
« SALT AND LIGHT »



During the lenten season, this year, I want to reflect with you on the theme Pope John Paul II has chosen for the Seventeenth World Youth Days: “You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world.” I want to do this by quoting extensively from WYD Handbook to the “Salt and Light” youth gathering to take place in Toronto, This Handbook is a attractive publication of the Catechetical Office of Québec and the National Office for World Youth Day 2002.

A SPECIAL MISSION

At their funeral in Edmundston on January 3, I charged Mathieu Beaupré, Joshua Léger, Pierre Martin, Patrick Blaquière and François Éric Dumont – our five young friends who died accidentally on December 29, 2001 in Ville Dégelis, Québec – with the very special mission of being the patrons of the 2000 youth from the Atlantic Region dioceses who will be gathering in Edmundston on July 21 of this year, and of watching over the millions of others who will be coming to Toronto to join Pope John Paul II for the World Youth Days, July 23 to 28. I am certain that like St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, these five young men want to do good among us in their own way. The prayers and eulogies I heard at the funeral reminded me that these young men were, in their own way, “salt and light” during their short lives, by their zest for life and the social commitment. May they watch over our youth! As we remember what they were to us, may it renew our strength, stimulate our commitment, and help us work at creating a just and fraternal world.

A TRULY SPECIAL HAPPENING

The World Youth Days are an extraordinary happening, an important point in the life of the Church. Following Manila, Denver, Paris, and Rome, this year’s encounter will give us an added opportunity to meet Christ and witness to his presence in today’s society, and to be the initiators of a civilisation of love, truth, and peace. The way we prepare in the months to come for this celebration will become major building blocks in this new civilisation. I firmly hope that the 2002 Lenten period will prove to be a step in the right direction along the path of this mission given by Christ to all his disciples but in a very special way to the youth of today.

SALT OF THE EARTH

On the mountainside at Capernaum, Jesus said to his disciples: *“You are the salt of the earth. But what if the salt goes flat? How can you restore its flavour? Then it is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot”* (Mt. 5:13-14). Pope John Paul is repeating these same words to today’s youth... One of the main properties of salt, as we all know, is to season food, to give it taste and flavour. According to the Pope, this image of salt reminds us of our baptism when our whole being was deeply transformed because it was seasoned with the new life of Christ. This salt which keeps our Christian identity from degenerating when as today we are overwhelmed by a heavily secularised society, this salt is the baptismal grace which gave us new birth to make us live in Christ and enable us to respond to his call, in order to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God. Writing to the Roman Christians, Saint Paul urged them to show clearly that their way of living and thinking was different from that of their contemporaries: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect”* (Rm. 12:2).

KEEPING THE FAITH

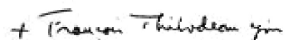
For a long time salt was also used to preserve food. As the salt of the earth, Christ's disciples are charged with preserving the faith which they have received and passing it on intact to others. People today are being challenged in a special way with to keep safe the deposit of faith. The Holy Father instantly urges us to discover our Christian roots, learn about the Church's history, deepen our knowledge of the spiritual legacy which has been passed on to us, and follow in the footsteps of the witnesses and masters who have gone before us. It is only by our fidelity to keeping God's commandments, and to our Covenant which Christ sealed with his blood poured out on the Cross that we shall be the apostles and witnesses of the new millennium.

SEEKING THE ABSOLUTE

It is proper to the human condition and especially to youth, to seek for the Absolute and for meaning of life and fullness of existence. We must not be satisfied with lower standards, in our search after great ideals. "Do not let yourselves be dispirited by those who are disillusioned with life and have grown deaf to the deepest and most authentic desires of their heart. You are right to be disappointed with hollow entertainment and passing fads, and with aiming at too little in life. If you have an ardent desire for the Lord you will steer clear of the mediocrity and conformism in our society." [*Salt and Light: Preparing for World Youth Day 2002 in Toronto* (Handbook), Ottawa, Novalis, 2001, p. 10.]

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

On the mountainside again, Jesus said to his disciples: "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden*" (Mt. 5:14). For many who first heard Jesus, just as for us, the symbol of light evokes the desire for truth and the thirst for the fullness of knowledge which are imprinted deep within each human being. When the light fades or vanishes altogether, we no longer see things as they really are. In the heart of the night we can feel frightened and insecure, and we impatiently await the coming of the light of dawn. And the Pope adds: "*Dear young people it is up to you to be the watchmen of the morning who announce the coming of the sun who is the risen Christ!*" [Handbook, pp. 10-11]



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

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