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UNIV: 25 years with John Paul II

“Dear young people: today more than ever the world needs your cheerfulness and your service, your clean life and your work, your courage and your self-giving” (John Paul II).

Excerpts from the Pope’s speeches to participants in the UNIV youth congresses since 1979.

10/23/2003

Each Holy Week since 1979, John Paul II has spoken to university

students who have come to Rome from all over the world for the annual UNIV youth congress, begun in 1968 with the encouragement of St. Josemaría Escrivá, Opus Dei's founder. Selections from those speeches follow.

The world needs you

I want to tell you that my great concern is thinking about the people who do not yet know Christ, who have not discovered the great truth of the love of God. You are living side by side with many of these people, at your universities, in the libraries, on the sports fields, in your usual gathering places. The mission that the resurrected Jesus entrusts to you is to be apostles of the new evangelization. Today more than ever the world needs your cheerfulness and your service, your clean life and your work, your courage and your self-giving (1987).

Building peace

To build peace, it is necessary first of all *to live in truth* . May you, young people, have the courage to question yourselves seriously on the meaning of life; train yourselves to think and act clearly and rightly, with respect for and in dialogue with others.

Make your priority that true relationship with God which demands personal conversion and openness to his mystery. The human person understands himself only in relation to God, who is the fullness of truth, beauty and goodness.

Justice should be combined with truth and with respect for the dignity of every person. We know, however, that without sincere and disinterested love, justice itself would not be able to guarantee peace to the world. Indeed, true peace blossoms when hatred, resentment and envy are uprooted from the

heart, when one says " *no* " to selfishness and to all that drives the human being to withdraw into himself and defend his own interests. (2003).

The courage of contrition

Dear young people, have the courage of contrition, and also the courage to seek God's grace in sacramental confession. It will make you free! It will give you the strength you need to face the challenges awaiting you as you seek to serve mankind in society and in the Church (1979).

Resist the temptation of mediocrity

Dear young men and women! Do not be surprised at this: the mystery of the Cross teaches people to live and work in a way that is different from the spirit of this world. The Apostle clearly alerts us to this: "Do not be conformed to this world but be

transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12,12).

Dear young members of UNIV, resist the temptation of mediocrity and conformism. Only in this way will you be able to make your life a gift and a service to humanity; only in this way will you help to alleviate the hurt and suffering of many poor and marginalized persons who are very much a part of our technologically advanced world. Let the Law of God guide you in your studies today and in your future professional activity. In this way you will "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5,16).

For all this to happen, prayer, intimate dialogue with the One who is calling you to be his disciples, must

come first. Be generous in your active life, young people, and be deeply immersed in the contemplation of God's mystery. Make the Eucharist the heart of your day. In union with the sacrifice of the Cross which it re-presents, offer your studies and your work, so that you yourselves may be "spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God, through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2,5)(2002).

How do I live the Christian faith?

In short, the fundamental issue involves a decisive question: *How do I live the Christian faith?* For me, is it just a set of beliefs and devotions restricted to the private sphere, or is it also a force that demands to be translated into decisions affecting my relationship with others? How much a man and woman of faith can influence society!

Part of Christian realism is to understand that great social changes

are the fruit of small courageous daily choices. You often ask yourselves: when will this world of ours be fully conformed to the Gospel message? The answer is simple: when you first think and always act according to Christ, at least a part of that world will, in you, be entrusted to him (2001).

The Christian effort is not never in vain

Dear young people of UNIV, be confident in this knowledge: the Christian's effort is never in vain. The Christian never works alone. Do not forget it! Every believer is an instrument of God and with him Christ acts through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let God act in you and through you. And for this to happen, you are well aware of the means you should use: the sacraments, prayer, the practice of the virtues and the

sanctification of work, as well as spiritual direction.

You need Christ, but Christ also needs you to make him known to your peers, with whom you share experiences and hopes. The Church entrusts you with the mission of bringing them the light of Christ's truth and his universal message of salvation. Always be ready to think of others, forgetting yourselves in order to bring your brothers and sisters closer to God. In this way you will help build a better and more united world, because the conversion and commitment of one are a seed of salvation for all (2000).

Improve the world

You can be like leaven in the dough, capable of changing the grand metropolis, the large cities, the intellectual environments. And you can build a better future, because it is man who builds that human

reality. Indeed, if man allows himself to be prompted by God, if he walks together with Him, he is capable of changing the world. I want you to change the world. May the last word of our UNIV 1982 meeting be this desire to change the world (1982).

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