

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO FRANCE ON THE OCCASION OF THE 150th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE APPARITIONS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AT LOURDES
(SEPTEMBER 12 - 15, 2008)

PRAYER VIGIL WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Esplanade in front of Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris
Friday, 12 September 2008*

Dear Young Friends,

After our prayerful [celebration of Vespers in Notre-Dame](#), your enthusiastic greeting gives a warm and festive tone to our meeting this evening. It reminds me of that unforgettable gathering at [World Youth Day in Sydney this past July](#) – at which some of you were present. This evening I would like to talk to you about two very closely related matters; they represent a real treasure to be stored up in your hearts (cf. *Mt 6:21*).

The first has to do with the theme which was chosen for Sydney. It is also the theme of the prayer vigil which is about to begin. I am referring to a passage taken from the Acts of the Apostles, a book which has most appropriately been called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you will be my witnesses” (*Acts 1:8*). The Lord now says the same thing to you! In [Sydney](#), many young people rediscovered the importance of the Holy Spirit for the life of every Christian. The Spirit gives us a deep relationship with God, who is the source of all authentic human good. All of you desire to love and to be loved! It is to God that you must turn, if you want to learn how to love, and to find the strength to love. The Spirit, who is Love, can open your hearts to accept the gift of genuine love. All of you are seeking the truth; and all of you want to live in truth! This truth is Christ. He is the only Way, the one Truth and the true Life. To follow Christ means truly to “put out to sea”, as is said several times in the Psalms. The way of Truth is simultaneously one and manifold according to the variety of charisms, just as Truth is one while at the same time possessing an inexhaustible richness. Surrender yourselves to the Holy Spirit in order to find Christ. The Spirit is our indispensable guide in prayer, he animates our hope and he is the source of true joy.

To understand more deeply these truths of faith, I would encourage you to meditate on the importance of the sacrament of Confirmation which you have received and which leads you into a mature faith life. It is vital for you to understand this sacrament more and more in order to evaluate the quality and depth of your faith and to reinforce it. The Holy Spirit enables you to approach the Mystery of God; he makes you understand who God is. He invites you to see in your neighbours the brothers and sisters whom God has given you, in order to live with them in human and spiritual fellowship – in other words, to live

within the Church. By revealing who the crucified and risen Lord is for us, he impels you to bear witness to Christ. You are at an age marked by great generosity. You need to speak about Christ to all around you, to your families and friends, wherever you study, work and relax. Do not be afraid! Have “the courage to live the Gospel and the boldness to proclaim it” ([Message to the Young People of the World](#), 20 July 2007). So I encourage you to find ways of proclaiming God to all around you, basing your testimony on the power of the Spirit, whom we ask for in prayer. Bring the Good News to the young people of your age, and to others as well. They know what it means to experience difficulty in relationships, worry and uncertainty in the face of work and study. They have experienced suffering, but they have also known unique moments of joy. Be witnesses of God, for, as young people, you are fully a part of the Catholic community through your Baptism and our common profession of faith (cf. *Eph 4:5*). The Church has confidence in you, and I want to tell you so!

In this year dedicated to Saint Paul, I would like to entrust you with a second treasure, which was at the centre of the life of this fascinating Apostle: I mean the mystery of the Cross. On Sunday, in Lourdes, I will celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross together with countless other pilgrims. Many of you wear a cross on a chain around your neck. I too wear one, as every Bishop does. It is not a mere decoration or a piece of jewelry. It is the precious symbol of our faith, the visible and material sign that we belong to Christ. Saint Paul explains the meaning of the Cross at the beginning of his First Letter to the Corinthians. The Christian community in Corinth was going through a turbulent period, exposed to the corrupting influences of the surrounding culture. Those dangers are similar to the ones we encounter today. I will mention only the following examples: quarrels and conflicts within the community of believers, the seductiveness of ersatz religious and philosophical doctrines, a superficial faith and a dissolute morality. Saint Paul begins his Letter by writing: “The word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (*1 Cor 1:18*). Then, the Apostle shows the clear contrast between wisdom and folly, in God’s way of thinking and in our own. He speaks of this contrast in the context of the founding of the Church in Corinth and in connection with his own preaching. He ends by stressing the beauty of God’s wisdom, which Christ and, in his footsteps, the Apostles, have come to impart to the world and to Christians. This wisdom, mysterious and hidden (cf. *1 Cor 2:7*), has been revealed by the Spirit, because “those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are folly to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (*1 Cor 2:14*).

The Spirit opens to human intelligence new horizons which transcend it and enable to perceive that the only true wisdom is found in the grandeur of Christ. For Christians, the Cross signifies God’s wisdom and his infinite love revealed in the saving gift of Christ, crucified and risen for the life of the world, and in particular for the life of each and every one of you. May this discovery of a God who became man out of love – this amazing discovery lead you to respect and venerate the Cross! It is not only the symbol of your life in God and your salvation, but also – as you will understand – the silent witness of human suffering and the unique and priceless expression of all our hopes. Dear young people, I know that venerating the Cross can sometimes bring mockery and even

persecution. The Cross in some way seems to threaten our human security, yet above all else, it also proclaims God's grace and confirms our salvation. This evening, I entrust you with the Cross of Christ. The Holy Spirit will enable you to understand its mysteries of love. Then you will exclaim with Saint Paul: "May I never boast of anything, except the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (*Gal* 6:14). Paul had understood the seemingly paradoxical words of Jesus, who taught that it is only by giving ("losing") one's life that one finds it (cf. *Mk* 8:35; *Jn* 12:24), and Paul concluded from this that the Cross expresses the fundamental law of love, the perfect formula for real life. May a growing understanding of the mystery of the Cross lead some of you discover the call to serve Christ unreservedly in the priesthood and the religious life!

We are about to begin the prayer vigil, for which you have gathered here this evening. Remember the two treasures which the Pope has presented to you this evening: the Holy Spirit and the Cross! As I conclude, I would like to tell you once more that I have confidence in you, dear young people, and I want you to experience, today and in the future, the esteem and affection of the whole Church! Now, we see the living Church here... May God be at your side each day. May he bless you, your families and your friends. I gladly grant my Apostolic Blessing to you, and to all the young people of France!

Thank you for your faith, and a good vigil to all!

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