



Holy Mass for the Youth of Ireland Homily of Pope St John Paul II

Ballybrit, Galway
30 September 1979

A aos óg na hÉireann, go mbeannaí Dia dhaoibh!

Dear young people, brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, this is a very special occasion, a very important one. This morning, the Pope belongs to the youth of Ireland! I have looked forward to this moment; I have prayed that I may touch your hearts with the words of Jesus. Here I wish to recall what I said so often before as Archbishop of Cracow and what I have repeated as Successor of Saint Peter: I believe in youth. I believe in youth with all my heart and with all the strength of my conviction. And today I say: I believe in the youth of Ireland! I believe in you who stand here before me, in every one of you.

When I look at you, I see the Ireland of the future. Tomorrow, you will be the living force of your country; you will decide what Ireland will be. Tomorrow, as technicians or teachers, nurses or secretaries, farmers or tradesmen, doctors or engineers, priests or religious – tomorrow you will have the power to make dreams come true. Tomorrow, Ireland will depend on you.

When I look at you assembled around this altar and listen to your praying voices, your singing voices, I see the future of the Church. God has his plan for the Church in Ireland, but he needs you to carry it out. What the Church will be in the future depends on your free cooperation with God's grace.

When I look at the thousands of young people here before me, I also see the challenges that you face. You have come from the parishes of Ireland as the representatives of those that could not be here. You carry in your hearts the rich heritage that you have received from your parents, your teachers and your priests. You carry in your hearts the treasures which Irish history and culture have given you, but you also share in the problems that Ireland faces.

Today, for the first time since Saint Patrick preached the faith to the Irish, the Successor of Peter comes from Rome and sets foot on Irish soil. You rightly ask yourselves what message he brings and what words he will speak to Ireland's youth. My message can be none other than the message of Christ himself; my words can be none other than the word of God.

I did not come here to give you an answer to all your individual questions. You have your Bishops, who know your local circumstances and local problem; you have your priests, especially those who devote themselves to the demanding but rewarding pastoral care of youth. They know you personally and will help you to find the right answers. But I too feel that I know you, for I know and understand young people.

And I know that you, like other young people of your age in other countries, are affected by what is happening in society around you. Although you still live in an atmosphere where

true religious and moral principles are held in honour, you have to realize that your fidelity to these principles will be tested in many ways. The religious and moral traditions of Ireland, the very soul of Ireland, will be challenged by the temptations that spare no society in our age. Like so many other young people in various parts of the world, you will be told that changes must be made, that you must have more freedom, that you should be different from your parents, and that the decisions about your lives depend on you, and you alone.

The prospect of growing economic progress, and the chance of obtaining a greater share of the goods that modern society has to offer, will appear to you as an opportunity to achieve greater freedom. The more you possess – you may be tempted to think – the more you will feel liberated from every type of confinement. In order to make more money and to possess more, in order to eliminate effort and worry, you may be tempted to take moral shortcuts where honesty, truth and work are concerned. The progress of science and technology seems inevitable and you may be enticed to look towards the technological society for the answers to all your problems.

The lure of pleasure, to be had whenever and wherever it can be found, will be strong and it may be presented to you as part of progress towards greater autonomy and freedom from rules. The desire to be free from external restraints may manifest itself very strongly in the sexual domain, since this is an area that is so closely tied to a human personality. The moral standards that the Church and society have held up to you for so long a time, will be presented as obsolete and a hindrance to the full development of your own personality. Mass media, entertainment, and literature will present a model for living where all too often it is every man for himself, and where the unrestrained affirmation of self leaves no room for concern for others.

You will hear people tell you that your religious practices are hopelessly out of date, that they hamper your style and your future, that with everything that social and scientific progress has to offer, you will be able to organize your own lives, and that God has played out his role. Even many religious persons will adopt such attitudes, breathing them in from the surrounding atmosphere, without attending to the practical atheism that is at their origin.

A society that, in this way, has lost its higher religious and moral principles will become an easy prey for manipulation and for domination by the forces which, under the pretext of greater freedom, will enslave it ever more.

Yes, dear young people, do not close your eyes to the moral sickness that stalks your society today, and from which your youth alone will not protect you. How many young people have already warped their consciences and have substituted the true joy of life with drugs, sex, alcohol, vandalism and the empty pursuit of mere material possessions.

Something else is needed: something that you will find only in Christ, for he alone is the measure and the scale that you must use to evaluate your own life. In Christ you will discover the true greatness of your own humanity; he will make you understand your own dignity as human beings “created to the image and likeness of God” (Gen. 1:26). Christ has the answers to your questions and the key to history; he has the power to uplift hearts. He keeps calling you, he keeps inviting you, he who is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:16). Yes, Christ calls you, but he calls you in truth. His call is demanding, because he invites you to let yourselves be “captured” by him completely, so that your whole lives will

be seen in a different light. He is the Son of God, who reveals to you the loving face of the Father. He is the Teacher, the only one whose teaching does not pass away, the only one who teaches with authority. He is the friend who said to his disciples, "No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends" (Jn 15:15). And he proved his friendship by laying down his life for you.

His call is demanding, for he taught us what it means to be truly human. Without heeding the call of Jesus, it will not be possible to realize the fullness of your own humanity. You must build on the foundation which is Christ (*cf.* 1 Cor. 3:11); only with him your life will be meaningful and worthwhile.

You come from Catholic families; you go regularly and meet Christ in Holy Communion on Sundays or even during the week. Many of you pray with your families every day; and I hope you all will continue to do so throughout later life. And yet it can happen that you will be tempted to walk away from Christ. This can happen especially if you see the contradiction in the life of some of your fellowmen between the faith they profess and their way of living. But I wish to insist and to plead that you always heed the call of Christ, for he alone can teach you the true meaning of life and of all temporal realities.

Permit me, in this context, to recall still another phrase of the Gospel, a phrase that we must remember even when its consequences are particularly difficult for us to accept. It is the phrase that Christ pronounced in the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (Lk. 6:27). You have guessed already that, even by my reference to these words of the Saviour, I have before my mind the painful events that for over ten years have been taking place in Northern Ireland. I am sure that all young people are living these events very deeply and very painfully, for they are tracing deep furrows in your young hearts. These events, painful as they are, must also be an incitement to reflection. They demand that you form an interior judgment of conscience to determine where you, as young Catholics, stand on the matter.

You heard the words of Jesus: "Love your enemies". The command of Jesus does not mean that we are not bound by love for our native land; it does not mean that we can remain indifferent before injustice in its various temporal and historical aspects. These words of Jesus take away only hate. I beg you to reflect deeply: what would human life be if Jesus had never spoken such words? What would the world be if in our mutual relations we were to give primacy to hatred among people, between classes, between nations? What would the future of humanity be if we were to base on this hatred the future of individuals and of nations?

Sometimes, one could have the feeling that, before the experiences of history and before concrete situations, love has lost its power and that it is impossible to practise it. And yet, in the long run, love always brings victory, love is never defeated. And, I could add, the history of Ireland proves that, if it were not so, humanity would only be condemned to destruction.

Dear young friends, this is the message I entrust to you today, asking you to take it with you and share it with your family at home and with your friends in school and at work. On returning home, tell your parents, and everyone who wants to listen, that the Pope believes in you and that he counts on you. Say that the young are the strength of the Pope, who wishes to share with them his hope for the future and his encouragement.

I have given you the words of my heart. Now let me also ask you for something in return. You know that from Ireland I am going to the United Nations. The truth which I have proclaimed before you is the same that I shall present, in a different way, before that supreme forum of the nations. I hope that your prayers—the prayers of the youth of Ireland—will accompany me and support me in this important mission. I count on you, because the future of human life on this earth is at stake, in every country and in the whole world. The future of all peoples and nations, the future of humanity itself depends on this: whether the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, whether the message of the Gospel will be listened to once again.

May the Lord Jesus be always with you! With his truth that makes you free (*cf.* Jn 8:32); with his word that unlocks the mystery of man and reveals to man his own humanity; with his death and Resurrection that makes you new and strong.

Let us place this intention at the feet of Mary, Mother of God and Queen of Ireland, example of generous love and dedication to the service of others.

Young people of Ireland, I love you! Young people of Ireland, I bless you! I bless you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Críost liom, Críost romham, Críost i mo dhiaidh.

Young people of Ireland
I love you.
John Paul II