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Benedict XVI: Learn from Mary how to spend your youth

"Do not be afraid, dear friends, to prefer the 'alternative' routes pointed out by true love: a modest and sound lifestyle; sincere and pure emotional relationships; honest commitment in studies and work; deep concern for the common good." Last weekend the Pope met and spoke with 500,000 youth in Loretto.

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500,000 Italian youth gathered in Loretto last weekend to help Pope Benedict XVI prepare for World Youth day, which will take place in Australia next summer.

In the sanctuary of Loretto is preserved the house where the angel Gabriel appeared to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Using this occasion, the Pope spoke to the young people about facing difficult family situations, dedication to God, and humility. Here we give a selection of the Pope's words.

You have come to this peaceful, authentic and joyful place of encounter for thousands of different reasons. . . . Whatever the reason that drew you here, I can tell you, although it requires courage to say it, that it was the Holy Spirit who has brought us together. Yes, that is exactly the case; the Spirit has led you here; you have come here with

your doubts and certainties, with your joys and your anxieties. It is now up to all of us, to all of you, to open your hearts and offer everything to Jesus. Say to him: here I am; of course, I am not yet as you would like me to be, I cannot even manage to understand myself fully but with your help I am ready to follow you.

Dear young men and women, since Mary truly knows what it means to respond generously to the Lord's requests, let us learn from her to say our own "yes". Mary, dear young people, knows your noblest and deepest aspirations. Above all, she well knows your great desire for love, with your need to love and to be loved. By looking at her, by following her docilely, you will discover the beauty of love; not a "disposable" love that is transient and deceptive, imprisoned in a selfish and materialistic mindset, but

true, deep love. In the very depths of their hearts, every young man, every young woman who are looking out on life, cherish the dream of a love that will give full meaning to their futures.

For many, this is fulfilled in the choice of marriage and in the formation of a family in which the love between a man and a woman is lived as a definitive gift, sealed by the "yes" spoken before God on their wedding day, a "yes" for their whole life. I know well that today this dream is always less easy to realize. How many failures of love surround us! How many couples bow their heads, give up and separate! How many families fall to pieces! How many young people, even among you, have witnessed the separation and divorce of their parents!

I would like to say to those in such sensitive and complex situations: the

Mother of God, the Community of believers and the Pope are beside you and are praying that the crisis that marks today's families may not become an irreversible failure. May Christian families, with the support of divine Grace, stay faithful to that solemn commitment of love joyfully assumed before the priest and the Christian community on the solemn day of their marriage. In the face of so many failures these questions are often asked: Am I any better than my friends and my parents who have tried and failed? Why should I myself succeed where so many have given up? This human fear can be daunting to even the more courageous spirits but in this night that awaits us, in front of her Holy House, Mary will repeat to each one of you, dear young friends, the words that she herself heard the Angel say to her: Do not be afraid, do not fear! The Holy Spirit is with you and will never

leave you. Nothing is impossible to those who trust in God.

This applies for those who are destined to married life and still more for those to whom God proposes a life of total detachment from earthly goods, to be dedicated full time to his Kingdom. Some of you have set out towards the priesthood, towards the consecrated life; some of you aspire to be missionaries, knowing how many and what risks this entails. I am thinking of the missionaries, priests, women religious and lay people, who have fallen in the trenches of love at the service of the Gospel.

Yes, there is hope today too; each one of you is important because each is known and desired by God and God has his plan for each one. It is our task to discover and respond to it, so that despite these precarious and marginalized situations, we will be

able to put into practice God's plan for us.

But what is it that makes people "young" in the Gospel sense? Our Meeting, which is taking place in the shadow of a Marian Shrine, invites us to look to Our Lady. Let us therefore ask ourselves: How did Mary spend her youth? Why was it that in her the impossible became possible? She herself reveals it to us in the Cantic of the Magnificat. God "regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (Lk 1: 48a). It was Mary's humility that God appreciated more than anything else in her....Here, we think spontaneously of the Holy House of Nazareth, which is the Shrine of humility: the humility of God who took flesh, who made himself small, and the humility of Mary who welcomed him into her womb; the humility of the Creator and the humility of the creature....The humble person is

perceived as someone who gives up, someone defeated, someone who has nothing to say to the world. Instead, this is the principal way, and not only because humility is a great human virtue but because, in the first place, it represents God's own way of acting. It was the way chosen by Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, who "being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2: 8).

Dear young people, I seem to perceive in these words of God about humility an important message which is especially current for you who want to follow Christ and belong to his Church. This is the message: do not follow the way of pride but rather that of humility. Go against the tide: do not listen to the interested and persuasive voices that today are peddling on many sides models of life marked by arrogance

and violence, by oppression and success at any cost, by appearances and by having at the expense of being. How many messages, which reach you especially through the mass media, are targeting you! Be alert! Be critical! Do not follow the wave produced by this powerful, persuasive action. Do not be afraid, dear friends, to prefer the "alternative" routes pointed out by true love: a modest and sound lifestyle; sincere and pure emotional relationships; honest commitment in studies and work; deep concern for the common good. Do not be afraid of seeming different and being criticized for what might seem to be losing or out of fashion; your peers but adults too, especially those who seem more distant from the mindset and values of the Gospel, are crying out to see someone who dares to live according to the fullness of humanity revealed by Jesus Christ.

From this moment, I would like to make an appointment with you young people in Sydney where, in a year's time, the next World Youth Day will be held. I know Australia is far away and for young Italians it is literally at the other end of the world.... Let us pray that the Lord who works every miracle will grant that many of you may be there. May he grant it to me, may he grant it to you.

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