “My dear young people, ... I entrust to you the Cross of Christ! Carry it throughout the world as a symbol of Christ’s love for humanity, and announce to everyone that only in the death and resurrection of Christ can we find salvation and redemption”.

7. Your contemporaries expect you to be witnesses of the One whom you have met and who gives you life. In your daily lives, be intrepid witnesses of a love that is stronger than death. It is up to you to accept this challenge! Put your talents and your youthful enthusiasm at the service of the proclamation of the Good News. Be the enthusiastic friends of Jesus who present the Lord to all those who wish to see him, especially those who are farthest away from him. Philip and Andrew brought those “Greeks” to Jesus: God uses human friendship to lead hearts to the source of divine charity. Feel responsible for the evangelization of your friends and all your contemporaries.

Throughout her life, the Blessed Virgin Mary steadfastly contemplated the face of Christ. May she keep you forever under the gaze of her Son (cf. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 10) and sustain you as you prepare for World Youth Day in Cologne. I ask you to set out towards it from now with responsible and active enthusiasm. The Virgin of Nazareth, the compassionate and patient Mother, will mould within you a contemplative heart, and teach you to fix your gaze on Jesus so that, in this world that passes away, you shall be prophets of a world that does not die.

With affection I impart a special blessing upon you that will accompany you on your way.