

*COLOGNE, Germany, AUG. 18, 2005: The address Benedict XVI on the bank or the Rhine.*

Dear Young People,

I am delighted to meet you here in Cologne on the banks of the Rhine! You have come from various parts of Germany, Europe and the rest of the world as pilgrims in the footsteps of the Magi. Following their route, you too want to find Jesus. Like them, you have begun this journey in order to contemplate, both personally and with others, the face of God revealed by the Child in the manger. Like yourselves, I too have set out to join you in kneeling before the consecrated white Host in which the eyes of faith recognize the real presence of the Savior of the world. Together, we will continue to meditate on the theme of this World Youth Day: "We Have Come To Worship Him" (*Mt 2:2*).

With great joy I welcome you, dear young people. You have come here from near and far, walking the streets of the world and the pathways of life. My particular greeting goes to those who, like the Magi, have come from the East. You are the representatives of so many of our brothers and sisters who are waiting, without realizing it, for the star to rise in their skies and lead them to Christ, Light of the Nations, in whom they will find the fullest response to their hearts' deepest desires. I also greet with affection those among you who have not been baptized, and those of you who do not yet know Christ or have not yet found a home in his Church. Pope John Paul II had invited you in particular to come to this gathering; I thank you for deciding to come to Cologne. Some of you might perhaps describe your adolescence in the words with which Edith Stein, who later lived in the Carmel in Cologne, described her own: "I consciously and deliberately lost the habit of praying". During these days, you can once again have a moving experience of prayer as dialogue with God, the God who we know loves us and whom we in turn wish to love. To all of you I appeal: Open wide your hearts to God! Let yourselves be surprised by Christ! Let him have "the right of free speech" during these days! Open the doors of your freedom to his merciful love! Share your joys and pains with Christ, and let him enlighten your minds with his light and touch your hearts with his grace. In these days blessed with sharing and joy, may you have a liberating experience of the Church as the place where God's merciful love reaches out to all people. In the Church and through the Church you will meet Christ, who is waiting for you.

Today, as I arrived in Cologne to take part with you in the Twentieth World Youth Day, I naturally recall with deep gratitude the Servant of God so greatly loved by us all, Pope John Paul II, who had the inspired idea of calling young people from all over the world to join in celebrating Christ, the one Redeemer of the human race. Thanks to the profound dialogue which developed over more than twenty years between the Pope and young people, many of them were able to deepen their faith, forge bonds of communion, develop a love for the Good News of salvation in Christ and a desire to proclaim it throughout the world. That great Pope understood the challenges faced by young people today and, as a sign of his trust in them, he did not hesitate to spur them on to

be courageous heralds of the Gospel and intrepid builders of the civilization of truth, love and peace.

Today it is my turn to take up this extraordinary spiritual legacy bequeathed to us by Pope John Paul II. He loved you – you realized that and you returned his love with all your youthful enthusiasm. Now all of us together have to put his teaching into practice. It is this commitment which has brought us here to Cologne, as pilgrims in the footsteps of the Magi. According to tradition, the names of the Magi in Greek were Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar. Matthew, in his Gospel, tells of the question, which burned in the hearts of the Magi: “Where is the infant king of the Jews?” (*Mt 2:2*). It was in order to search for him that they set out on the long journey to Jerusalem. This was why they withstood hardships and sacrifices, and never yielded to discouragement or the temptation to give up and go home. Now that they were close to their goal, they had no other question than this. We too have come to Cologne because in our hearts we have the same urgent question that prompted the Magi from the East to set out on their journey, even if it is differently expressed. It is true that today we are no longer looking for a king, but we are concerned for the state of the world and we are asking: “Where do I find standards to live by, what are the criteria that govern responsible co-operation in building the present and the future of our world? On whom can I rely? To whom shall I entrust myself? Where is the One who can offer me the response capable of satisfying my heart’s deepest desires?” The fact that we ask questions like these means that we realize our journey is not over until we meet the One who has the power to establish that universal Kingdom of justice and peace to which all people aspire but which they are unable to build by themselves. Asking such questions also means searching for Someone who can neither deceive nor be deceived, and who therefore can offer a certainty so solid that we can live for it and, if need be, even die for it.

Dear friends, when questions like these appear on the horizon of life, we must be able to make the necessary choices. It is like finding ourselves at a crossroads: which direction do we take? The one prompted by the passions or the one indicated by the star which shines in your conscience? The Magi heard the answer: “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet” (*Mt 2:5*), and, enlightened by these words, they chose to press forward to the very end. From Jerusalem they went on to Bethlehem. In other words, they went from the word which showed them where to find the King of the Jews whom they were seeking, all the way to the end, to an encounter with the King who was at the same time the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Those words are also spoken for us. We too have a choice to make. If we think about it, this is precisely our experience when we share in the Eucharist. For in every Mass the liturgy of the Word introduces us to our participation in the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ and hence introduces us to the Eucharistic Meal, to union with Christ. Present on the altar is the One whom the Magi saw lying in the manger: Christ, the living Bread who came down from heaven to give life to the world, the true Lamb who gives his own life for the salvation of humanity. Enlightened by the Word, it is in Bethlehem – the “House of Bread” – that we can always encounter the inconceivable

greatness of a God who humbled himself even to appearing in a manger, to giving himself as food on the altar.

We can imagine the awe, which the Magi experienced before the Child in swaddling clothes. Only faith enabled them to recognize in the face of that Child the King, whom they were seeking, the God to whom the star had guided them. In him, crossing the abyss between the finite and the infinite, the visible and the invisible, the Eternal entered time, the Mystery became known by entrusting himself to us in the frail body of a small child. "The Magi are filled with awe by what they see; heaven on earth and earth in heaven; man in God and God in man; they see enclosed in a tiny body the One whom the entire world cannot contain" (*Saint Peter Chrysologus*, Sermon 160, No. 2). In these days, during this "Year of the Eucharist", we will turn with the same awe to Christ present in the Tabernacle of mercy, in the Sacrament of the Altar. Dear young people, the happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy has a name and a face: it is Jesus of Nazareth, hidden in the Eucharist. Only he gives the fullness of life to humanity! With Mary, say your own "yes" to God, for he wishes to give himself to you. I repeat today what I said at the beginning of my Pontificate: "If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation" (*Homily at the Mass of Inauguration*, 24 April 2005). Be completely convinced of this: Christ takes from you nothing that is beautiful and great, but brings everything to perfection for the glory of God, the happiness of men and women, and the salvation of the world.

In these days I encourage you to commit yourselves without reserve to serving Christ, whatever the cost. The encounter with Jesus Christ will allow you to experience in your hearts the joy of his living and life-giving presence, and enable you to bear witness to it before others. Let your presence in this city be the first sign and proclamation of the Gospel, thanks to the witness of your actions and your joy. Let us raise our hearts in a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Father for the many blessings he has given us and for the gift of faith which we will celebrate together, making it manifest to the world from this land in the heart of Europe, a Europe which owes so much to the Gospel and its witnesses down the centuries.

And now I shall go as a pilgrim to the Cathedral of Cologne, to venerate the relics of the holy Magi who left everything to follow the star, which was guiding them to the Savior of the human race. You too, dear young people, have already had, or will have, the opportunity to make the same pilgrimage. These relics are only the poor and frail sign of what those men were and what they experienced so many centuries ago. The relics direct us towards God himself: it is he who, by the power of his grace, grants to weak human beings the courage to bear witness to him before the world. By inviting us to venerate the mortal remains of the martyrs and saints, the Church does not forget that, in the end, these are indeed just human bones, but they are bones that belonged to individuals touched by the transcendent power of God. The relics of the saints are

traces of that invisible but real presence which sheds light upon the shadows of the world and reveals the Kingdom of Heaven in our midst. They cry out with us and for us: "Maranatha!" – "Come Lord Jesus!" My dear friends, I make these words my farewell, and I invite you to the Saturday evening Vigil. I shall see you then!