



But who do you say that I am?"

JOHN PAUL II at WYD 2000 in ROMA

Dear young people, it is with great joy that I meet you again at this Prayer Vigil, during which we wish to listen together to Christ whom we feel present among us. It is he who is speaking to us.

“Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asks his disciples this question near Caesarea Philippi.

Simon Peter answers: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (*Mt 16:16*). The Master then turns to him with the surprising words: “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (*Mt 16:17*).

What is the meaning of this dialogue? Why does Jesus want to know what people think about him? Why does he want to know what his disciples think about him? (.....)

2The conversation near Caesarea Philippi took place during the time leading up to the Passover, that is before Christ’s passion and resurrection. We should also recall another event, when the Risen Christ checked the maturity of faith of his Apostles. This is the meeting with the Apostle Thomas. He was the only one not there when, after the resurrection, Christ came for the first time into the Upper Room. When the other disciples told him that they had seen the Lord, he would not believe it. He said: “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe” (*Jn 20:25*). A week later, the disciples were gathered together again and Thomas was with them. Jesus came through the closed door, and greeted the Apostles with the words: “Peace be with you” (*Jn 20:26*), and immediately he turned to Thomas: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing” (*Jn 20:27*). Thomas then answered: “My Lord and

my God!” (*Jn 20:28*). (.....)

4. Dear friends, to believe in Jesus today, to follow Jesus as Peter, Thomas, and the first Apostles and witnesses did, demands of us, just as it did in the past, that we take a stand for him, almost to the point at times of a new martyrdom: the martyrdom of those who, today as yesterday, are called to go against the tide in order to follow the divine Master, to follow “the Lamb wherever he goes” (*Rev 14:4*). It is not by chance, dear young people, that I wanted the witnesses to the faith in the twentieth century to be remembered at the Colosseum during this Holy Year.

Perhaps you will not have to shed your blood, but you will certainly be asked to be faithful to Christ! A faithfulness to be lived in the circumstances of everyday life: I am thinking of how difficult it is in today’s world for engaged couples to be faithful to purity before marriage. I think of how the mutual fidelity of young married couples is put to the test. I think of friendships and how easily the temptation to be disloyal creeps in.

I think also of how those who have chosen the path of special consecration have to struggle to persevere in their dedication to God and to their brothers and sisters. **I think of those who want to live a life of solidarity and love in a world where the only things that seem to matter are the logic of profit and one’s personal or group interest.**

I think too of those who work for peace and who see new outbreaks of war erupt and grow worse in different parts of the world; I think of those who work for human freedom and see people still slaves of themselves and of one another. I think of those who work to ensure love and respect for human life and who see life so often attacked and the respect due to life so often flouted.

5. 5. Dear young people, in such a world is it hard to believe? Is it hard to believe in the Third Millennium? Yes! It is hard. There is no need to hide it. It is hard, but with the help of grace it can be done, as Jesus explained to Peter: “Neither flesh nor blood has revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (*Mt 16:17*).

This evening I will give you the Gospel. It is the Pope’s gift to you at this unforgettable vigil. The word which it contains is the word of Jesus. If you listen to it in silence, in prayer, seeking help in understanding what it means for your life from the wise counsel of your priests and teachers, then you will meet Christ and you will follow him, spending your lives day by day for him!

It is Jesus in fact that you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is he who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle.



It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.

Dear young people, in these noble undertakings you are not alone. With you there are your families, there are your communities, there are your priests and teachers, there are so many of you who in the depths of your hearts never weary of loving Christ and believing in him. In the struggle against sin you are not alone: so many like you are struggling and through the Lord's grace are winning!

6. Dear friends, at the dawn of the Third Millennium I see in you the "morning watchmen" (cf. *Is* 21:11-12). In the course of the century now past young people like you were summoned to huge gatherings to learn the ways of hatred; they were sent to fight against one another. The various godless messianic systems which tried to take the place of Christian hope have shown themselves to be truly horrendous. Today you have come together to declare that in the new **century you will not let yourselves be made into tools of violence and destruction; you will defend peace, paying the price in your person if need be. You will not resign yourselves to a world where other human beings die of hunger, remain illiterate and have no work. You will defend life at every moment of its development; you will strive with all your strength to make this earth ever more livable for all people..**

Joannes Paulus II



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