

Pope in Lebanon: Address to Young People



Benedict XVI is known to have a special place in his heart for young people. Following his meeting with government officials, he delivered an address to young people gathered on the square in front of the Maronite Patriarchate at Bkerke. Published below is a copy of his official text.

Your Beatitude,

Brother Bishops, Dear Friends,

“May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord” (2 Pet 1:2). The words from the Second Letter of Saint Peter that we have just heard express a desire which I have long felt. Thank you for your warm welcome! I thank you most kindly for your presence in such great numbers this evening! I am grateful to His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Boutros Raï for his words of welcome, to Archbishop Georges Bou-Jaoudé of Tripoli, the President of the Council for the Lay Apostolate in Lebanon, to Archbishop Elie Haddad of Saïd of the Greek Melkites, Vice President of the same Council, and to the two young people who greeted me in the name of all present. “My peace I give to you!” (Jn 14:27), Christ Jesus says to us.

Dear friends, you are living today in this part of the world which witnessed the birth of Jesus and the growth of Christianity. It is a great honour! It is also a summons to fidelity, to love of this region and, above all, to your calling to be witnesses and messengers of the joy of Christ. The faith handed down from the Apostles leads to complete freedom and joy, as the many Saints and Blesseds of this country have shown. Their message lights up the universal Church. It can light up your lives as well. Many of the Apostles and saints lived in troubled times and their faith was the source of their courage and their witness. Find in their example and intercession the inspiration and support that you need!

I am aware of the difficulties which you face daily on account of instability and lack of security, your difficulties in finding employment and your sense of being alone and on the margins. In a constantly

changing world you are faced with many serious challenges. But not even unemployment and uncertainty should lead you to taste the bitter sweetness of emigration, which involves an uprooting and a separation for the sake of an uncertain future. You are meant to be protagonists of your country's future and to take your place in society and in the Church.

You have a special place in my heart and in the whole Church, because the Church is always young! The Church trusts you. She counts on you! Be young in the Church! Be young with the Church! The Church needs your enthusiasm and your creativity! Youth is the time when we aspire to great ideals, when we study and train for our future work. All this is important and it takes time. Seek beauty and strive for goodness! Bear witness to the grandeur and the dignity of your body which "is for the Lord" (1 Cor 6:13b). Be thoughtful, upright and pure of heart! In the words of Blessed John Paul II, I say to you: "Do not be afraid! Open the doors of your minds and hearts to Christ!" An encounter with Jesus "gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (Deus Caritas Est, 1). In Christ you will find the strength and courage to advance along the paths of life, and to overcome difficulties and suffering. In him you will find the source of joy. Christ says to you: "My peace I give to you!" (Jn 14:27). This is the true revolution brought by Christ: that of love.

The frustrations of the present moment must not lead you to take refuge in parallel worlds like those, for example, of the various narcotics or the bleak world of pornography. As for social networks, they are interesting but they can quite easily lead to addiction and confusion between the real and the virtual. Look for relationships of genuine, uplifting friendship. Find ways to give meaning and depth to your lives; fight superficiality and mindless consumption! You face another temptation, too: that of money, the tyrannical idol which blinds to the point of stifling the person at the heart. The examples being held up all around you are not always the best. Many people have forgotten Christ's warning that one cannot serve both God and mammon (cf. Lk 16:13). Seek out good teachers, spiritual masters, who will be able to guide you along the path to maturity, leaving behind all that is illusory, garish and deceptive.

Bring the love of Christ to everyone! How? By turning unreservedly to God the Father, who is the measure of everything that is right, true and good. Meditate on God's word! Discover how relevant and real the Gospel can be. Pray! Prayer and the sacraments are the sure and effective means to be a Christian and to live "rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith" (Col 2:7). The Year of Faith, which is about to begin, will be a time to rediscover the treasure of the faith which you received at Baptism. You can grow in knowledge and understanding of this treasure by studying the Catechism, so that your faith can be both living and lived. You will then become witnesses to others of the love of Christ. In him, all men and women are our brothers and sisters. The universal brotherhood which he inaugurated on the cross lights up in a resplendent and challenging way the revolution of love. "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:35). This is the legacy of Jesus and the sign of the Christian. This is the true revolution of love!

Christ asks you, then, to do as he did: to be completely open to others, even if they belong to a different cultural, religious or national group. Making space for them, respecting them, being good to them, making them ever more rich in humanity and firm in the peace of the Lord. I know that many among you take part in various activities sponsored by parishes, schools, movements and associations. It is a fine thing to be engaged with and for others. Experiencing together moments of friendship and joy enables us to resist the onset of division, which must always be rejected! Brotherhood is a

foretaste of heaven! The vocation of Christ's disciples is to be "leaven" in the lump, as Saint Paul says: "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Gal 5:9). Be heralds of the Gospel of life and life's authentic values. Courageously resist everything opposed to life: abortion, violence, rejection of and contempt for others, injustice and war. In this way you will spread peace all around you. Are not "peacemakers" those whom in the end we admire the most? Is it not a world of peace that, deep down, we want for ourselves and for others? "My peace I give to you!" (Jn 14:27), Jesus says. He overcame evil not with more evil, but by taking evil upon himself and destroying it completely on the cross through a love lived to the very end. Truly discovering God's forgiveness and mercy always enables us to begin a new life. It is not easy to forgive. But God's forgiveness grants the power of conversion, and the joy of being able to forgive in turn. Forgiveness and reconciliation are the paths of peace; they open up a future.

Dear friends, a number of you are surely asking in a more or less conscious way: What is it that God expects of me? What is his plan for me? Wouldn't I like to proclaim to the world the grandeur of his love in the priesthood, in the consecrated life or in marriage? Might not Christ be calling me to follow him more closely? Think about these questions with confidence and trust. Take time to reflect on them and ask for enlightenment. Respond to his invitation by offering yourselves daily to the Lord, for he calls you to be his friends. Strive to follow Christ wholeheartedly and generously, for out of love he redeemed us and gave his life for each one of us. You will come to know inconceivable joy and fulfilment! To answer Christ's call to each of us: that is the secret of true peace.

Yesterday I signed the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*. This letter is also addressed to you, dear young people, as it is to the entire People of God. Read it carefully and meditate upon it so as to put it into practice. To help you, I remind you of the words of Saint Paul to the Corinthians: "You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written in your hearts, to be known and read by all men; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:2-3). Dear friends, you too can be a living letter of Christ. This letter will not be written with pen and paper, but with the witness of your lives and your faith. In this way, with courage and enthusiasm, you will enable those around you to understand that God wants the happiness of all without distinction and that Christians are his servants and his faithful witnesses.

Young people of Lebanon, you are the hope and the future of your country. You are Lebanon, a land of welcome, of openness, with a remarkable power of adaptation. At this moment, we cannot forget those millions of individuals who make up the Lebanese diaspora and maintain solid bonds with their land of origin. Young people of Lebanon, be welcoming and open, as Christ asks you and as your country teaches you.

I should like now to greet the young Muslims who are with us this evening. I thank you for your presence, which is so important. Together with the young Christians, you are the future of this fine country and of the Middle East in general. Seek to build it up together! And when you are older, continue to live in unity and harmony with Christians. For the beauty of Lebanon is found in this fine symbiosis. It is vital that the Middle East in general, looking at you, should understand that Muslims and Christians, Islam and Christianity, can live side by side without hatred, with respect for the beliefs of each person, so as to build together a free and humane society.

I understand, too, that present among us there are some young people from Syria. I want to say how much I admire your courage. Tell your families and friends back home that the Pope has not forgotten you. Tell those around you that the Pope is saddened by your sufferings and your griefs. He does not forget Syria in his prayers and concerns, he does not forget those in the Middle East who are suffering. It is time for Muslims and Christians to come together so as to put an end to violence and war.

In conclusion, let us turn to Mary, the Mother of the Lord, our Lady of Lebanon. From the heights of Mount Harissa she protects and accompanies you with a mother's love. She watches over all the Lebanese people and over the many pilgrims who come from all directions to entrust to her their joys and their sorrows! This evening, let us once more entrust to the Virgin Mary and to Blessed John Paul II, who came here before me, your own lives and the lives of all the young people of Lebanon and the countries of the region, particularly those suffering from violence or from loneliness, those in need of strength and consolation. May God bless you all! And now together, let us lift up our prayer to Mary:

Peace be upon you Mary ... (Hail Mary ...)

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