

PAPAL ADDRESS TO YOUTH AT DOS COQUEIROS STADIUM

"The Power to Shape the Future Is Within You"

LUANDA, Angola, MARCH 21, 2009

Here is the address Benedict XVI gave today at a meeting with youth at Dos Coqueiros Stadium in Luanda.

"Dear Friends,

You have come here in great numbers to be with the Successor of Peter, and you represent so many other young people who are one with us in spirit. You have come to join me in proclaiming openly the joy of our faith in Jesus Christ, and in renewing your commitment to be his faithful disciples in our time. A meeting much like this took place here in Luanda on June 7, 1992 with our beloved Pope John Paul II. Today another Pope stands before you: with a different appearance, but with the same love in his heart, and he embraces all of you in Jesus Christ, who is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8).

First of all I want to thank you for this celebration which you have planned for me, for the festive atmosphere which you yourselves generate, for your presence and for your joy. I cordially greet my brother Bishops and priests and all those who are engaged in youth ministry. I likewise greet with gratitude all who have prepared this event, especially the Bishops' Commission for Young People and Vocations, and its President, Bishop Kanda Almeida, whom I thank for his warm words of welcome. I greet all the young people present, Catholics and others, who are looking for an answer to their questions and difficulties. Some of these have been expressed by your representatives, and I have listened to them with gratitude and appreciation. The embrace I exchanged with them is, naturally, an embrace which I offer to all of you.

Meeting young people is good for everyone! You may have your share of difficulties, but you are filled with great hope, great enthusiasm and a great desire to make a new beginning. My young friends, you hold within yourselves the

power to shape the future. I encourage you to look to that future through the eyes of the Apostle John. Saint John tells us: "I saw a new Heaven and a new earth ... and I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven, from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold the dwelling of God is with men'" (Rev 21:1-3).

Dear young people, God makes all the difference. His special presence among us begins with his easy intimacy with the first couple in the garden of Eden; it continues with the divine glory which shone forth from the Tent of Meeting in the midst of the People of Israel during their journey through the desert, and it culminates in the incarnation of the Son of God who became inseparably one with humanity in Jesus Christ. Jesus himself traversed the desert of our humanity and, passing beyond death, he rose from the dead and now draws all humanity with himself towards God. Jesus is no longer confined to a particular place and time. His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, flows forth from him, enters our hearts and thus joins us to him, and with him to the Father -- to the God who is one and three.

Yes, my friends! God makes all the difference ... and more! God changes us; he makes us new! This is what he has promised: "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). It is true! The Apostle Paul tells us: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled himself to us" (2 Cor 5:17-18). In ascending to Heaven and entering eternity, Jesus Christ has become the Lord of all ages. So he can walk with us as a friend in the present, carrying in his hand the book of our days. In his hand he also holds the past, the foundation and source of our life. He also carefully holds the future, allowing us to catch a glimpse of the most beautiful dawn we will ever see: the dawn that radiates from him, the dawn of the Resurrection. God is the future of a new humanity, which is anticipated in his Church. When you have a chance, take time to read the Church's history. You will find that the Church does not grow old with the passing of the years. Rather, she grows younger, for she is journeying towards her Lord,

day by day drawing nearer to the one true fountain overflowing with youthfulness, rebirth, the power of life.

Dear young people, the future is God. As we have just heard, "he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4). At present though, and even in our midst, I see some of the many thousands of young Angolans who have been maimed or disabled as a result of the war and the landmines. I think of the countless tears that have been shed for the loss of your relatives and friends. It is not hard to imagine the dark clouds that still veil the horizon of your fondest hopes and dreams. In your hearts I see doubt, a doubt which you have expressed to me today. You are saying: "Here is what we have. There is no visible sign of the things you are talking about! The promise is backed by God's word -- and we believe it -- but when will God arise and renew all things?" Jesus' answer is the one he gave to his disciples: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (Jn 14:1-2).

But you persist, dear young people: "Yes! But when will this happen?" The Apostles asked Jesus a similar question, and his answer was: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8). See how Jesus does not leave us without an answer; he tells us one thing very clearly: renewal starts from within; you will receive a power from on high. The power to shape the future is within you.

It is within you, but how? Just as life exists within a seed. That is how Jesus explained it at a critical juncture in his ministry. The beginning of his ministry was accompanied by great enthusiasm. People saw the sick healed, demons cast out, the Gospel proclaimed, but otherwise the world had not changed: the Romans remained in power and everyday life continued to be hard, despite those miracles and those beautiful words. People's enthusiasm was

waning so much that even some of his disciples had left the Master (cf. Jn 6:66) who preached but did not change the world. Everyone was asking: deep down, what value does this message have? What has this prophet of God brought us? It was then that Jesus spoke about the sower who sows in the field of the world, and he explained that the seed is his word (Mk 4:3-20) and his miracles of healing. These are so few in comparison to the immense needs and demands of everyday life. And yet, deep within the seed, the future is already present, since the seed contains tomorrow's bread, tomorrow's life. The seed seems almost nothing. But it is the presence of the future, the promise already present. When it falls on good soil, it produces fruit, thirty, sixty and even a hundredfold.

My dear friends, you are a seed which God has sown in the world, a seed that contains power from on high, the power of the Holy Spirit. And yet, the only way to pass from the promise of life to actually bearing fruit is to give your lives in love, to die for love. Jesus himself said: "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn 12:24-25).

This is what Jesus said, and this is how he acted. His crucifixion seems like complete failure, but it is not! Jesus, in the power of "the eternal Spirit, offered himself without blemish to God" (Heb 9:14). Thus, once he fell to the earth, he could bear fruit in every time and place. In your midst you have the new Bread, the Bread of future life, the Most Holy Eucharist, which nourishes us and pours out the life of the Trinity into the hearts of all people.

Dear young people, as seeds filled with the power of the same eternal Spirit, sprout up before the warmth of the Eucharist, in which the Lord's testament is fulfilled: he gives himself to us and we respond by giving ourselves to others, for love of him. This is the way that leads to life; it can be followed only by maintaining a constant dialogue with the Lord and among yourselves. The dominant societal culture is not helping you to live by Jesus' word or to practise the self-giving to which he calls you in accordance with the Father's plan. Yet, dear friends, you have the power within you, just as it was in Jesus when he said:

"the Father who dwells in me does his works... he who believes in me, will also do the works that I do; and he will do greater works than these, because I go to the Father" (Jn 14:10,12).

So do not be afraid to make definitive decisions. You do not lack generosity -- that I know! But the idea of risking a lifelong commitment, whether in marriage or in a life of special consecration, can be daunting. You might think: "The world is in constant flux and life is full of possibilities. Can I make a life-long commitment now, without knowing what unforeseen events lie in store for me? By making a definitive decision, would I not be risking my freedom and tying my own hands?" These are the doubts you feel, and today's individualistic and hedonist culture aggravates them. Yet when young people avoid decisions, there is a risk of never attaining to full maturity!

I say to you: Take courage! Dare to make definitive decisions, because in reality these are the only decisions which do not destroy your freedom, but guide it in the right direction, enabling you to move forward and attain something worthwhile in life. There is no doubt about it: life is worthwhile only if you take courage and are ready for adventure, if you trust in the Lord who will never abandon you.

Young people of Angola, unleash the power of the Holy Spirit within you, the power from on high! Trusting in this power, like Jesus, risk taking a leap and making a definitive decision. Give life a chance! In this way islands, oases and great stretches of Christian culture will spring up in your midst, and bring to light that "holy city coming down out of Heaven, from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband". This is the life worthy of being lived, and I commend it to you from my heart. May God bless the young people of Angola! »