



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN THE FIJI ISLANDS

FAREWELL CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Nadi (Fiji), 22 November 1986

Dear young Friends,

1. I am very pleased that, before leaving your beloved country, I have this opportunity of meeting the youth of Fiji. It is a great pleasure to be with you. I greet you all in the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

People sometimes ask me: "What do you enjoy most about young people? Why do you so often meet them? Why did you write an Apostolic Letter to Youth, and why did you establish the World Youth Day to be celebrated on Passion Sunday each year?". My answer is very simple: I have confidence in young people. I see in them the future of the world, the future of the Church. I believe that the youth of today want to build a world of justice, truth and love; and with God's help they can do so. Yes, I believe in you the young people of Fiji.

2. Jesus Christ has a special love for young people. We can see this when we read the Gospel. For example, remember when Jesus rebuked his disciples for not letting children come to him saying: "it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs". And even more revealing is the example of his love for the rich young man. It is obvious that this young man was drawn to Jesus and felt at ease with him. He trusted Jesus enough to ask him a fundamental question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?". Jesus took the question seriously and answered it just as seriously. Even more importantly, "Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him".

We know from the rest of the Gospel that Jesus does not reserve his love for young people alone. His loving gaze embraces everyone, the old as well as the young, the healthy as well as the sick. Jesus looks steadily at every one of us and loves us. This love of Jesus, in fact, is the heart of the

Gospel. For his words and deeds, particularly his death on the Cross, can only be explained by love.

Saint John put it this way: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life". This is the message of salvation which the Church proclaims to the world. This is the message which I repeat to you today: "God loves you so much that he gave his only Son, and if you believe in his Son you will have eternal life".

3. To believe in Jesus is more than a matter of words. It is more than being attracted to Christ, as the rich young man was. Faith demands a generous response. It demands the commitment of your whole life to the person and message of Christ. But this must be done freely and deliberately, for you are able to accept or reject the gift Christ offers.

As for the rich young man, unfortunately he was not ready to make the sacrifice that faith demands. "Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, 'There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me'. But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth".

The young man went away sad, but his sadness need not be the last word. In fact, the keynote of the Gospel message is joy. Joy is the hallmark of the saints. Joy is the result of faith and sacrifice. We see this in the message of the angel who, at the birth of Jesus, said to the shepherds: "Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people". This same joy floods every heart that lives in faithful union with Jesus.

But remember this: love also demands sacrifice. Do not underestimate the cost of remaining faithful to Christ. Too easily today love is misunderstood. It is reduced to mere sentimental feelings, or identified with selfish desires. But real love is always linked with the truth, and is expressed in generous service to others. Real love makes demands upon us and requires us to keep the Commandments. Thus it is that Jesus said: "If you love me you will keep my commandments".

Three times Jesus asked Peter: "Do you love me?". And each time Peter answered: "Yes, Lord, you know I love you". Peter was quick to affirm his love for Christ, and each time he was reminded how to put that love into practice. Jesus told him: "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep".

Peter never forgot that conversation, and the Successor of Peter cannot forget it either. Jesus' words are meant in a particular way for me, but they also apply to you. Peter was asked to show his love for the Lord by serving the needs of his brothers and sisters, by exercising his ministry in the Church. The same Lord who spoke to Peter is speaking to you today. He is asking for your

love.

I hope and pray, dear young people of Fiji, that you will never turn away from Christ like the rich young man, that you will never go away sad. If you believe in Christ, if you accept his words and also accept the sacrifices that he asks, you will be filled with joy, a joy that the world cannot give.

4. And now the time has come for me to say good-bye. My visit to this country has flown by all too quickly, and I must continue my pastoral journey to other people and other lands. But before I leave I want to express a word of admiration and also a word of gratitude.

The admiration which I feel for the people of Fiji existed before I come to your country. I admire the many values and special qualities which you have fostered and cherished over the years. Above all. I admire the way people of such diverse cultures and backgrounds live together here in harmony and peace. You differ widely among yourselves, yet you are one united nation. Through a common will and mutual effort, you have learned how to support one another in your diversity, to respect one another's customs and to emphasize what you hold in common. In a very visible way, you are a symbol of hope in the world. You have something to teach the world about solidarity and loving respect for every person.

I am deeply grateful for the hospitality offered to me here in your country. You have received me as a brother and friend. You have made me feel at home. I shall not forget your goodness and kindness, and I promise to remember you in my prayers.

I wish to tell you also how much I share the sorrow of Fiji at the death of three soldiers who were killed in Lebanon during their peace mission. In their effort to serve the cause of peace they were called upon to give up their lives, and now you, dear young people, are called to live and work ever more so that peace may triumph on this earth. I wish to offer my sympathy to the families of the victims and pray that the Lord will give them strength.

And now I wish to entrust you to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and Mother of his Church. I entrust to Mary the future of this nation and the destiny of all its people. I pray that she will assist the young to remain steadfast in faith and to fulfil their mission of service to the world. I pray that she will comfort the suffering and obtain for the whole Church in Fiji the grace to be faithful to Jesus Christ and his saving and uplifting Gospel of love. And upon all the inhabitants of these islands I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord.

