



The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS**

Manila

Wednesday, 18 February 1981

Mga giliw kong kabataan ng Maynila at ng buong Pilipinas: tanggapin ninyo ang aking taos pusong pagbati at pagmamahal! (Dear young people of Manila and of the Philippines: accept my heart felt greetings and affection!)

1. There is no hiding the joy I feel at this longed-for meeting with you, my dear friends. "Friendship" is a word that we all like. But the reality it points to is far more beautiful. *Friendship indicates sincere love*, a two-way love that wishes everything good for the other person—a love that brings about union and happiness. It is no secret that the Pope loves young people like you, and that he feels immensely happy in your company.

It is only right that it should be so. He is the Vicar of Christ and must therefore follow *Christ's example*. The Gospel records the intensity with which Jesus offered his friendship to each one of his disciples^[1]. It also notes the special affection that he had for the young^[2].

It was on the basis of this friendship that Jesus set before his young friends the mission that was assigned to them. Like Jesus I would like to speak to you of *your own special vocation*. The Second Vatican Council pointed out that Catholic universities should prepare their students to be "truly outstanding in learning, ready to undertake responsible duties in society, and witnesses in the world to their faith"^[3]. I would add, for my part, that, if you are to be in a position tomorrow to fulfill your threefold mission as fully mature adults, servants of society and representatives of the

Gospel, you must today live to the full your vocation *as young people, as university students, and as real Catholics*.

2. First and foremost, be genuine young people. What is it to be young? To be young means possessing within oneself an incessant newness of spirit, nourishing a continual quest for good, and persevering in reaching a goal. Being genuinely young in this sense is the way to prepare for your future, which is to fulfill your vocation as fully mature adults. Never try to ignore then the irresistible force that is driving you toward the future.

The Church is not frightened at *the intensity of your feelings*. It is a sign of vitality. It indicates pent-up energy, which of itself is neither good nor bad, but can be used for good causes or for bad. It is like rain water that accumulates on the mountains after days and days of raining. When whatever holds it bursts, it unleashes forces capable of wiping whole towns off the map, overwhelming their inhabitants in a sea of tears and blood. But, if properly channelled, dry fields are irrigated, producing the necessary food and the needed energy.

In your case it is not only food or material things that are involved ; it is the destiny of your country, the future of your generation and the security of children yet unborn. It is without any doubt an exciting but crucial challenge for you, my dear young people. And I am positive that you can meet this challenge, that you are willing to assume this responsibility. Above all that you are ready to prepare yourselves now, today.

You will agree with me that it is worth your while to *accept self-discipline*, which not only indicates strength of character on your part but also offers valuable service to others. The effort involved is one that fits in perfectly with your lives as young people in the field of sports. Even as far back as the time of Saint Paul, Christian mortification was spoken of in these terms. The young athlete who is prepared to undergo hard training in order to improve his sporting performance should be generous about the self-discipline required for his fully human training.

As young people, you look to the future. You are not stagnantly fixed in the present. You must therefore decide in what direction you want to go, and then keep an eye on the compass. Young people do not like mediocre ideals. They prefer to launch out into the deep. It is your right—or rather, it is your duty, to aim high. Your aspirations must be sublime; *your ideals must be high*. Dear young people, strive to build a character that is strong, rich and consistent, one that is free and responsible, sensitive to genuine values, a character that accepts the superiority of "being" over "having", one that perseveres in challenges and shuns escapism, facile compromise and heartless self-centered calculation.

In going forward along the path of truth, sincerity and authenticity, you have an ideal model. *The model for you is Christ. Christ in his humanity, Christ the man*. Notice that he is not only your goal: he is also the way that leads you where you are going. And on the way he acts as a shepherd ; he

even goes so far to give himself as food for your journey.

If you agree to model your youth on Christ, you will find the whole process summed up in a single word in Luke's Gospel. The word is that Jesus "grew". " Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man"[4]. This is not just a statement of what happened in history. This is also an invitation to you. Christ's word "follow me"[5] should also strike a special chord in your hearts. *Accepting Christ's call is a sure way of responding to your vocation* to be a fully mature adult, and this is the fundamental aspiration of every worthy young person.

"The direction that society will take tomorrow depends mainly on the minds and hearts of today's *university students*"[6]. This wise observation by Pope Pius XII is an invitation to you to be aware of the privilege and the *responsibility* that so many of you here today have as young people in an institute of higher learning.

The university offers you a whole array of excellent means for completing your formation. *You must not however think of yourselves alone*. You are called to help build up human society. As university students you have at your disposal abundant means that you must learn to know and appreciate fully.

The structure of a university is very much a community structure. The word "university" itself originally meant a society of professors and students. The university rests on the columns of society. It offers its members intense community experience. It strives to be a training ground for future experts who will take up key positions in the human family. The Second Vatican Council was well aware that young people in a university "are conscious of their importance in the life of society and are anxious to play their part in it all the sooner"[7].

Your desire is laudable; your youthful impatience very understandable. *But you must prepare yourselves carefully* now for your noble service in the future ; because the effectiveness of your service will be in direct proportion to the resources of truth that are yours.

A university student must therefore have a permanent program for capturing truth. It is no easy task. It demands study and perseverance ; it calls for generosity and self-sacrifice. The assimilation of truth is conditioned by the surrounding culture. First you must personally make a critical examination and try to form *an organic synthesis*. Only in this way will a university student be in a position to contribute the expert, committed and creative service that society expects of him or her.

Needless to say, the conquest of truth must be carried out with complete respect for different viewpoints and in open dialogue with others : a dialogue that in every field reaches particular intensity in a university.

Finding myself here in this illustrious University of Santo Tomas, which has given us such cordial and generous hospitality, I must make at least a brief reference to a particular aspect of the dialogue between the Church and the world : I mean the fact that it enables us "to see more clearly how faith and reason converge on the one truth, following in the footsteps of the doctors of the Church, especially Saint Thomas Aquinas"[8].

4. Thirdly, I would have you note that the *Catholic faith* that you profess fits in perfectly with your two other characteristics of being young and of being university students.

The catholicity of the Church has within it—for her divine Founder willed it so—an *intrinsic dynamism* that is in perfect accord with the enthusiasm of youth. The very words "catholicity" and "university" sound almost synonymous. Neither the Church nor the university admit boundaries. In the vertical dimension there is a difference, in that the Church is not content with a merely hypothetical openness to transcendence : she professes that such openness is a fact.

For a young university student, being a Catholic is not just something extra. It involves values that are original and specific ; it gives an incomparable power for building a better world and for proclaiming the Kingdom of God. As young Catholic university students, you are called to work in harmony with students of different religions and ideologies, in a common effort to advance truth, to serve man and to honor God. You are called to sincere ecumenical collaboration with all those who are your brothers and sisters in Christ. But at the same time you are called to make a specifically Catholic contribution at the university level to the evangelization of culture. As Catholics you must confess Christ openly and without embarrassment in the university environment that is yours.

In this way you are also contributing to maintaining the Catholic character of your University in its institutional commitment to the Gospel of Christ as proclaimed by the Catholic Church. Being dedicated to the further evangelization of your culture in depth, you are able, as Catholics, to bring new elements for an open and enriching dialogue. Hence as young Catholic university students you have a special testimony to give. Not to give it would be to deprive humanity of an expert and necessary contribution—one that can be made only by someone who is proud to be in the ranks of Christ's followers.

Dear young people, the mission that Christ gives you is a universal one, but at the same time it is to be realized in a unique way by each one of you. The particular way the mission is carried out depends on the missionaries, on you ! It is up to you to discover all the right ways to fulfill the Lord's mission in your world of young university students.

Christ counts on your support. He needs you to spread the Good News of his love and the Gospel of eternal salvation. How providential it is that our meeting of friendship should conclude on the theme of evangelization in a country with a great mission for Christ ! This is a challenge for

everyone. Each of you is called to take up the torch and proclaim the truth of Christ. You can do it ! You can do it with your youthful enthusiasm and with the confidence—the assurance—displayed by the first Apostles when the Church was young. You can do it, provided you do it together, and provided you do it with Christ and his Church !

5. I conclude with a loving and grateful remembrance of the Virgin Mary.

She is our Mother, an intimate, discreet and loving Mother. Although her affection is for all, it is a fact that the young have special need of her care, particularly today.

She is our Teacher, because she is our Mother. Students have a wonderful lesson to learn from her attitude of profound reverence before the unfathomable mystery of God, and from her search for truth through contemplation and prayer.

She is Queen of the Apostles : of all the apostles, both those of the Church's beginning and those in present-day history. Her presence is as discreet and effective today as it was at Cana of Galilee. May she be with you always. May she intercede for you with her divine Son, as she did then in order to prevent a shadow falling on the happiness of the bride and groom, who were young people just like your-selves—children of hers just like you, each and every one of you.

And in the name of her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is forever the friend of the youth of the world, I leave you with this heritage of yours, which is faith, hope and love.

[1] Cf. *Jn* 15: 15.

[2] Cf. *Mk* 10: 21.

[3] *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10.

[4] *Lk* 2:52.

[5] *Mt* 4:19.

[6] *Gravissimum Educationis*, note 33.

[7] *Gaudium et Spes*, 7.

[8] *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10.

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