

On the closing of World Youth Day in 2002, Pope St. John Paul II had wonderful advice that we can share with our children today:

“Jesus offers one thing, and the "spirit of the world" offers another. In today's Reading from the Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul tells us that Jesus leads us from darkness into light (cf. Eph 5,8). [referring to Paul's transformation]...You too are called to be transformed. "Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Eph 5, 14), says Saint Paul.

The "spirit of the world" offers many false illusions and parodies of happiness. There is perhaps no darkness deeper than the darkness that enters young people's souls when false prophets extinguish in them the light of faith and hope and love. The greatest deception, and the deepest source of unhappiness, is the illusion of finding life by excluding God, of finding freedom by excluding moral truths and personal responsibility.

The Lord is calling you to choose between these two voices competing for your souls..."Lord, to whom shall we go?" Who has the words of eternal life? "You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6,68). Jesus - the intimate friend of every young person - has the words of life.

The world you are inheriting is a world which desperately needs a new sense of brotherhood and human solidarity. It is a world which needs to be touched and healed by the beauty and richness of God's love. It needs witnesses to that love. The world needs salt. It needs you - to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world...

Even a tiny flame lifts the heavy lid of night. How much more light will you make, all together, if you bond as one in the communion of the Church! If you love Jesus, love the Church! ... If, in the depths of your hearts, you feel the same call to the priesthood or consecrated life, do not be afraid to follow Christ on the royal road of the Cross! ...

You are young, and the Pope is old... Although I have lived through much darkness, under harsh totalitarian regimes, I have seen enough evidence to be unshakably convinced that no difficulty, no fear is so great that it can completely suffocate the hope that springs eternal in the hearts of the young. You are our hope, the young are our hope.

Do not let that hope die! Stake your lives on it! We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of his Son. I finish with a prayer.

*O Lord Jesus Christ, keep these young people in your love. Let them hear your voice and believe what you say, for you alone have the words of life.*

*Teach them how to profess their faith, bestow their love, and impart their hope to others.*

*Make them convincing witnesses to your Gospel in a world so much in need of your saving grace.*

*Make them the new people of the Beatitudes, that they may be the salt of the earth and the light of the world at the beginning of the Third Christian Millennium!*

*Mary, Mother of the Church, protect and guide these young men and women of the Twenty-first Century. Keep us all close to your maternal heart. Amen."*