

Summer Is Time for Joy and Love

Following is the text of a recent papal address given at a general audience.

Today I wish to turn my thought to youth. It is holiday time. Young people and children are free from the commitments of school and university and dedicate this period to rest. I wish to greet cordially all the young people and children who are resting, and I hope that the holidays will bring them a new lease of the energy that they need for the new year of studies. Rest belongs not only to the human order, but also to the divine program of human life. He rests well who works well and, in his turn, he who works well must rest well.



My thought goes, in particular, to those numerous groups of young people who make their summer rest coincide with the deepening of their relationship with God, with the deepening of the spiritual life. I have known many of these groups of young people personally since the time of my preceding service as a priest and bishop in Poland. I have already been informed here of many other groups. Certainly, in various countries of Europe and of the world we meet with a very marked search for spiritual and religious values in the young. The fact that it is not possible to fill one's life only with materialistic contents and values seems to be felt very deeply by the young.

From this are derived aspirations and quests which can only be a source of comfort and hope for us. They bear witness to man, who wishes to live his life fully, to breathe his own human personality deeply, as it were. Life reduced to the one dimension — temporality, matter, the consumer mentality — brings forth contestations.

Significant for the circles of the young of whom I am thinking at this moment is the pursuit, especially at this period of the year, of closer contact with nature.

The mountain slopes, the woods, the lakes, the seashores draw immense crowds during summer. However for many groups of young people that rest which man finds within nature becomes a special occasion for a closer contact with God. And they find it again in the exuberant beauty of nature, which, throughout history, has become a source of religious inspiration for many spirits and many hearts. In this twofold encounter, they again find themselves, they again find their deeper "self," their inner self. Nature helps them to do so. Man's inner self becomes, in contact with nature, more transparent to man and more open to deep reflection and to the action of grace which waits for the inner absorption of the young heart in order to act more efficaciously.

Having been in contact with young groups of this kind for many years, I have noted that their spirituality rests on two sources which nourish youthful souls almost parallelly. One of them is Holy Scripture. The other is the liturgy. The reading of Holy Scripture with systematic reflection on its content, aiming at the revision of one's life, becomes a rich source to find oneself again and to renew the spirit of the community. And at the same time, the process of the liturgy of the Word, developed in various directions, leads by the simplest way to the Eucharist lived with the depth of young hearts and always at the same time within a community. Around the Eucharist, this community and all the ties that spring from it, take on new strength and depth: ties of comradeship, friendship and love, to which young hearts are particularly open in this period of life. The permanent presence of Christ, his closeness in the Eucharist, offer these ties a dimension of particular beauty and nobility.

The youthful circles and groups, to which I am referring at this moment, are usually full of real and youthful joy. I have sometimes admired how this joy and spontaneity went hand in hand with the love for order and discipline. This fact was already in itself a proof that man can be educated only from within, with the power of a spiritual ideal, by making him see the simple contours of truth and the aspect of true love in which Christ placed human life. I myself came back from these meetings more joyful and more rested

spiritually. The beauty of joy is as important for man as the beauty of love.

The special expression of this joy is always song. Today there still resound in my ears the groups of young people singing who have given rise to the new style of singing or rather of religious songs of today. This phenomenon would deserve a special analysis.

There are also groups that like to go on pilgrimage. Modern man, more than in previous generations, is a man on his way. This applies particularly to the young. These groups of young pilgrims (in the strict sense of the word) are many in number. The pilgrimage often becomes the completion of a tourist trip, even though its character is different. I am thinking particularly of a pilgrimage which starts out from Warsaw to Jasna Gora every year, at the beginning of August. Young people make up the vast majority of the pilgrims, who walk for ten days (sometimes in difficult conditions) covering about 300 kilometers. Among these young pilgrims, there is a group, more numerous every year, formed by young Italians.

A few weeks back there took place in Rome the fourth Symposium, organized by the Council of European Bishops' Conferences on the subject of The Young and Faith.

The more than 70 prelates who represented the bishops of Europe analysed thoroughly the situation of the young today with regard to the faith, and the main characteristics of their religious outlook. Although not concealing a certain concern about some attitudes of rejection of some traditional values on the part of the young, the bishops stressed that the young people of today are discovering the Church more and more as a community of faith; they approach the Gospel and the person of Jesus Christ with particular commitment; they feel deeply the value of meditation and prayer.

Let all that I have said be a supplement to that central theme with which the representatives of the bishops conferences of nearly the whole of Europe dealt in June. Let these words of mine be a proof to all the young, especially those who are seeking God during the holidays, that the pope remembers them, and asks Christ for the beauty of joy and the beauty of love for them.



Feast of Assumption

This painting by Federigo Baroccio is titled Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the feast day of which is celebrated today, Aug. 15. (RNS)

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