

PREPARED, UNDELIVERED MESSAGE DURING THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE YOUTH

Dear young friends,

It is a joy for me to be with you this morning. I greet each of you from the heart, and I thank all those who made this meeting possible. During my visit to the Philippines, I wanted in a particular way to meet with young people, to listen to you and to talk with you. I want to express the love and the hopes of the Church for you. And I want to encourage you, as Christian citizens of this country, to offer yourselves passionately and honestly to the great work of renewing your society and helping to build a better world.

In a special way, I thank the young people who have offered words of welcome to me. They have expressed eloquently, in your name, your concerns and worries, your faith and your hopes. They have spoken of the difficulties and the expectations of the young. Although I cannot respond to each of these issues at length, I know that, together with your pastors and among yourselves, you will prayerfully consider them and make concrete proposals for action in your lives.

Today I would like to suggest three key areas where you have a significant contribution to make to the life of your country. The first of these is the *challenge of integrity*. The word "challenge" can be understood in two ways. First, it can be understood negatively, as a temptation to act against your moral convictions, what you know to be true, good and right. Our integrity can be challenged by selfish interest, greed, dishonesty, or the willingness to use other people.

But the word "challenge" can be also understood positively. It can be seen as invitation to courage, a summons to bear prophetic witness to what you believe and hold sacred. In this sense, the challenge of integrity is something which you have to face now, at this time in your lives. It is not something you can put off until you are older or have greater responsibilities. Even now you are challenged to act with honesty and fairness in your dealings with others, young and old alike. Do not avoid the challenge! One of the greatest challenges young people face is learning to love. To love means to take a risk: the risk of rejection, the risk of being taken advantage of, or worse, of taking advantage of another. Do not be afraid to love! But in love, too, maintain your integrity! Here too, be honest and fair!

In the reading we have just heard, Paul tells Timothy: "Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity" (*1 Tim 4:12*).

You are called, then, to set a good example of integrity. Naturally, in doing this, you will encounter opposition, negativity, discouragement, and even ridicule. But you have received a gift which enables you to rise above those difficulties. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you nurture this gift by daily prayer and draw strength from sharing in the Eucharist, you will be able to achieve that moral greatness to which Jesus calls you. You will also be a compass to those of your friends who are struggling. I think especially of these young people who are tempted to lose hope, to abandon their high ideals, to drop out of school, or to live from day to day on the streets.

So it is essential not to lose your integrity! Not to compromise your ideals! Not to give in to temptation against goodness, holiness, courage and purity! Rise to the challenge! With Christ, you will be – indeed you already are! – the architects of a renewed and more just Filipino culture.

A second key area where you are called to make a contribution is in showing *concern for the environment*. This is not only because this country, more than many others, is likely to be seriously affected by climate change. You are called to care for creation not only as responsible citizens, but also as followers of Christ! Respect for the environment means more than simply using cleaner products or recycling what we use. These are important aspects, but not enough. We need to see, with the eyes of faith, the beauty of God's saving plan, the link between the natural environment and the dignity of the human person. Men and women are made in the image and likeness of God,

and given dominion over creation (cf. *Gen 1:26-28*). As stewards of God's creation, we are called to make the earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil and pollute our seas, we betray that noble calling.

Three months ago, your Bishops addressed these issues in a prophetic Pastoral Letter. They asked everyone to think about the moral dimension of our activities and lifestyles, our consumption and our use of the earth's resources. Today I ask you to do this in the context of your own lives and your commitment to the building up of Christ's kingdom. Dear young people, the just use and stewardship of the earth's resources is an urgent task, and you have an important contribution to make. You are the future of the Philippines. Be concerned about what is happening to your beautiful land!

A final area in which you can make a contribution is one dear to all of us. It is *care for the poor*. We are Christians. We are members of God's family. No matter how much or how little we have individually, each one of us is called to personally reach out and serve our brothers and sisters in need. There is always someone near us in need, materially, emotionally, spiritually. The greatest gift we can give to them is our friendship, our concern, our tenderness, our love for Jesus. To receive Jesus is to have everything; to give him is to give the greatest gift of all.

Many of you know what it is to be poor. But many of you have also experienced something of the blessedness that Jesus promised to "the poor in spirit" (cf *Mt5:3*). Here I would say a word of encouragement and gratitude to those of you who choose to follow our Lord in his poverty through a vocation to the priesthood and the religious life; by drawing on that poverty you will enrich many. But to all of you, especially those who can do more and give more, I ask: Please, do more! Please, give more! When you give of your time, your talents and your resources to the many people who struggle and who live on the margins, you make a difference. It is a difference that is so desperately needed, and one for which you will be richly rewarded by the Lord. For, as he has said: "you will have treasure in heaven" (*Mk 10:21*).

Twenty years ago, in this very place, Saint John Paul II said that the world needs "a new kind of young person" – one committed to the highest ideals and eager to build the civilization of love. Be those young persons! Never lose your idealism! Be joyful witnesses to God's love and the beautiful plan he has for us, for this country and for the world in which we live. Please pray for me. God bless you all! (source: **Rappler.com**)