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# **Benedict XVI's words for young people**

How can we develop a friendship with Christ? What brings joy to daily life? What do we need to make courageous decisions?

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## **Friends of God**

The Apostles were Jesus' travelling companions, Jesus' friends. Their journey with Jesus was not only a physical journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, but an interior journey

during which they learned faith in Jesus Christ, not without difficulty, for they were people like us.

But for this very reason, because they were Jesus' travelling companions, Jesus' friends, who learned faith on a journey that was far from easy, they are also guides for us, who help us to know Jesus Christ, to love him and to have faith in him. (*General Audience, August 9, 2006*). **Closeness to Jesus**

We can imagine that Philip is also addressing us with those two verbs that imply personal involvement. He is also saying to us what he said to Nathanael: "Come and see." The Apostle engages us to become closely acquainted with Jesus.

In fact, friendship, true knowledge of the other person, needs closeness and indeed, to a certain extent, lives on it. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that according to what

Mark writes, Jesus chose the Twelve primarily "to be with him" (Mk 3: 14); that is, to share in his life and learn directly from him not only the style of his behaviour, but above all who he really was.

Indeed, only in this way, taking part in his life, could they get to know him and subsequently, proclaim him.

Later, in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, one would read that what is important is to "learn Christ" (4: 20): therefore, not only and not so much to listen to his teachings and words as rather to know him in person, that is, his humanity and his divinity, his mystery and his beauty. In fact, he is not only a Teacher but a Friend, indeed, a Brother.

How will we be able to get to know him properly by being distant? Closeness, familiarity and habit make us discover the true identity of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Philip reminds us

precisely of this. And thus he invites us to "come" and "see", that is, to enter into contact by listening, responding and communion of life with Jesus, day by day. (*General Audience, September 6, 2006*). **Young people and commitment** *Holy Father, you were in Cologne with the young people exactly a year ago. You experienced how amazingly willing youth are to welcome others and you personally were very warmly welcomed. Will you be bringing a special message for young people on this next Trip?*

First of all, I would say that I am very happy there are young people who want to be together, who want to be together in faith and who want to do something good. The tendency to do good is very strong in young people; just think of the many kinds of volunteer work they do.

The commitment of offering your own personal contribution to help the needy of this world is a great thing. One idea might be to encourage them in this sphere: Go ahead! Look for opportunities to do good! The world needs this desire to do good, it needs this commitment!

Then, another message might be this: the courage to make definitive decisions! Young people are very generous, but when they face the risk of a lifelong commitment, be it marriage or a priestly vocation, they are afraid.

The world is moving dramatically: nowadays I can continually do whatever I want with my life with all its unpredictable future events. By making a definitive decision, am I not myself tying up my personal freedom and depriving myself of freedom of movement?

Reawaken the courage to make definitive decisions: they are really the only ones that allow us to grow, to move ahead and to reach something great in life. They are the only decisions that do not destroy our freedom but offer to point us in the right direction. Risk making this leap, so to speak, towards the definitive and so embrace life fully: this is something I would be happy to communicate to them. (*Interview, August 5, 2006*). **Education: the courage to make definitive decisions**

A true education must awaken the courage to make definitive decisions, which today are considered a mortifying bind to our freedom. In reality, they are indispensable for growth and in order to achieve something great in life, in particular, to cause love to mature in all its beauty: therefore, to give consistency and meaning to freedom itself.

From this solicitude for the human person and his formation comes our "no" to weak and deviant forms of love and to the counterfeiting of freedom, seen also in the reduction of reason to only what is calculable or manipulatable. In truth, these "nos" are rather "yeses" to authentic love, to the reality of man as he has been created by God. (*Address, October 19, 2006*). **The beauty of sanctity, and the rich young man**

Four new Saints are proposed today for the veneration of the universal Church: Rafael Guízar y Valencia, Filippo Smaldone, Rose Venerini and Théodore Guérin. Their names will be remembered for ever.

In contrast to this immediately comes the thought of the "rich young man" of whom the Gospel, just proclaimed, speaks. This youth has remained anonymous; if he had responded positively to the invitation of Jesus,

he would have become his disciple and probably the Evangelist would have recorded his name.

From this fact one can immediately glimpse the theme of this Sunday's Liturgy of the Word: if man puts his trust in the riches of this world, he will not reach the full sense of life and of true joy. If instead, trusting the Word of God, he renounces himself and his goods for the Kingdom of Heaven, apparently losing much, he in reality gains all.

The Saint is exactly that man, that woman, who, responding with joy and generosity to Christ's call, leaves everything to follow him. Like Peter and the other Apostles, as St Teresa of Jesus today reminds us as well as countless other friends of God, the new Saints have also run this demanding yet fulfilling Gospel itinerary and have already received "a hundred fold" in this life, together



with trials and persecutions, and then eternal life. (*Homily, October 15, 2006*). **The joy of those who trust in God**

But how can we become holy, friends of God?

We can first give a negative answer to this question: to be a Saint requires neither extraordinary actions or works nor the possession of exceptional charisms. Then comes the positive reply: it is necessary first of all to listen to Jesus and then to follow him without losing heart when faced by difficulties. "If anyone serves me", he warns us, "he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honour him" (Jn 12: 26).

Like the grain of wheat buried in the earth, those who trust him and love him sincerely accept dying to themselves. Indeed, he knows that

whoever seeks to keep his life for himself loses it, and whoever gives himself, loses himself, and in this very way finds life (cf. Jn 12: 24-25).

The Church's experience shows that every form of holiness, even if it follows different paths, always passes through the Way of the Cross, the way of self-denial.

The Saints' biographies describe men and women who, docile to the divine plan, sometimes faced unspeakable trials and suffering, persecution and martyrdom. They persevered in their commitment: "they... have come out of the great tribulation", one reads in Revelation, "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rv 7: 14). Their names are written in the book of life (cf. Rv 20: 12) and Heaven is their eternal dwelling-place.

The example of the Saints encourages us to follow in their same

footsteps and to experience the joy of those who trust in God, for the one true cause of sorrow and unhappiness for men and women is to live far from him.

Holiness demands a constant effort, but it is possible for everyone because, rather than a human effort, it is first and foremost a gift of God, thrice Holy (cf. Is 6: 3). In the second reading, the Apostle John remarks: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (I Jn 3: 1).

It is God, therefore, who loved us first and made us his adoptive sons in Jesus. Everything in our lives is a gift of his love: how can we be indifferent before such a great mystery? How can we not respond to the Heavenly Father's love by living as grateful children? In Christ, he gave us the gift of his entire self and

calls us to a personal and profound relationship with him.

Consequently, the more we imitate Jesus and remain united to him the more we enter into the mystery of his divine holiness. We discover that he loves us infinitely, and this prompts us in turn to love our brethren. Loving always entails an act of self-denial, "losing ourselves", and it is precisely this that makes us happy. (*Homily, November 1, 2006*).

### **The young**

The young want to see if God exists and what God tells us. Consequently, there is a certain willingness, in spite of all the difficulties of our time. An enthusiasm also exists. Therefore, we must do all we can to try to keep alive this flame that shows itself on occasions such as the World Youth Days.

What shall we do? This is our common question.... It seems to me

that under the Bishop's coordination, a way should be found, on the one hand, to integrate young people into the parish so that they may be the leaven of parish life; and on the other, also to obtain for these youth the help of extra-parochial personnel. These two things must go hand-in-hand.

It is necessary to suggest to young people that not only in the parish but also in various contexts they must integrate themselves into the life of the dioceses so as to meet subsequently in the parish; so it is necessary to encourage all initiatives along these lines.

I think that volunteer experience is very important nowadays. It is vital not to leave young people to the mercy of discos but to have useful tasks for them to do in which they see they are necessary, realize that they can do something good.

By feeling this impulse to do something useful for humanity, for someone, for a group, young people also become aware of this incentive to strive to find the "track" of a positive commitment, of a Christian ethic.

It seems to me very important that young people truly find tasks that demonstrate that they are needed, that guide them on the way of a positive service of assistance inspired by Christ's love for men and women, so that they themselves seek the sources from which to draw strength and commitment. (*Address, August 31, 2006*). **Humor** *What role does humor play in the life of a Pope?*

I am not a man who constantly thinks up jokes. But I think it is very important to be able to see the humorous side of life and its joyful dimension and not to take everything too tragically.

I would also say it is necessary for my ministry. A writer once said that angels can fly because they do not take themselves too seriously. Maybe we could also fly a bit if we did not think we were so important.  
*(Interview, August 5, 2006).*

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