



The Holy See

8th WORLD YOUTH DAY

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION
AT THE CHERRY CREEK STATE PARK OF DENVER

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Sunday, 15 August 1993

"God who is mighty has done, great things for me" (Luc 1,49).

Beloved Young People and Dear Friends in Christ,

1. Today the Church finds herself, with Mary, on the threshold of the house of Zechariah in Ain-Karim. With new life stirring within her, the Virgin of Nazareth hastened there, immediately after the *Fiat* of the Annunciation, to be of help to her cousin Elizabeth.

It was Elizabeth who first recognized the "great things" which God was doing in Mary. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth marvelled that the mother of her Lord should come to her (Cfr. *Luc 1,43*). With deep insight into the mystery, she declared: "Blest is she who believed that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled" (*Luc 1,45*). With her soul full of humble gratitude to God, Mary replied with a hymn of praise: "*God who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name*" (*Luc 1,49*).

On this Feast the Church celebrates the culmination of the "great things" which God has done in Mary: her glorious Assumption into Heaven. And throughout the Church the same hymn of thanksgiving, the "*Magnificat*", rings out as it did for the first time at Ain-Karim: *All generations call you blessed* (Cfr. *Luc 1,48*).

Gathered at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, which remind us that Jerusalem too was surrounded by hills (Cfr. *Ps 124,2*) and that Mary had gone up into those hills (Cfr. *Luc 1,39*), we are here to

celebrate Mary's "going up" to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the threshold of the eternal Temple of the Most Holy Trinity. Here in Denver, at the "World Youth Day", the Catholic sons and daughters of America, together with others "from every tribe and tongue, people and nation" (*Apoc* 5,9), join all the generations since who have cried out: *God has done great things for you, Mary – and for all of us, members of his pilgrim people!* (*Cfr. Luc* 1,49).

With my heart full of praise for the Queen of Heaven, the sign of hope and source of comfort on our pilgrimage of faith to "the heavenly Jerusalem" (*Hebr* 12,22), I greet all of you who are present at this Solemn Liturgy. It is a pleasure for me to see so many priests, Religious and lay faithful from Denver, from the State of Colorado, from all parts of the United States, and from so many countries of the world, who have joined the young people of the World Youth Day to honor *the definitive victory of grace in Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer*.

2. The Eighth "World Youth Day" is a *celebration of Life*. This gathering has been the occasion of a serious reflection on the words of Jesus Christ: "*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*" (*Io* 10,10). Young people from every corner of the world, *in ardent prayer* you have opened your hearts to the truth of Christ's promise of new Life. Through the Sacraments, especially Penance and the Eucharist, and by means of the unity and friendship created among so many, you have had *a real and transforming experience of the new Life which only Christ can give*. You, young pilgrims, have also shown that you understand that Christ's gift of Life is not for you alone. You have become more conscious of your vocation and mission in the Church and in the world. For me, our meeting has been a deep and moving experience of your faith in Christ, and I make my own the words of Saint Paul: "*I have great confidence in you, I have great pride in you; I am filled with encouragement, I am overflowing with joy*" (*2Cor* 7,4).

These are not words of empty praise. I am confident that you have grasped the scale of the challenge that lies before you, and that you will have the wisdom and courage to meet that challenge. *So much depends on you*.

3. This marvelous world – so loved by the Father that he sent his only Son for its salvation (*Cfr. Io* 3,17) – *is the theater of a never – ending battle being waged for our dignity and identity as free, spiritual beings*. This struggle parallels the apocalyptic combat described in the First Reading of this Mass. Death battles against Life: *a "culture of death" seeks to impose itself on our desire to live, and live to the full*. There are those who reject the light of life, preferring "the fruitless works of darkness" (*Eph* 5,11). Their harvest is injustice, discrimination, exploitation, deceit, violence. In every age, a measure of their apparent success is the *death of the Innocents*. In our own century, as at no other time in history, the "culture of death" has assumed a social and institutional form of legality to justify the most horrible crimes against humanity: genocide, "final solutions", "ethnic cleansings", and the massive "taking of lives of human beings even before they are born, or before they reach the natural point of death" (*Dominum et vivificantem*, 57).

Today's Reading from the Book of Revelation presents *the Woman* surrounded by hostile forces. The absolute nature of their attack is symbolized in the object of their evil intention: *the Child, the*

symbol of new life. The "dragon" (*Apoc 12,3*), the "ruler of this world" (*Io 12,31*) and the "father of lies" (*Io 8,44*), relentlessly tries *to eradicate from human hearts the sense of gratitude and respect for the original, extraordinary and fundamental gift of God: human life itself.* Today that struggle has become increasingly direct.

4. Dear Friends, this gathering in Denver on the theme of Life should lead us to a deeper awareness of *the internal contradiction present in a part of the culture of the modern "metropolis".*

When the Founding Fathers of this great nation enshrined certain inalienable rights in the Constitution – and something similar exists in many countries and in many International Declarations – they did so because they recognized the existence of a "law" – a series of rights and duties – engraved by the Creator on each person's heart and conscience.

In much of contemporary thinking, any reference to a "law" guaranteed by the Creator is absent. There remains only each individual's choice of this or that objective as convenient or useful in a given set of circumstances. No longer is anything considered *intrinsically* "good" and "universally binding". Rights are affirmed but, because they are without any reference to an objective truth, they are deprived of any solid basis. Vast sectors of society are confused about what is right and what is wrong, and are at the mercy of those with the power to "create" opinion and impose it on others.

The family especially is under attack. And the sacred character of human life denied. Naturally, the weakest members of society are the most at risk: *the unborn*, children, the sick, the handicapped, the old, the poor and unemployed, the immigrant and refugee, *the South of the world!*

5. Young pilgrims, Christ needs you to enlighten the world and *to show it the "path to life"* (*Ps 16,11*). The challenge is to *make the Church's "yes" to Life concrete and effective.* The struggle will be long, and it needs each one of you. Place your intelligence, your talents, your enthusiasm, your compassion and your fortitude at the service of life!

Have no fear. The outcome of the battle for Life is already decided, even though the struggle goes on against great odds and with much suffering. This certainty is what the Second Reading declares: " *Christ is now raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ...so in Christ all will come to life again*" (*1Cor 15,20-22*). The paradox of the Christian message is this: Christ – the Head – has already conquered sin and death. Christ in his Body – the pilgrim People of God – continually suffers the onslaught of the Evil One and all the evil which sinful humanity is capable of.

6. At this stage of history, the liberating message of *the Gospel of Life* has been put into your hands. And the mission of proclaiming it to the ends of the earth is now passing to your generation. Like the great Apostle Paul, you too must feel the full urgency of the task: "Woe to me if I do not evangelize" (*1Cor 9,16*). *Woe to you if you do not succeed in defending life.* The Church needs your energies, your enthusiasm, your youthful ideals, in order to make the Gospel of Life penetrate the fabric of society, transforming people's hearts and the structures of society *in order to create a civilization of true justice and love.* Now more than ever, in a world that is often without light and without the courage of noble ideals, *people need the fresh, vital spirituality of the Gospel.*

Do not be afraid to go out on the streets and into public places, like the first Apostles who preached Christ and the Good News of salvation in the squares of cities, towns and villages. This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel (Cfr. *Rom* 1,16). It is the time to preach it from the rooftops (Cfr. *Matth* 10,27). Do not be afraid to break out of comfortable and routine modes of living, in order to take up the challenge of making Christ known in the modern "metropolis". It is you who must "go out into the byroads" (*Matth* 22,9) and invite everyone you meet to the banquet which God has prepared for his people. The Gospel must not be kept hidden because of fear or indifference. It was never meant to be hidden away in private. It has to be put on a stand so that people may see its light and give praise to our heavenly Father.

Jesus went in search of the men and women of his time. He engaged them in an open and truthful dialogue, whatever their condition. As the Good Samaritan of the human family, he came close to people to heal them of their sins and of the wounds which life inflicts, and to bring them back to the Father's house. Young people of "World Youth Day", the Church asks you to go, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to those who are near and those who are far away. Share with them the freedom you have found in Christ. People thirst for genuine inner freedom. They yearn for the Life which Christ came to give in abundance. The world at the approach of a new millennium, for which the whole Church is preparing, is like a field ready for the harvest. *Christ needs laborers ready to work in his vineyard*. May you, the Catholic young people of the world, not fail him. In your hands, carry the Cross of Christ. On your lips, the words of Life. In your hearts, the saving grace of the Lord.

7. At her Assumption, Mary was "*taken up to Life*" – body and soul. She is already a part of "the first fruits" (*1Cor* 15,20) of our Savior's redemptive Death and Resurrection. The Son took his human life from her; in return he gave her the fullness of communion in Divine Life. She is the only other being in whom the mystery has already been completely accomplished. In Mary *the final victory of Life over death is already a reality*. And, as the Second Vatican Council teaches: "In the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached the perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle" (*Lumen gentium*, 65). In and through the Church we too have hope of "an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us" (Cfr. *1Petr* 1,4).

You are blessed, O Mary! Mother of the Eternal Son born of your virgin womb, you are *full of grace* (Cfr. *Luc* 1,28). You have received the *abundance of Life* (Cfr. *Io* 10,10) as no one else among the descendants of Adam and Eve. As the most faithful "hearer of the Word" (Cfr. *Luc* 11,28), you not only treasured and pondered this mystery in your heart (Cfr. *Luc* 11,2; *Luc* 11,19; *Luc* 11,51), but you observed it in your body and nourished it by the self-giving love with which you surrounded Jesus throughout his earthly life. As Mother of the Church, you guide us still from your place in heaven and intercede for us. You lead us to *Christ, "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life"* (*Io* 14,16), and help us to increase in holiness by conquering sin (Cfr. *Lumen gentium*, 65).

8. The Liturgy presents you, Mary, as the *Woman clothed with the sun* (Cfr. *Apoc* 12,1). But you are even more splendidly clothed with that Divine Light which can become the Life of all those created in the image and likeness of God himself: "*this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*" (*Io* 1,4-5).

O woman clothed with the sun, the *youth* of the world *greet you with so much love*; they come to you *with all the courage* of their young hearts. Denver has helped them to become more conscious of the Life which your Divine Son has brought.

We are all witnesses of this.

These young people now know that *Life is more powerful than the forces of death*; they know that the Truth is more powerful than darkness; that Love is stronger than death (Cfr. *Cant 8,6*).

Your spirit rejoices, O Mary, and our spirit rejoices with you because the Mighty One has done great things for you and for us, – for all these young people gathered here in Denver, for all of us, for all the young people of the world, for all the young people, this generation, the future generation. The Mighty One has done great things for you, Mary, and for us. For you and for us, for us with you. The Mighty One – and *holy is his name!*

His mercy is from age to age.

We rejoice, Mary, we rejoice with you, Virgin assumed into heaven.

The Lord has done great things for you! The Lord has done great things for us! Alleluia. Amen.