



JOHN PAUL II

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

Address Of John Paul II To The Youth Of England And Wales, Ninian Park, Wednesday, 2 June 1982

Dear young people, dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

1. As my visit to Britain draws to an end, I am happy that this last meeting is with you – the youth of England and Wales, you who are the hope of tomorrow.

I have come to this land as a pilgrim pastor, a servant of Jesus Christ. I have come to proclaim Christ's Gospel of peace and reconciliation; I have come to celebrate his saving action in the sacraments of the Church. I have come to call you to Christ.

Before I go away, there is something really important that I wish to emphasize. There is something very closely linked to the sacraments that I have celebrated, something that is essential to your Christian lives. It is prayer. Prayer is so important that Jesus himself tells us: "Pray constantly" (Luc. 21, 36). He wants us to pray for light and strength. He wants us to pray to his Father, as he himself did. The Gospel tells us that Jesus prayed all night before choosing his Apostles (Cfr. *ibid.* 6, 12). And later on, in his Passion, at the height of his suffering, Christ "prayed more earnestly" (*Ibid.* 22, 44).

2. Jesus not only gave us the example of prayer, he actually taught us how to pray. One of the most beautiful scenes of the Gospel shows Jesus gathered with his disciples, teaching them to pray: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus was showing his disciples the value of praising God: the importance of God's name, his Kingdom and his holy will. At the same time Jesus was telling them to ask for bread, for pardon and for help in trials. "Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Cfr. Matth. 6, 9-13; Luc. 11, 2-4).

3. My dear young people, it is through prayer that Jesus leads us to his Father. It is in prayer that the Holy Spirit transforms our lives. It is in prayer that we come to know God: to detect his presence in our souls, to hear his voice speaking through our consciences, and to treasure his gift to us of personal responsibility for our lives and for our world.

It is through prayer that we can clearly focus our attention on the person of Jesus Christ and see the total relevance of his teaching for our lives. Jesus becomes the model for our actions, for our lives. We begin to see things his way.

4. Prayer transforms our individual lives and the life of the world. Young men and women, when you meet Christ in prayer, when you get to know his Gospel and reflect on it in relation to your hopes and your plans for the future, then everything is new. Everything is different when you begin to examine in prayer the circumstances of every day, according to the set of values that Jesus taught. These values are so clearly stated in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matth. 5, 7-9).

In prayer, united with Jesus – your brother, your friend, your Saviour, your God – you begin to breathe a new atmosphere. You form new goals and new ideals. Yes, in Christ you begin to understand yourselves more fully. This is what the Second Vatican Council wanted to emphasize when it stated: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). In other words, Christ not only reveals God to man, but he reveals man to himself. In Christ we grasp the secret of our own humanity.

5. But there is more. Through prayer you come to experience the truth that Jesus taught: “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Io. 6, 63). In Jesus, whom you get to know in prayer, your dreams for justice and your dreams for peace become more definite and look for practical applications.

When you are in contact with the Prince of Peace, you understand how totally opposed to his message are violence and terrorism, hatred and war. In him you experience the full meaning of an interpersonal relationship that is based on generous love. Christ offers you a friendship that does not disappoint, a fidelity beyond compare.

6. Through contact with Jesus in prayer, you gain a sense of mission that nothing can dull. Your Christian identity is reaffirmed, and the meaning of your lives is for ever linked to Christ’s saving mission. Through prayer, the commitments of your Baptism and Confirmation take on an urgency for you. You realize that you are called to spread Christ’s message of salvation (Cfr. Apostolicam Actuositatem, 3).

In union with Jesus, in prayer, you will discover more fully the needs of your brothers and sisters. You will appreciate more keenly the pain and suffering that burden the hearts of countless people. Through prayer, especially to Jesus at Communion, you will understand so many things about the world and its relationship to him, and you will be in a position to read accurately what are referred to as the “signs of the times.” Above all you will have something to offer those who come to you in need. Through prayer you will possess Christ and be able to communicate him to others. And this is the greatest contribution you can make in your lives: to communicate Christ to the world.

7. Through prayer you will receive the strength to resist the spirit of the world. You will receive the power to show compassion to every human being – just as Jesus did. Through prayer you will have a part in salvation history as it unfolds in your generation. In prayer you will be able to enter into the heart of Jesus and understand his feelings towards his Church. By using the Psalms, the prayerbook that Jesus used, you will be able to repeat, under the action of the Holy Spirit, the praise and thanksgiving that have been offered to God for centuries by his people. In all the circumstances of your lives, you

will find that Jesus is with you – he is close to you in prayer. It is prayer that will bring joy into your lives and help you to overcome the obstacles to Christian living. Remember the words of Saint James: “Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray” (Iac. 5, 13).

8. My dear young people, it is easy to see why Christ told us to pray all the time, and why Saint Paul insisted on this so much (Cfr. Luc. 21, 36; Rom. 12, 12; 1 Thess. 5, 7). It is in prayer that God finally brings us into union with himself, through our Lord Jesus Christ, his Son, who lives and reigns with him and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.

When you go to Jesus in prayer – and through him to the Father – you will always find inspiration in Mary his Mother. With every generation of disciples you will learn to pray with her, and with her to await the action of the Holy Spirit in your lives (Cfr. Act. 1, 14).

9. It is my hope today, as I return to Rome, that you will remember why I came among you. And as long as the memory of this visit lasts, may it be recorded that I, John Paul II, came to Britain to call you to Christ, to invite you to pray!

Dear young people, this explains why, in the Church of today, you are the hope of tomorrow. And so I urge you, in the words of Saint Paul: “Pray at all times in the Spirit . . . and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel . . . that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak . . . Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with unflinching love” (Eph. 6, 18–20. 24). Amen.

© Copyright 1982 – Libreria Editrice Vaticana