

## Pope John Paul II — “Encouraging Young People Toward Holiness.”

### I. Introduction

- A. I decided to refocus my talk within the general theme of the day, which is the Path to Sanctity, to concentrate on how John Paul II encouraged young people to holiness. We all wish to do the same with the young people of today, our children and grandchildren, our students, our parishioners. We want them to be the best for them, which is we want God for them, to want happiness, to want holiness.
- B. We do it within the context that many of us can get easily bewildered and sometimes frustrated in our work with young people. Hard as we try, sometimes we seem to fail in comparison with the other “formative” influences in their lives, coming from Hollywood, or some of the music, prevalent ideas in some of their schools, their peers.
- C. Pope John Paul II had a particular fascination for and effectiveness with youth. They came to him in record numbers. (The two largest recorded crowds in history were for WYD Masses and his funeral was the largest ever, fueled mainly by young people). He inspired so many priestly vocations. And he did it when so many others of us have tried and failed.
- D. I began this study when I was a Catholic high school chaplain in my diocese. It was an inner city school with a lot of inner city issues. Many of the students came to the school not for its religious instruction, but because it was safer and better than the public schools. Few were enthusiastic about the things of God. They looked at the Church as “boring,” as a “whole bunch of rules,” as something that seemed to “repress” rather than liberate and make possible their deep aspirations. I tried all different types of approaches, but none seemed to reach many of the young students. So I began to study systematically what John Paul II said to and about young people. Eventually my binder grew to over 450 pages. The more I read his discourses, the more I started to see how his approach created a type, a tone, an inspiration that mine, despite my best intentions, didn’t. The more I focused on his themes and vocabulary, the more my themes and lexicon began to change. It started to reorder the way I was interacting with young people and I started immediately to see fruits.
- E. So my appreciation for what he did is not academic or theoretical but pastoral and practical. John Paul II bequeathed a pedagogy, a way of meeting and accompanying young people along the journey. He did this clearly by his example. But he did so also in explicit conversation with priests and bishops whom he tried to guide to be more Christ-like, more hopeful and more effective on youth.
- F. What I’d like to do today is to condense what he said and did in his interactions with young people to ten fundamental attitudes or ten pastoral tips toward encouraging young people toward holiness. I hope that they will be of obvious practical application to parents with teenagers, to teachers and catechists, to youth ministers, to priests, and especially to young people with apostolic hearts who want to help their friends. And insofar as we all have to become younger, in fact like little children, to enter into the kingdom of heaven, I hope that these ideas of our late Holy Father, will give us all a spiritual rejuvenation and added spur to holiness during this great season of Lent.

### II. Ten Lessons

- A. The first lesson we learn from JP II’s interaction with young people is that he treated them as real friends.
  1. He called them “dear friends” over and over and meant it. .
  2. He enjoyed their company. He loved spending time with them. He said it was never a duty but a joy. Friends spend time together, they listen to each other, trust each other. He made a commitment to spend time with them. That is what he tried to do not only on World Youth Days, but in the hundreds of audiences he would have in Rome and during every apostolic journey with young people.
  3. “I want to tell you that the Pope considers himself to be a friend who is very close to young people and to their hopes,” he said to a group of young people early in his pontificate.”
  4. He phrased his interaction with them as one of “accompaniment,” walking alongside young people as they make the pilgrimage of life. He wanted to be with them in their joys and sorrows, the ups and downs. He wanted to be their “companion” along the journey.
  5. As friends, he made a commitment to show them he loved them.

- a. To Irish pilgrims, 9/7/81: "I want to assure you once more of my love for you, and of the hope and confidence."
- b. He said that this love needs to be present in all our interactions, just like in Christ's interactions with young people. In 1985, during the U.N.'s International Year of Youth, he wrote a beautiful Holy Thursday letter to priests in which he said that our pastoral effectiveness comes from looking on young people with deep and sincere love.
  1. "The first and most profound source of their effectiveness has been that 'loving look' of Christ. ... With young people, this love is not something exclusive, as if it did not also concern others, such as adults, the old, the sick. ... At the same time, ... it flows from a particular concern for what being young means in human life... This love for young people is fully conscious both of the qualities and of the defects proper to youth and to young people. At the same time, this love — just like Christ's love — reaches the person directly precisely through these qualities and defects. It reaches the individual who is at an extremely important phase of life. Many things, in fact, are determined and decided at this phase (sometimes in an irreversible way). The future of a person depends to a great extent upon the nature of that person's youth... This time of youth therefore in the life of every person is a particularly responsible phase. *Love for young people is above all awareness of this responsibility and readiness to share it.*" (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)
  2. He says the Church must have a preferential love for young people because Christ did, seen not only in his allowing children to be permitted to come to him, but also in the millstones he announced would await those who led the young astray.
6. He showed that he treasured them as friends. He did it not in a self-interested way (for the spiritual "I.V." he received from their interaction, but because he treasured them and considered them a great gift in themselves. He tried to help them see themselves as a treasure and help others to see them as a treasure as well. He talked often about the treasure of youth, that it is a "talent" given by Christ to the whole Church with which we are entrusted and which we're called to help multiply.
  - a. "Dear Christian parents. Take good measure of the great gift in which God has made you his co-workers. ... He has entrusted a talent to you, that you may make it grow." (9/2/85 Douala, Cameroon)
  - b. "The experience of youth is a unique treasure. Not only does the Church look to you with sympathy, with hope, conscious that the future depends on you; but through you she sees herself and her mission in the world." (7/1/85 Belgium)
  - c. "'Youth is in itself a special treasure of man... The period of youth is the time of a particularly intense discovery of the human 'I.' This is the treasure of discovering and at the same time of organizing, choosing, foreseeing, and making the first personal decisions, decisions that will be important for the future ... personally ... and socially."
7. Like a friend, he made himself accessible and approachable.
  - a. He said to priests, but it can apply to anyone, "The Gospel text [of the RYM] indicates that the young man had easy access to Jesus. For him, the Teacher from Nazareth was someone to whom he could turn with confidence: someone to whom he could entrust his essential questions; someone from whom he could expect a true response. ... Each one of us must be distinguished by an accessibility similar to that of Christ. Young people should find no difficulty in approaching the Priest, and should discover in him the same openness, benevolence and availability with regard to the problems troubling them. Even when by temperament he is a little shy or reserved, the priest's attitude should help him to overcome the resistances that derive from that" (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)
  - b. But this accessibility is more than just someone who makes external contact easy for them both inside and outside Church. "The accessibility of which Christ gives us as an example consists in something more. The priest ... ought to evoke in young people trust as the confidant of their problems of a fundamental nature, questions regarding their spiritual life and questions of conscience." (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)
  - c. He said that this type of friendly confidant should "know how to listen and how to answer. The Master whom the young man questions has in the latter's eyes a special credibility and authority: moral authority." (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)
8. He was able, as a true friend, credibly to call young people to the commitment of friendship in return.

9. In his whole approach, he was trying to model Christ's interaction with them and to encourage them to be faithful friends in return to Christ.
  - a. Christ "has become the friend of each one of us, the daily companion, contemporary and close to each person who lives, at whatever moment of human history."
  - b. Jesus said during the Last Supper, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." Friends seek a unity of wills, they desire to please each other, they do what may be hard for another. Christ out of friendship gave his life to save his friends' lives. JP II says that Christ's example calls us to similar fidelity, love and commitment.
10. So this first point deals with our whole orientation toward young people.
  - a. We're not called to "lord" our age over them, to be their "bosses" or worse to treat them like "slaves" whose whole existence depends on obeying our every wish.
  - b. We're called to love them, to serve them, to treasure them, to be friends to them and to model for them true friendship in return.
  - c. John Paul II is not saying that we need to look at them as our equals in everything. Friendships can have a vertical dimension in which one friend's contributions are simply greater than the others. But friendship does recognize that there is a two way street, that both give and that both receive, and to make a commitment to accompany the young person patiently along the path of maturity, to be a guide, like Virgil in the Aeneid, on the way upward toward heaven, toward holiness, toward eternity.

#### B. Young people are capable of holiness

1. So the first tip has to do with us who want to help young people. The second focuses on the young people themselves and it's central to our theme of guiding young people on the path of sanctity. JP II firmly believed that young people are truly capable of holiness.
  - a. He believed they were capable not just "later," "in the future," but now.
  - b. He believed that this holiness is not just a fluffy type of innocence that many, especially those who might not yet have kids (!), see in children. In fact, he believed that young people were capable of the heroic virtue on which true holiness is built.
  - c. For that reason, he believed that young people could in fact set examples for us about the path to sanctity.
2. In this regard, it's easy to point to the beatification of two of the young Fatima seers, Francisco and Jacinta, in Fatima in 2000.
  - a. He said during his homily that this shows that even the very young — both died before they were teenagers — are capable of holiness.
  - b. They were not martyrs, but saints, whose heroic virtues were established for all.
  - c. They responded to Mary's call to pray, to do reparation and penance, and, even though it was hard, they did it.
3. John Paul II also cited the example of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, whose "little way" was something that people of all ages, but especially the young, could follow. In declaring her a doctor of the Church in 1997, despite the fact that she never went to high school!, he declared that she was an "eminent teacher" in the faith. She got the most important part, that we're all called to be love in the heart of the Church, to be humble, to be little.
4. He exalted many other saints and blessed as well and showed that the stirrings of sanctity, of heroic virtue, were shown at a very young age:
  - a. Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, a young person of great enthusiasm and vibrancy, who lived a life of great charity, a life of the beatitudes, until his death in his mid 20s.
  - b. Francis of Assisi (4/21/81): "For him, the Gospel, and in particular the words of the Beatitudes, did not remain a fine text, or even an ideal, but meant attitudes to be put into practice very concretely, almost literally. Because he was an unequalled witness to Christ, he brought forth in the Church a spiritual movement that many people no longer had dared to hope for. Become disciples of Christ with Francis of Assisi."
5. Perhaps the greatest example was Mary, who as a teenager said a full-hearted yes to the Lord's call and changed the history of the world.
6. In a beautiful reflection on baptism in Paris, he brought everything back to our baptismal vocation to become holy, to take the light of Christ which we receive from Christ's resurrection out to the whole world, just like at the Easter Vigil we start to light everyone else's candles, one at a time. Young people

were clearly capable of walking as children of the light and bringing the light of Christ to the whole Church.

### C. He challenged young people to greatness

1. Because young people are capable of holiness, Pope John Paul II challenged them to greatness. This is our third point.
2. “Challenge” is one of his favorite terms. He uses it almost every address to young people, and sometimes, many times.
  - a. He acknowledges and describes the challenge of the Gospel, the challenge of discipleship, how Christ challenges us. It’s a tone that is meant to inspire the young people to meet the challenge with God’s help.
  - b. He challenges them to be “brave,” “strong,” to “have courage.” — The disciple needs the virtue of courage and he’s confident that they have it.
  - c. He’s communicating that he knows they’re capable of it. He saw in the valor of so many of his young contemporaries during the war and occupation the capacity of young people for this type of bravery and heroism.
  - d. Allied to bravery, he tells them “don’t be afraid.” He acknowledges their fears. He often names those fears. He tells them not to be afraid to trust in Christ. Not to be afraid to follow him. Not to be afraid to be the morning watchmen for a new millennium. Not to be afraid to love purity. Not to be afraid to be saints. But he reminds them that courage is not the absence of fear, but the capacity to do what we should despite our fears.
3. Alongside this challenge, he frames faith as an adventure. Discipleship is not boring, but invigorating. It’s like an uphill hike with Christ, up the way of the Cross. It’s a particularly noble adventure. He knows young people are attracted naturally to these adventures, which capture their imagination. The Pope says that following Christ, putting out into the deep trusting him, is the greatest adventure of all.
4. He admitted that there’s a temptation among many who work with young people to try to water down the faith and he vigorously resisted this temptation.
  - a. He did it first with the young people themselves:
    1. He admits that it’s sometimes hard to believe in the Gospel and to live it, but he says they’re capable of it.
    2. There’s a difficult path, the path of the Cross, the path of the seed falling to the ground. It’s the path of the beatitudes, the path of a love that gives its life for others.
    3. “Let’s be clear that we are speaking of an adventure superior to any others, more profound and convincing than all others” (10/7/85 Genoa)
    4. “It takes courage to stand by the faith. Take Courage! Perhaps people will laugh at you because you like religious instruction. Maybe they will make fun of you because you go to Church or you openly confess what you have learned. Do not be troubled!” (9/23/85 Liechtenstein)
    5. But he also said, “I have no fear of being demanding toward you: Christ is, before me.” (7/29/85, Treviso)
    6. “Look for Christ, then, and welcome him. He is demanding, he is not content with mediocrity, he does not admit indecision.” (2/18/85, Venezuela)
    7. He had a dramatic encounter with young people in Holland in June of 1985. This was one of his more difficult apostolic pilgrimages. Many of the people, including Catholics, were outright hostile. He took a lot of the young person’s questions and then responded with great candor, love and challenge to the questions they had given him:
    8. “Dear friends, allow me to be very frank with you. ... Are you really sure that the idea you have of Christ fully corresponds to the reality of his person? The Gospel, in truth, presents us with a *very demanding* Christ who invites us to a radical conversion of heart, to detachment from earthly goods, to the pardon of offenses, to the love of enemies, to the patient endurance of abuses, and even to the sacrifice of one’s life for love of neighbor. In particular, concerning the sexual sphere, the firm position taken by him in defense of the indissolubility of marriage and the condemnation pronounced even regarding simple adultery of the heart are well known. And how can we fail to be struck by the precept to “gouge out one’s eye” or “cut off one’s hand” if these members are an occasion of ‘scandal.’ Having these precise Gospel references, is it realistic to imagine a *permissive Christ* in the realm of married life, in the question of abortion, of pre-marital, extra-marital or homosexual relations? ... In her teaching the Church never pronounces a judgment regarding

concrete persons. But at the level of principles she must distinguish good from evil. Permissiveness doesn't make man happy." (6/3/85 Dutch Youth)

9. "Young friends, this then is my response: love Christ and accept the demands which the Church makes upon you in his name, because they are the demands which come from God, the Creator and Redeemer of man. Accept these demands in your lives and you will discover their value." (6/3/85 Dutch Youth)
  10. "Beloved young friends, faith always involves a challenge. It has never been otherwise. Today there are difficulties for whoever wants to be Christian. But there were others yesterday. And tomorrow— one may venture this prophecy without ear of being proven wrong — tomorrow new generations of youth will have to face new difficulties. Being a Christian has never been, and never will be, a 'tranquil' choice.... But I ask you: doesn't the decision for Christ find a particular reason for fascination from this very fact? What is arduous requires courage, and the characteristic nobility of a human being is expressed in a unique way through courage. It must not be forgotten, furthermore, that in other areas of the world, young people pay a very high price to give witness of their consistency with the Gospel of Christ." (6/3/85 Dutch Youth)
- b. He did it also with those who are responsible or the young.
1. He said to the U.S. Bishops in the Sept 1993 ad limina, "Don't water down the faith. Strengthen it!" He encouraged them to listen, to teach, to encourage.
  2. To US Bishops in an ad limina a month after Denver: "In spite of negative signs, many hunger or an authentic and challenging spirituality... or a solid foundation upon which to build their lives. ... They are not inspired by a Gospel which is diluted, disguised or made to seem effortless. Every effort should be made to guarantee that [we] present serenely and convincingly, but without embarrassment or compromise, the whole treasury of Church teaching
  3. "We must not be afraid of challenging the young. It can happen that one of them may go away 'saddened' [like the RYM], when he or she seems unable to face some demand. Nevertheless, sadness of this sort can also be 'savioric.' Sometimes the young must make progress through such experiences of salvific sadness, so as gradually to reach the truth and that joy which the truth gives." (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)
  4. "Besides, the young know that the true good cannot be had 'cheaply'; it must 'cost.'" (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)

#### D. He acknowledged their questions and their search for meaning and happiness.

1. As we saw in his interaction with the Dutch youth, he readily acknowledges that youth is a time of asking a lot of question and he's not afraid of them. In fact, he sees in their questions as the search for meaning and for happiness, which is the desire for holiness. .
2. Every WYD began with listening to their questions, with hearing from them.
3. "I would like to speak personally with each one of you, to listen, to ask questions, to assure and to rejoice with each one, looking to the future and seeking together in the Gospel of Christ the answer to the questions which you carry in your hearts. Unfortunately this is not practically possible — at least for now. But we do need to leave something for Paradise!" (6/3/85 Dutch Youth)
4. "Some young people feel ignored, cut off from responsibilities, from access to a worthy life, from the possibility of self-expression." (7/1/85 Belgium)
5. "When young people cease to pose questions, they cease to be young. I would now like to give as clear a response as possible to the questions you have put to me."
6. He met them where they were at and helped them search for the answer. He treated them like a guide, rather than a boss. He often made the questions his own. "We wonder why?"
7. He knows that for them the questions are urgent. Like the RYM, they're searching for answers to the questions of why they're here or where they're going. He knows that like Augustine, their hearts will remain restless until they rest in God.
8. He's convinced that if they seek the truth, they will find the truth and find that the truth has a name, Jesus.
9. He knows that science cannot explain the mystery and longing of their hearts. Only Christ can. He has the words of everlasting life. He is the one with the answers to the questions they have.
10. "I understand and respect your worries." (7/1/85 Belgium)
11. Youth is the age of discovery of questions. Prior to WYD 1988, he said it's a time of discovering.
  - a. . Himself
  - b. Personality

- c. Meaning of existence
  - d. Reality of Good and Evil
  - e. The world of Nature
  - f. Jesus!
12. He enters into a dialogue with them.
- a. . He sees his interactions with the young as a dialogue, a mutual learning and discovery, a two-way conversation. He invites them into a two-way conversation with God. The Church's pastoral care is not a "classroom" but a conversation in which Christ is the chief interlocutor
  - b. . He used the word "you" in his conversations with them to make it very direct
  - c. He then used "we" and "together". "We have come here together to be with the Lord
  - d. This is a means by which he identifies with young people, puts himself at their level, and leads them from where they are to Christ
  - e. He stresses the whole of Christian life is a dialogue, where we're not just "workers *for* Christ," but "collaborators."
13. He acknowledges even their criticisms, particularly of the Church.
- 1. "In the Church there are certainly some things to be criticized and there are occasionally unpleasant and painful things; this is due to the fact that she is also a community of imperfect and sinful men. Nevertheless, I challenge you today: Love your Church! In spite of all her defects, she is still bound to announce God's Word to you, she gives you the unique encounters with Jesus Christ in the sacraments, and she helps you to overcome life's trials with human dignity and in a Christian way."
  - 2. "Do not limit yourselves to looking at the wrinkles of the Church; we are all responsible for her wrinkles. Do not look to her only for a reflection of yourselves. She is the sacrament of a salvation which comes from beyond, she is the efficacious sign of Jesus Christ." (7/1/85 Belgium)
  - 3. "You have let me know that you often consider the Church an institution which does nothing but promulgate regulation and laws. You think that she puts up many barriers in various fields; sexuality, the structure of the Church, the place of women in the Church." (6/3/85 Dutch Youth)
  - 4. But he gives a response: "The Church is you; the Church is all of us. Never speak of the Church as I you were an external person, but rather in your position as committed persons within the Church. ... I should likewise ask you not to approach the Church in such a way that you can no longer listen to her. You must not close yourselves off. ... As in a family, we should practice patience with one another... and respect."
- E. But then he tries to answer those questions by bringing them to Christ.**
- 1. "You asked me about the meaning of life. This meaning is not an idea nor some other thing: it is rather a person. It is Jesus Christ. If you want to awaken to life, you must awaken to Jesus Christ. He gives your life meaning, in good times as well as bad." (9/23/85 Liechtenstein)
  - 2. "Christ brings a youthfulness that not even time can eliminate, the ability to rise up from falls, the experience of joy and of passion, of purity and tenacity, the capacity to love men like brothers and to fight for truth and justice in the continual striving for a better world." (9/30/85, Rimini)
  - 3. "Dear friends, continue to believe. The secret to the solution of the difficulties you have mentioned, and of every other difficulty, lies in faith" (6/3/85 Dutch Youth)
  - 4. "Here, dear young friends, is the secret of a Christian life which is both coherent and joyous: the secret lies in a sincere, personal, deep love for Christ." (6/3/85 Dutch Youth)
  - 5. "Love enables us to propose what is good. Jesus looked at his young questioner in the Gospel and said to him: follow me." The good that we can propose to young people is always expressed in this exhortation: Follow Christ! We have no other good to propose; no one has a better good to propose. To say "follow Christ!" means, above all, try to find yourself as a person. For as the Council teaches, it is precisely Christ who fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his highest calling."
  - 6. "He — Christ — is your answer." (2/18/85, Venezuela).
  - 7. Bringing them to Christ, he reminds them of who they are, because Christ fully reveals us to ourselves and makes our calling clear.
    - a. He said to the million people who listened to him in Parish, "If you are what you should be, you will set the world ablaze.

- b. Each has a vocation. "I hope that each of you will listen to the call that Christ addresses to you, for your Christian life, and for the special vocation that is destined for you in the service of man or in the spiritual service of your brothers.
    - c. You are called to an eternal destiny, to be sons of God and brothers in Christ." (2/18/85 Venezuela)
- F. He wants to help them find Christ where they should, but often do not. He wants them to encounter the living Christ.
1. Christ was not a dead, historical figure, but alive. He recognizes that sometimes the young people don't see Christ alive where they should.
  2. He tried to bring Christ alive, to show that he is risen, to show that he loves them tremendously.
  3. In *ad limina* addresses to bishops, he asks bishops to present Christ as alive. He pleads with teachers and parents to do the same.
  4. He says that Christ is alive in Sacred Scripture
    - a. God speaks to us in Sacred Scripture.
    - b. Like Mary, we're called to listen to the word of God and treasure it so that the Word may become flesh in us.
    - c. To symbolize the "actualization" of the word, during WYDs, JP II would often say, "Let us listen to the word of God together."
  5. Alive in the sacraments.
    - a. He calls the sacraments, "signs and means of *intimate union* with God."
    - b. Christ is alive in the Eucharist.
      1. JP II called us to remember this "stupendous gift" of love, to adore him, to receive him worthily, to take him as living monstrances on Corpus Christi processions wherever we go.
      2. "We praised God by participating in Holy Mass on Sundays. Basically there is no better way to sanctify the Lord's day. ... In every Mass we should get to know Jesus better." (9/23/85 Liechtenstein)
    - c. In the Sacrament of Confession, the Lord forgives us, forms our consciences and strengthens us.
      1. "We praise God when we regularly confess our sins. We should confess our sins because we know that God is merciful. ... I would like to encourage you to rediscover this widely forgotten sacrament. It is worth the effort. Jesus, who forgives sins, will give you the strength to overcome life's difficulties." (9/23/85 Liechtenstein)
  6. Alive in prayer
    - a. Prayer is a living dialogue, a two-sided conversation of love. Christ listens to us and speaks to us.
    - b. He knows us even better than we know ourselves and wants to help us.
    - c. "Prayer is the most powerful force with which we Christians can oppose the evil forces in the world. Prayer does not only mean that we can tell God all that troubles us. Prayer also means that we become silent in order to hear what God wants to say to us. Therefore, have the courage to pray and to listen to the quiet voice of God in stillness." (9/23/85 Liechtenstein)
  7. Alive in the Church
    - a. The Pope calls young people to love the Church because Christ loves the Church as his bride.
    - b. Christ gave himself up for her to make her holy.
    - c. We find Christ in the Church and are called to love Christ in the Church.
    - d. "The Church has so much to offer young people."
  8. Alive in others
    - a. "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me."
    - b. Jesus identifies with others.
    - c. In loving them, we're loving him.
    - d. He particularly called young people to love Christ in the poor and handicapped.
  9. Alive, beside us, in our day to day struggles.
    - a. We find Christ on the Cross!
    - b. He's there with us helping us to carry our crosses.
  10. Alive in nature

- a. Nature is a book written by our Creator that we're called to "read," so as to come to know the Creator better.
  - b. It's like his poem, *The Source*, in which all the streams lead us up the mountain toward God.
11. "Jesus won't deceive you. He wants to be your friend. Your Companion."

**G. He recognizes that they are made to give themselves to others and want to give themselves.**

1. JP II recognizes that they're made in the image and likeness of God who is love.
2. True happiness and love can be found only in the free gift of self.
3. The Pope recognizes that young people are searching for love, but often they seek it in the wrong places, dedicating themselves often to the wrong causes or to counterfeit love.
4. The pope wants to acknowledge their desire for love and point them to where they will truly find it, Christ, who first loved them and showed them by his words and deeds what real love is.
5. He wanted them to bring their love to Christ rather than allow "love" to bring them away from Christ.
6. He called them to Christ-like sacrifice, knowing that they desire that type of total self-gift, that they're made for it.
7. This gift of self, this path to true happiness and holiness, is seen in the priesthood, in consecrated life, in the sacrament to marriage.
8. "Since you are in the image and likeness of god, your life may not exist only for yourselves, but must be a gift, a present for others. ... With this openness to God and to men, you will reach the realization of your personality." 2/18/85, Venezuela)
9. In order to achieve this gift of self, he needed to form their freedom appropriately.
  - a. Maturity happens only through the responsible use of freedom.
  - b. He affirms their freedom and challenges them to use it well.
  - c. He proposes. He doesn't impose. He often uses the word, "invite" and "invitation." It keeps them thinking about having to choose to accept the invitation Christ gives them, that the Pope and the Church on behalf of Christ, gives them.
  - d. This is obviously a tough thing for some people in working with young people, because it requires great patience to form young people's freedom. It is enticingly easier just to tell them what to do and to punish them when they do not. But it doesn't help them. Resentment builds because of a lack of being heard, because of a lack of being trusted.
  - e. He laid out for them the dangers and trusted them maturely to make the choice to avoid them. He wanted them to be aware, but he realized that he needed to treat them like adults. He wasn't an overprotective Holy Father
  - f. To form their freedom, he obviously had to teach them the dangers out there. But he treated the young people as intelligent enough to see the dangers and want to avoid them.
    1. He teaches them about the real issues at stake in the use of their freedom — our whole future.
    2. He indicates to them the path to which Christ calls them.
    3. But he then reminds them that the choice is theirs. Story of St. Florian's as a young priest. People wanted him to tell them what they should do. He would always talk to them about the various issues at stake, to weigh the alternatives, but then tell them, "you must choose." That was part of the young people's growth in maturity, to take their freedom seriously.
    4. He also mentions the false prophets out there, enticing them with erroneous notions of human freedom and easy allurements. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever we want, but the capacity to do what we ought to do.
  - g. God's truth fits in here. It's not meant to restrict our freedom, but to make it possible. "If you keep my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free."
  - h. He doesn't force them to choose the Lord, or scare them into keeping commandments out of a fear of punishment, but proposes the love of the Lord, the real challenge of the Gospel in all its fullness, and leaves the choice to the young people, knowing, confidently, that it corresponds to their deepest longings.
  - i. Implicit in all of this is that he trusts the young people to make the right decision and he trusts that the Lord will help them with grace. He's not naïve. He knows from his work as a confessor that many will misuse their freedom, but he doesn't focus on that. Like a good coach

who knows that his quarterback will occasionally throw an interception, he reminds the quarterback that he knows he can through the tough touchdown as well and that's what he stresses until the quarterback begins to believe in himself and live up to the coach's trust and expectations

**H. He acknowledges that God has given them real responsibility in the Church right now and challenges them freely to give of themselves to God and to others.**

1. Young people are not just part of the future of the Church, but a crucial part of the Church right now.
2. They are a great gift to the Church.
3. Every address has one action item or another relative to their role in the Church, in the new evangelization, as the heralds of the new dawn or of the new springtime.
4. The Pope tells them, "It's not enough just to belong to the Church."
5. They have a particular mission to their peers. He calls their peers a "missionary land," and admits that there are "few apostles ready to proclaim Christ credibly."
6. Jesus entrusts them with a great mission, just like he did to St. John and the young apostles. It's never a question of "worthiness" or "readiness," because none of the apostles were, on paper, ready for the task. But Jesus trusted them, and formed them for mission. The pope encourages us to do the same.
7. They have a mission to bring their energy, their hope and their enthusiasm to the whole Church. Those gifts are their "*talent*" that they're called to invest, not bury. The Church finds herself in their enthusiasm and dedication.
8. He thinks that Jesus spoke the truth when he praised the Father for revealing to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom. The Pope, in his dialogues with young people, tries to discover in them and from them these mysteries.
9. Christ trusts the young and so we should too. The pope acknowledges that many do not think that the young are capable of fulfilling serious spiritual responsibilities, but he does.
10. He constantly uses a vocabulary to stress these ideas:
  - a. Responsibility — Not as a "burden" but as the path to true freedom and a full life. True love is found connected to the responsibility love entails.
  - b. Task — The young are not just "recipients" of the Church's pastoral care but agents of it.
  - c. Mission — Christ sends them out! "Come with me to save the world"
  - d. Trust, entrusted to you — Christ trusts the young. The Church trusts the young. The pope trusts the young.
  - e. "Counting on you" — Christ, the Pope, the Church is counting on the young." This implies the trust they can fulfill it.
11. "Take the initiative and don't wait for everything to come from the older people and from those in office" (9/16/85 Muslims in Morocco)

**I. Finally, he shows them that they are the hope of the Church and he has great confidence in them to fulfill the mission.**

1. 2 Cor 7:4: I have great confidence in you, great pride in you. I am filled with encouragement, overflowing with joy.
2. "You are the hope of the Church, of the world. You are my hope!"
3. "This city has in you its future, and today its most conspicuous hope" (10/7/85 Genoans)
4. "Dear young people, the future of society and of the Church lies in your hands, in your capacity to discover your vocation and to fulfill it: it lies in the response that you will give with strength and commitment to God's call." (7/29/85 Treviso)
5. "What will be tomorrow is already shining in youth. But this future does not fall into your laps as a ripe fruit. It is entrusted to you to be built up in a responsible way. ... What there will be ... the day after tomorrow... depends in ever greater measure on you. It will depend on the general lines of your life and on your commitment, on the condition of your moral knowledge and on your conscience, whether the dream of a better world will come true" (6/17/85 Luxembourg)
6. "You are the Church of tomorrow. It is right that you should feel proud of this; but you should also feel all of the responsibility involved. Christ relies on you as the generation which will appear in the fullness of its maturity upon the threshold of the third millennium. On you rests the task of bringing Christ's message to the generation of the year two thousand."

7. "The future can be yours if you live the present with serious commitment. You will be tomorrow what you have been able to be today, since the future will be only the fruit of your being able to give meaning to the present. Youth conditions the irreversible choices of adulthood." (3/13/85 Audience)

### III. Conclusion

- A. B 16's inaugural homily — "La Chiesa è viva; La chiesa è giovane." The Church is alive and the Church is young.
- B. In his address to young priests on February 23, he said,
  1. "The young really must be a priority of our pastoral work because they dwell in a world far from God. And in our cultural context it is not easy to encounter Christ, the Christian life and the faith life.
  2. Young people require so much guidance if they are truly to find this path. I would say - even if I unfortunately live rather far away from them and so cannot provide very practical instructions - that the first element is, precisely and above all, **guidance**. They must realize that living the faith in our time is possible, that it is not a question of something obsolete but rather, that it is possible to live as Christians today and so to find true goodness
  3. It seems to me to be very important that the young find people - both of their own age and older - in whom they can see that **Christian life today is possible**, and also reasonable and feasible.
  4. Only if we manage to grasp that Jesus is not a great prophet or a world religious figure but that he is the Face of God, that he is God, have we discovered Christ's greatness and found out who God is. God is not only a distant shadow, the "primary Cause", but he has a Face. His is the Face of mercy, the Face of pardon and love, the Face of the encounter with us.
  5. Then of course, we have to realize that the Church is our vital traveling companion on our journey. In her, the Word of God lives on and Christ is not only a figure of the past but is present. We must therefore rediscover sacramental life, sacramental forgiveness, the Eucharist and Baptism as a new birth.
- C. JP II sums up the whole mission as "'Meet Christ, become friends with him, announce to others the miracle of his love!'".
- D. He summarized his strategy as
  1. Endless patience
  2. Loving closeness
  3. Help them to experience they're lovable by God and by others.
- E. The path he marks is a path toward holiness, to where we all are forever young.