

Message from the Holy Father in preparation for World Youth Day 2008

Wednesday 4 July, St Peter's Square, Rome



Dear young people,

One year from now we will meet at World Youth Day in Sydney! I want to encourage you to prepare well for this marvellous celebration of the faith, which will be spent in the company of your bishops, priests, Religious, youth leaders and one another. Enter fully into the life of your parishes and participate enthusiastically in diocesan events! In this way you will be equipped spiritually to experience new depths of understanding of all that we believe when we gather in Sydney next July.

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth" (*Acts 1:8*). As you know, these words of Jesus form the theme of World Youth Day 2008. How the Apostles felt upon hearing these words, we can only imagine, but their confusion was no doubt tempered with a sense of awe and of eager anticipation for the coming of the Spirit. United in prayer with Mary and the others gathered in the Upper Room (cf *Acts 1:14*), they experienced the true power of the Spirit, whose presence transforms uncertainty, fear, and division into purpose, hope and communion.

A sense of awe and eager anticipation also describes how we feel as we make preparations to meet in Sydney. For many of us, this will be a long journey. Yet Australia and its people evoke images of a warm welcome and wondrous beauty, of an ancient aboriginal history and a multitude of vibrant cities and communities. I know that already the ecclesial and government authorities, together with numerous young Australians, are working very hard to ensure an exceptional experience for us all. I offer them my heartfelt thanks.

World Youth Day is much more than an event. It is a time of deep spiritual renewal, the fruits of which benefit the whole of society. Young pilgrims are filled with the desire to pray, to be nourished by Word and Sacrament, to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, who illuminates the wonder of the human soul and shows the way to be "the image and instrument of the love which flows from Christ" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 33).

It is this love - Christ's love - for which the world yearns. Thus you are called by so many to "be his witnesses".

Some of you have friends with little real purpose in their lives, perhaps caught up in a futile search for endless new experiences. Bring them to World Youth Day too! In fact, I have noticed that against the tide of secularism many young people are rediscovering the satisfying quest for authentic beauty, goodness and truth. Through your witness you help them in their search for the Spirit of God. Be courageous in that witness! Strive to spread Christ's guiding light, which gives purpose to all life, making lasting joy and happiness possible for everyone.

My dear young people, until we meet in Sydney, may the Lord protect you all. Let us entrust these preparations to Our Lady of the Southern Cross, Help of Christians. With her, let us pray: "Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love".