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## Benedict XVI's Legacy to Youth

### Dziedzictwo Benedykta XVI dla młodzieży

**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to explore the enduring legacy of Pope Benedict XVI in the context of World Youth Days through an analysis of five profound “invitations” he extended to young people. This article begins with an examination of how the Pontiff recognized the Church’s genuine “aliveness” and “youthfulness” in the Lord. It then looks at how he implored young individuals to manifest God’s presence, particularly in challenging circumstances or in places where faith might appear to be absent. The article goes on to discuss how the Pope encouraged the youth to respond to this call by opening their hearts to Christ, dispelling fear, and embracing Christian hope. In essence, young people were motivated to engage in active listening, prioritize moments of silence, make courageous resolute decisions, experience joy, and maintain trust. This article concludes with a demonstration of how these five “invitations” continue to serve as a perpetual reminder for younger generations to immerse themselves in the Word of God, seek contemplative moments, be willing to take calculated risks, nurture enduring happiness, and live with hope. Pope Benedict XVI’s legacy remains a poignant reminder and challenge for the youth as they strive to attain authenticity in their identity and professed faith. Though the Pontiff passed away in 2022, his teachings persist in inspiring and guiding young individuals as they cultivate a hopeful faith and find unwavering support within the Church to become joyful witnesses to Christ in the world. The author intends to shed light on the enduring significance of these teachings and their continued impact on the younger generations.

**KEYWORDS:** Benedict XVI, legacy, youth, World Youth Days, witness, God, Scripture, silence, risk, trust, faith, hope, joy and love

**ABSTRAKT:** Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu zbadanie trwałości dziedzictwa Benedykta XVI w kontekście Światowych Dni Młodzieży poprzez analizę pięciu poważnych „zaproszeń”, które papież skierował do młodych ludzi. Autor rozpoczyna artykuł od przedstawienia, w jaki sposób papież rozpoznał prawdziwą „żywołność” i „młodość” Kościoła w Panu, a następnie, jak wzywa młodych ludzi do manifestowania Bożej

obecności, zwłaszcza w trudnych okolicznościach lub w miejscach, w których wiara może wydawać się nieobecna. Następnie autor omawia, w jaki sposób papież zachęcał młodzież do odpowiedzi na to wezwanie poprzez otwarcie serc na Chrystusa, wyzbycie się strachu i przyjęcie chrześcijańskiej nadziei. Benedykt XVI motywował młodych ludzi zasadniczo do aktywnego słuchania, uznawania wartości chwil ciszy, podejmowania odważnych i stanowczych decyzji, doświadczania radości i podtrzymywania zaufania. W ostatniej części artykułu autor pokazuje, w jaki sposób pięć „zaproszeń” służy jako nieustanne przypomnienie młodszemu pokoleniom, aby zanurzyli się w Słowie Bożym, szukali chwil kontemplacji, byli gotowi do podjęcia skalkulowanego ryzyka, pielęgnowali trwałe szczęście i żyli z nadzieją. Spuścizna papieża Benedykta XVI pozostaje poruszającym przypomnieniem i wyzwaniem dla młodzieży, która stara się osiągnąć autentyczność w swojej tożsamości i wyznawanej wierze. Choć papież odszedł w 2022 roku, jego nauczanie nie przestaje inspirować i prowadzić młodych ludzi, którzy kultywują pełną nadziei wiarę i znajdują niezachwiane wsparcie w Kościele, aby stali się radosnymi świadkami Chrystusa w świecie. Autor zamierza rzucić światło na nieprzemijającą wartość papieskiego nauczania i na jego wpływ na młodsze pokolenia.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Benedykt XVI, dziedzictwo, młodzież, Światowe Dni Młodzieży, świadectwo, świadek, Bóg, Pismo Święte, milczenie, ryzyko, zaufanie, wiara, nadzieja, radość i miłość

## Introduction

When one reflects on Benedict XVI's engagement with the youth during his papacy, it becomes evident that the World Youth Days emerged as an opportunity for extraordinary and transformative experiences for young people from all corners of the globe. His participation in these events helped the Church as a community of faith to give reason for her hope and to spread it in the world (see 1 Pet 3:15; Acts 1:8). In view of a contemporary zeitgeist that sometimes seems to ignore God's presence,<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict emphasized love, hope, and charity above all else. These values hold a central position in his three encyclicals and magisterial teaching. He does not shy away from grappling with challenging aspects of faith, while proposing a fresh Christian vision in that he uses terms like 'God *and* the world,' 'salt of the earth,' and 'light of the world.' For Pope Benedict, each conversation or interaction presents a providential opportunity to create a space for the Church's consolidation and renewal, especially among the younger generation of the faithful.

<sup>1</sup> The expression of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) – *etiamsi daremus non esse Deum* (as though God did not exist) – is surprisingly congruent with our contemporary context. See J.-P. Heering, *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian Religion: A Study of His Work De veritate religionis christianae 1640*, transl. J.C. Grayson, Leiden–Boston, MA 2004.

In his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, Pope Benedict XVI extends a heartfelt invitation to Christians worldwide, encouraging them to celebrate, reflect upon, and embrace their cherished faith.<sup>2</sup> Young people, who joyfully embody this call, are exemplified in his engaging discourses at the World Youth Days and during papal audiences. The Pontiff emphasises that Christian faith surpasses a mere collection of beliefs; rather, it should be intricately woven into every aspect of personal and ecclesial life. On a particular occasion, he affirmed that “we live faith, not as a hypothesis, but as the certainty on which our life is based.”<sup>3</sup> It is a faith that matures and finds expression through one’s way of living. He draws inspiration from biblical figures such as Abraham and Mary, along with more contemporary examples like Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901–1925) and Chiara Badano (1971–1990) amongst others, whose lives exemplify the profound impact of living their faith to the fullest.<sup>4</sup>

The call to embrace a prophetic faith during challenging times brings to mind the remarkable Protestant theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), whose prison letters before the end of the last World War carry immense power in this context.<sup>5</sup> Confronted with such adversity, Bonhoeffer wrote that “the only way to be honest is to recognise that we have to live in the world as though God did not exist . . . however, despite all this . . . the God who makes us live in this

<sup>2</sup> See Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, 2012. For an extensive treatment of the Apostolic Letter, see M. Cozzoli, *Pensare, professare, vivere la fede: nel solco della lettera apostolica “Porta Fidei”*, Città del Vaticano 2012. See also G. Cucci, *La fede è un valore per l’uomo moderno?*, “La Civiltà Cattolica” 163/4 (2012), pp. 553–564; D. Paoletti, *La quaestio fidei sfida prioritaria oggi. Linee per una riproposta della fede cristiana come pienezza d’umanità*, “Miscellanea francescana” 3–4 (2012), pp. 447–464; E. Scognamiglio, *Perché un anno della fede? Rileggiamo la lettera apostolica Porta fidei*, “Asprenas” 60/1–2 (2013), pp. 9–36.

<sup>3</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, eds. S.O. Horn, V. Pfnür, transl. H. Taylor, San Francisco 2005, pp. 19–20.

<sup>4</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day (15 March 2012)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20120315\\_youth.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120315_youth.html) [access: 26.05.2023]. Faith in this sense requires a personal assent; however, it has a communitarian and an ecclesial dimension, too. See G. Lorizio, *Teologia fondamentale*, vol. 2: *Fondamenti*, Roma 2005, p. 373. On Frassati and Badano, see J. D’Cunha, *The Lived Theology of an Exemplary Youth: A Biographical Study of Pier Giorgio Frassati with the View to Nurture the Integral Growth of Youth*, Rome 2007; L. Frassati, *Mio fratello Pier Giorgio, una vita mai spenta*, Torino 2010; M. Magrini, *Thérèse e Chiara insieme sulla piccola via dell’amore*, Cinisello Balsamo 2013.

<sup>5</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, London 2001. See also F. Ferrario, *Mondo adulto e teologia della croce. L’immagine di Dio nelle lettere dal carcere di Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, “Protestantesimo” 61/3 (2006), pp. 245–256; J. Wiersma, *The Grotian Moment: The ‘pièce de résistance’ in Bonhoeffer’s letters and papers from prison*, “Grotiana” 12 (1991), pp. 62–77.

world without using Him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing.”<sup>6</sup> In line with these thoughts, Pope Benedict emphasises the significance of new evangelization in advancing the Christian faith. This endeavour requires creating a culture where faith can flourish, develop, and resonate. Our world stands at a critical juncture where individuals, diverse ideologies, and cultures must engage in honest discussions about the profound meaning of humanity in light of the Infinite. Faced with these realities, the Church’s mission lies in faithfully serving humanity and embodying God’s presence in the world, illuminating and proclaiming the Good News in a world desirous of guidance and hope.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI’s inspiring vision revolves around referring to the Church as “alive” and “young”!<sup>8</sup> Beyond being a mere source of light for humanity (*lumen gentium* reflecting Christ’s light) and facilitating salvation, the

<sup>6</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, op. cit., p. 118. See also G. Cavalleri, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: teologo e martire del Nazismo*, Milano 2016; C.M. Parisi, *La Stellvertretung in Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Cristo e la condizione dell’uomo chiamato a esistere con/per gli altri*, Roma 2016.

<sup>7</sup> See E. Borgman, *The Intrinsically ‘Weak’ Presence of the God about Whom Christianity Speaks*, [in:] *What does Europe Believe In*, eds. T. Dienberg, T. Eggensperger, U. Engel, Münster 2010, pp. 120–129. This theme also justifies Edward Schillebeeckx’s pioneering work entitled *Church: The Human Story of God*, London 1990. See also B. Przewozny, *Church as the Sacrament of the Unity of all Mankind in “Lumen Gentium” and “Gaudium et Spes” and in Semmelroth, Schillebeeckx and Rabner*, Roma 1979.

<sup>8</sup> See Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass of Inauguration on 24 April 2005*: “The Church is alive and the Church is young. She holds within herself the future of the world and therefore shows each of us the way towards the future.” [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20050424\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html) [access: 26.05.2023]. See also Benedict XVI, *Address at the Celebration Welcoming the Young People. Apostolic Journey to Cologne on the Occasion of the XX World Youth Day. Cologne – Poller Wiesen, 18 August 2005*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/august/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20050818\\_youth-celebration.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/august/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050818_youth-celebration.html) [access: 26.05.2023], where he emphasised with the young people present: “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).” By these words, he was highlighting and stating several fundamental issues: 1) Jesus Christ is the focus and fulcrum of every believer’s life – faith, hope, love, ideals, generosity, positive enthusiasm, youthful energy. God became human in Jesus, so that human beings can have the possibility to become like God, created as they are in his image and likeness; 2) his belief in youth as an ongoing forward process of discovering oneself, one’s infinite potentials and possibilities (Jesus will take nothing away from you). 3) Knowing oneself to enhance one’s personality.

Church's primary purpose is for believers to comprehend themselves as being "in" God. This proposition sets them apart from others. Amidst a dynamic and challenging landscape shaped by secularism, globalization, technology, and economic uncertainties, the Pope stressed the Church's responsibility to safeguard human dignity—the precious creation of the Creator—within all human endeavours.<sup>9</sup> In this visionary perspective, young people hold a special place within the Church, conveying the "hope" of God to humanity and embodying a vibrant Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit's strength.<sup>10</sup>

Research focused on the relationship between Pope Benedict and the youth appears to be limited in comparison to the more prevalent exploration of various theological and philosophical themes that characterized his extensive career. These themes notably encompass aspects such as faith and reason, postmodernism and relativism, culture and faith, the theology of the Church, liturgy, scripture, ecumenism, dialogue with non-Christian religions, and moral theology. To delve into this underrepresented area of study, scholars and researchers may find valuable primary sources in collections of the Pope's discourses directed towards the youth.<sup>11</sup> There are also secondary sources available for consultation, including books authored by individuals such as Federico Lombardi and Ciro García.<sup>12</sup> A selection of articles by renowned scholars like John L. Allen, Riccardo Cascioli, Catalin Dioguardi, Lorenzo Leuzzi, Mauro Parolini, and Riccardo Pedrizzi can provide supplementary insights into this subject matter.

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The fundamental text comes from Jesus saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

<sup>9</sup> See Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, no. 4; J. Joblin, *Face à l'incroyance: «Évangéliser le social»*, "Gregorianum" 94/4 (2013), pp. 815–832.

<sup>10</sup> We must mention here the decision of Pope Benedict to institute the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation, which was declared during the celebration of the First Vespers of the Solemnity of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. The Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et Semper*, dated 21<sup>st</sup> September 2010 marked the official launch of the same Council. See R. Fisichella, *The New Evangelization. Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*, Leominster, UK 2012, pp. 1–7.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict XVI, *Tutti i discorsi di Benedetto XVI durante la XX Giornata mondiale della gioventù: Colonia 2005*, Roma 2005; Benedetto XVI, *In dialogo con i giovani*, Città del Vaticano 2006; Benedict XVI, *Niente è impossibile per chi si fida di Dio e si affida a Dio, guardate alla giovane Maria! Incontro con i giovani italiani a Loreto (1–2 settembre 2007)*, Città del Vaticano 2007.

<sup>12</sup> F. Lombardi et al., *I giovani di Benedetto. Una rilettura del pensiero di Ratzinger e il mondo giovanile*, Torino 2019; C. García, *La nueva evangelización en las JMJ de Benedicto XVI: Colonia – Sidney – Madrid*, Burgos 2011.

These resources collectively offer a foundation for the examination and analysis of Pope Benedict's interactions and engagement with the youth.<sup>13</sup>

This article explores five invitations presented by Pope Benedict, encouraging young people and the entire Church to earnestly “seek” and “find” in Christ the truth that guides them and fulfils their deepest longings. With poignant words from his homily at the beginning of his Pontificate on Sunday, 24 April 2005, the Pontiff affirms that “Christ takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen.”<sup>14</sup> The invitation to open wide the doors to Christ becomes a compelling proposal for young people and all who have encountered him, urging them to overcome fear and embrace the hope that provides identity and stability. In this context, the enduring impact of Pope Benedict XVI on young people is encapsulated in five profound “invitations” that echo in his speeches addressed to the youth and the world: (i) to listen and become familiar with the Word of God; (ii) to seek silence; (iii) to take risks; (iv) to cultivate perpetual joy; and (v) to live in hope. Each section will be further divided into sub-points that elucidate the essence of each individual invitation, shedding light on Pope Benedict XVI's profound wisdom and teachings.

<sup>13</sup> J.L. Allen Jr., *New Pope takes Case to 1 Million Youth*, “National Catholic Reporter” 41/38 (2005), pp. 12–13; R. Cascioli, *Perché Benedetto XVI spera nei giovani*, “La Nuova Bussola Quotidiana” 8 Feb (2013), <https://lanuovabq.it/it/pdf/perche-benedetto-xvi-spera-nei-giovani> [access: 26.05.2023]; C. Dioguardi, *Benedetto XVI e i giovani. Un dialogo di fede e speranza*, Porta di Servizio 4 Jan (2023), <https://www.portadiservizio.it/2023/01/04/benedetto-xvi-e-i-giovani-un-dialogo-di-fede-e-speranza/> [access: 26.05.2023]; L. Leuzzi (ed.), *La carità intellettuale. Percorsi culturali per un nuovo umanesimo. Scritti in onore di Benedetto XVI*, Città del Vaticano 2007; M. Parolini, *Papa Benedetto XVI: Educare i giovani alla giustizia e alla pace*, <https://www.mauroparolini.it/papa-benedetto-xvi-educare-i-giovani-alla-giustizia-e-alla-pace/> [access: 26.05.2023]; R. Pedrizzi, *Benedetto XVI ed i giovani. Riflessione sul pontificato di Joseph Ratzinger*, 5 Jan 2023, <https://ladiscussione.com/215376/societa/benedetto-xvi-ed-i-giovani/> [access: 26.05.2023].

<sup>14</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass Imposition of the Pallium and Conferral of the Fisherman's Ring for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome*, St. Peter's Square, 24 April 2005, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20050424\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

## “I urge you to become familiar with the Bible”

The first invitation extended to the youth revolves around the profound maturation of faith which can be acquired through attentive listening to the Word of God.<sup>15</sup> Pope Benedict emphasises that when hearts are receptive and open to the Word of God, they expand and flourish. Young people are warmly encouraged to joyfully and reverentially “encounter” the Word of God.<sup>16</sup> In Benedict’s perspective, the Word is not a mere concept but a living person with whom one can form a personal relationship that leads into the depths of one’s being.<sup>17</sup> To “become familiar with the Word of God” signifies an openness of the human soul to receive the Divine with complete free will. It entails knowing the Word so intimately that there is no distinction between one’s own words and God’s. As the Word becomes increasingly familiar, it illuminates the heart, shaping and fulfilling the life of the person who embraces it. Pope Benedict XVI shared with his audiences key ideas related to the act of listening to the Word. These ideas implicitly serving as a pedagogy of faith highlight the transformative power originating from God’s Word and offer invaluable insights to enrich one’s spiritual journey.

*The Word as light for our path* is the first idea that echoes in the Pope’s emphasis on acknowledging the significance of listening to the Word. At the outset of the Christian life, an essential realization dawns upon individuals—the understanding of being called and bestowed with inherent dignity. In this divine

<sup>15</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message to Youth of the World on the Occasion of the 21<sup>st</sup> World Youth Day (9 April 2006)*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20060222\\_youth.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20060222_youth.html) [access: 26.05.2023]. This invitation recalls the first words of the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation of Vatican Council II: “*Dei verbum religiose audiens et fidenter proclamans.*”

<sup>16</sup> A recent study which sheds light on the power of the Word of God in Ratzinger’s life and works is that by Stefano Rossi, *La Parola di Dio nella vita e nel ministero del presbitero nel magistero di Papa Benedetto XVI*, Roma 2013. See also S.A. La Terra, *La Parola di Dio e l’esperienza spirituale dei giovani nei messaggi delle Giornate Mondiali della Gioventù del XXI secolo*, Roma 2014.

<sup>17</sup> This is a theme close to Benedict XVI’s heart. See for instance J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, transl. J.R. Foster, San Francisco 2004, pp. 204–205. A word has its beginning in the depths of a person (or God), from the depths of one’s mind and heart and then physically from the lungs, up to the vocal chords, the mouth, tongue and lips. So, a word is the very intimacy of the speaker. It is the full expression of them who speak. When one becomes personally familiar with the Word, it transpires God within him. 2 Tim 3:16: All Scripture is inspired by God. The original word for inspired is *theopneustos*, which can be passive (passive inspiration, inspired by God) or middle (= kind of reflexive), this active inspiration; it breathes God back to the reader!

encounter, God takes the initiative to call, and the person, especially a young person, becomes an attentive listener. This divine outreach, emanating from Benedict's goodness, calls for a heartfelt response, one that is freely and generously given. Pope Benedict XVI posed a significant challenge to young people: to listen attentively/closely and be receptive to the God who chooses not to remain hidden but to reveal himself and to speak.<sup>18</sup> To illustrate this point, the Pope draws upon the biblical verse from Psalm 119 [118] v. 105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Emphasizing the importance of listening and openness on the journey of faith, he underscores that the Word of God holds extraordinary significance. Unlike any other word, it is infused with ultimate truth, leading those who embrace it to fulfilment (see John 4:14; 6:35; 8:12; 10:10). This divine Word becomes a beacon of light for seekers yearning to quench their thirst for God, guiding them towards the best path suited for their lives. When one has (had) the privilege of listening to the truth spoken by God himself, one can no longer heed erroneous advice of the ungodly world (see Ps 1:1). Pope Benedict underscores the necessity and urgency of attentively listening to the Word, recognizing its life-changing and transformative power in the lives of believers.

This moves Benedict to speak of an *urgency to embrace the Word*, which means allowing the Word of God to take possession of oneself. Pope Benedict explains that it is not enough just to know the Word; there is a need to 'befriend' it as well. In this context, epistemology must be accompanied by affectivity, which translates into fostering a living relationship with God himself. Pope John Paul II, Benedict XVI's predecessor, commented on the psalm verse we mentioned earlier, stating that "the one who prays pours out one's thanks for the Law of God that one adopts as a lamp for one's steps in the often dark path of life."<sup>19</sup> This is why young people should with "absolute priority" become acquainted with the Word, seeking guidance and illumination in their journey and decision-making. Scripture serves as the fountain that can quench the thirst of young hearts and provide solace. Pope Benedict's intention was to inspire young individuals to prioritise their connection with the Word of God by reading and praying with the Bible.

This in turn empowers the youth to *courageously propose the Word to others*. Engaging with the Word inspires individuals to establish connections and influence others. The invitation to "be familiar with the Bible" becomes more

<sup>18</sup> See Second Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, no. 1 as well as in chapters Four and Five.

<sup>19</sup> John Paul II, *General Audience, Wednesday 14 November 2001*, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_20011114.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20011114.html) [access: 26.05.2023].



meaningful in our world, where Christians, instead of exercising an *assuming* faith, must actively *propose and invite* others to encounter Christ anew. Paolo Asolan (1967–), an expert in pastoral theology, asserts that the idea of a “world without faith” greatly influenced Pope Benedict’s reflections and pastoral decisions.<sup>20</sup> This perspective is clearly evident in the address he delivered during an ecclesial convention in Rome: “Faith must never be *presupposed* but *proposed*. This is just how it is. Faith is not preserved in the world by itself, it is not automatically passed on to the human heart, but must always be proclaimed.”<sup>21</sup> The foundations of faith rest on the Word of God. Without the Word, there can be no faith. This is also affirmed by *Dei Verbum*, which proclaims that the Holy Council *listens* to the Word of God with awe and *proclaims* it with trust. It is in this context that we must understand the invitation “to be familiar with the Word.” A similar reality is expressed at the beginning of the Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*:

It often happens that Christians are more concerned for the social, cultural and political consequences of their commitment, continuing to think of the faith as a self-evident presupposition for life in society. In reality, not only can this presupposition no longer be taken for granted, but it is often openly denied. Whereas in the past it was possible to recognise a unitary cultural matrix, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of the faith and the values inspired by it, today this no longer seems to be the case in large swathes of society, because of a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people.<sup>22</sup>

Pope Benedict emphasises *the need to rediscover the power of the Word*.<sup>23</sup> He appreciated the evocation of the sense of God’s mystery, “captured” in awe.

<sup>20</sup> P. Asolan, *La fede non è più un presupposto ovvio*, [in:] *Pensare, professare, vivere la fede: nel solco della lettera apostolica “Porta Fidei”*, ed. M. Cozzoli, Città del Vaticano 2012, p. 15. See also P. Asolan, *La dimensione pastorale della teologia e l’insegnamento della pastorale in teologia*, “Lateranum” 77/1 (2011), pp. 201–220.

<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address at the Opening of the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, 13 June 2011, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/june/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20110613\\_convegno-diocesi-rm.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110613_convegno-diocesi-rm.html) [access: 26.05.2023] [My emphasis].

<sup>22</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, no. 2. For a conclusive article about the question of the lack of faith in a world which is all the more secularised, see Y. Congar, *Une conclusion théologique à l’enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l’incroyance*, “La Vie Intellectuelle” 37 (1935), pp. 214–249.

<sup>23</sup> It seems that in this urge to push the youth towards the Word comes from Amos 8:11, “The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.”

This is crucial to awaken within oneself the hunger for the Word. The German Pope believes that it is vital for young people and Christians alike to “rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples.”<sup>24</sup> This encompasses a profound experience of encountering Christ face to face through the Bible. The focus here lies in God’s initiative to enter history and draw near to humanity. The power of the Word is illuminated in the Jewish concept of “dabar,” which can be translated as both “the word” and “the act” in itself.<sup>25</sup> In other words, what God speaks, He brings into existence; his proclamation becomes his action. Moreover, the ultimate power of the word is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, in whom God has conveyed everything, and there will be no other word than Him.<sup>26</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reinforces this, stating that “Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father’s one, perfect and unsurpassable Word.”<sup>27</sup>

Lastly, *the Holy Spirit helps us understand the Word*. The Pope also mentions the Holy Spirit, who guided the chosen people by inspiring the authors of the Sacred Scripture and also opened the hearts of believers to grasp its meaning.<sup>28</sup> The same Spirit is active in the celebration of the Eucharist when the priest, *in persona Christi*, pronounces the words of consecration, transforming the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, thereby nourishing the faithful. To continue our earthly pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of Heaven, we require sustenance from both the Word and the Bread of Eternal Life, as each is indispensable and complements the other (see John 6:35).

These reflections bring us to the second challenge: while listening to God speaking to us through Scripture, we must place great importance on listening itself as an essential part of this dialogue between God and humans. The

<sup>24</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, no. 3; see John 6:51.

<sup>25</sup> See G. Cappelletto, *Spiritualità dell’Antico Testamento: È in te, Signore, la sorgente della vita [Sal 36,10]*, Padova 2016 and also L. Fanin, *Spiritualità del Nuovo Testamento: un cammino per il credente*, Padova 2014.

<sup>26</sup> See Second Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican 2020, § 65.

<sup>28</sup> On the role of the Holy Spirit who was sent to reveal the mysteries to the hearts of the faithful and to teach all truth to the Church to the end of the ages, see J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, P. Hünermann, T. Söding, *God’s Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, San Francisco 2008, p. 69. See also G.R. Allison, A.J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, Nashville, TN 2020; Y. Congar, *Spirit of God: Short Writings on the Holy Spirit*, Washington, DC 2018; M.B. Yarnell, *Who Is the Holy Spirit?: Biblical Insights into His Divine Person*, ed. H.A. Thomas, Nashville, TN 2019.

pope once stated that “man in his own self, and of himself, cannot bring about this believing at all; it has of its nature the character of a dialogue. It is only because the depth of the soul the heart has been touched by God’s Word that the whole structure of spiritual powers is set in motion and unites in the Yes of believing.”<sup>29</sup> In the next part, we will discuss silence and contemplation as the most effective ways for a person to listen to God. Although Benedict rarely used the term ‘silence’ in his messages to the youth on particular world youth days, he refers to it in terms of a human heart that seeks to listen and understand.

### “Make space for silence”

A second invitation to young people is centred around choosing silence over all other activities. This advice has been reiterated on various occasions, but especially very clear on world communications day.<sup>30</sup> It is evident that the Pontiff considers silence to be a crucial aspect of dialogue and in line with Church tradition. Silence represents both openness and readiness, and it is as significant and essential as the Word itself. The Pope Emeritus held Saint Benedict (480–547), the Patron Saint of Europe in high regard, and drawing from his example and writings, he consistently emphasised that God is encountered in silence and tranquillity. In this section, we will emphasise the importance of silence, particularly in connection with proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the world. The Holy Spirit, the spirit of strength and witness, motivates young people to listen to and spread the Word of God. Reference will also be made to key features in this regard: interior silence, mutual communication, personal response, the silence of God and contemplation.

A central idea for Pope Benedict is the necessity of interior silence. He asserts that to grasp the significance of “making space for silence,” one must understand the vital relationship between silence and the Word. These two aspects of communication must be balanced, allowing for the possibility of alternating between them and integrating them harmoniously. The Pope explains that the quality of a dialogue and the bond between individuals depend on the relationship between words and silence. When words and silence

<sup>29</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the 40<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day*, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20120124\\_46th-world-communications-day\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120124_46th-world-communications-day_en.html) [access: 26.05.2023]. This is a very important theme for Pope Benedict as can be seen in the preface to the book by R. Sarah, N. Diat, *La forza del silenzio. Contro la dittatura del rumore*, Siena 2017, pp. 9–11.

complement each other, a genuine and authentic dialogue ensues. However, if words and silence are mutually exclusive, communication breaks down, leading to confusion or creating a cold atmosphere. Silence is vital in the lives of young people (and everyone) because it is in silence that God speaks, and they can truly hear His voice. For Benedict, silence is an integral element of communication and should not be overlooked. In other words, if silence is not given its proper space, words, even if meaningful, will not convey their true and full message. The Pope emphasises that in moments of silence, young people can better listen and understand themselves. Silence provides the space where new ideas are born and can develop. It is also the moment when one gains a clearer insight into what one needs to say, what one expects from others, and how one chooses to express oneself.

Silence leads to full communication. When young people choose silence, they create space for the other person to talk and express themselves. Opting for silence means being free and unattached to one's own words and ideas, allowing oneself to be questioned through conversation. This approach fosters reciprocal listening, ensuring that their relationships reflect human maturity. In fact, in silence, young people can observe the most authentic communication between two individuals who love each other. Gestures, facial expressions, and body language are all signs through which they reveal themselves to one another. The Pope also highlights other instances in the lives of youths communicated through silence, such as joy, anxiety, and pain. Silence becomes the deepest and most effective means of expressing these experiences. Moreover, silence leads to active communication, demanding sensitivity and the ability to listen, which often reveals the true measure and nature of the relationship. In an age inundated with never-ending streams of messages and information, silence becomes essential for discerning what is truly important from what is not or is of lesser significance. Deep reflection helps the youth discover connections between seemingly disconnected events, evaluate and analyze messages, and share informed and relevant opinions, contributing to an authentic body of shared wisdom. To make this possible, it is crucial to create the right environment, a kind of ecosystem that maintains a balance between silence, words, images, and sounds.

Silence leads to a personal response. Many young people engage in personal conversations with others, raising questions that demand/require/necessitate meaningful answers. This stream of questions reflects humanity's inherent restlessness. Many individuals search relentlessly, not settling for superficial truths, but seeking answers that can provide meaning and hope in their lives. Search engines, AI and social networks have become the starting point of

communication for those who seek advice, ideas, information, and answers. In our time, the internet has become the platform for posing questions and seeking responses – individuals are bombarded with questions that were never asked before and that they were not consciously aware of. For the youth to recognise and focus on the genuinely important questions, silence becomes a precious commodity that enables them to exercise true discernment amid the deluge of stimuli and information they receive. In a complex and diverse world of communication, many find themselves pondering fundamental questions: Who am I? What can I know? What ought I to do? What can I hope for? The search for a convincing answer opens up the possibility of profound dialogue.<sup>31</sup> This dialogue can occur not only through an exchange of words but also through a call to silent reflection. Such reflection often leads to more eloquent responses than hasty answers and allows seekers to delve deeper into their being, opening themselves to the knowledge that God has inscribed in their hearts. The Pope explained that silence is the path to profound answers. He drew attention to various websites, applications, and social networks that facilitate reflection and questioning, but, above all, lead individuals to silence and offer opportunities for prayer, meditation, and the sharing of the Word of God.<sup>32</sup>

Another idea to which Pope Benedict draws attention is *the silence of God*. Silence needs to be given importance because it is God himself who employs it. As revealed in Scripture, God also communicates without the use of words: just as the cross of Christ speaks volumes, so God does speak through silence. The silence of God, the experience of the distance of the almighty Father, is a pivotal stage in the earthly journey of the Son of God, the incarnate Word. God's silence extends and complements his earlier words. In these moments of darkness, he speaks through the mystery of his silence (*Verbum Domini*, 21). The eloquence of the love of God reaches its zenith when he fully gives himself, as seen on Holy Saturday when “the whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began.” The voice of God resounds, filling all of humanity with love.<sup>33</sup> The Pope explains

<sup>31</sup> See John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, no. 1.

<sup>32</sup> A recent book on the liturgy asserts that meeting God, being awake in his presence, creating a space to receive his word and respond to it by means of the Holy Spirit all depend on silence. The latter promotes the participation of all and involves the whole person. One's interiority is enriched by one's prayer. See P. Desthieux, *Habiter le silence dans la liturgie*, Paris 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Holy Week, Holy Saturday, Office of Readings, Second Reading, From an Ancient Homily on Holy Saturday, <http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/loh/lent/holysaturdayor.htm> [access: 26.05.2023].

that since God speaks to us in silence, we, in turn, need to discover in silence the possibility to speak to God and about God. “We need that silence which becomes contemplation, which introduces us into God’s silence and brings us to the point where the Word, the redeeming Word, is born.”<sup>34</sup> It is at this point that the Pope introduces the idea that silence must lead to contemplation. Contemplation, as the fruit of silence, through its inner strength, compels an urgent call to mission and the essential duty to “proclaim to you what we have seen and heard,” so that others may have fellowship with us, and our unity will be with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

The final observation here pertains to *silence and contemplation*. The purpose of seeking silence and engaging in contemplation is not trivial. Through contemplation in silence, we immerse ourselves in the source of love, which directs us towards our neighbours. It enables us to understand their pain and offer them the light of Christ, the message of his life, and the salvific gift of complete love. According to the Pope, it is in silence that we recognise the culmination of God’s plan for salvation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Mediator. He is the ultimate revelation who unveils the true nature of God the Father.<sup>35</sup> Through his cross and resurrection, he has saved us from the bondage of sin and death, leading us to the freedom of being God’s children. In the contemplation of silence, the eternal Word, through whom the world was created, becomes increasingly present, and we gain a deeper awareness of the salvific plan that God is unfolding throughout history through his Word and actions. As Vatican Council II reminds us, this plan of revelation is manifested through both deeds and words, with inner unity: the deeds of God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teachings and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mysteries contained within them.<sup>36</sup> Mary, the person of silence, played a significant role in allowing the Word to bear fruit within her.<sup>37</sup> The Pope stresses that it is through the Word and silence that we learn how to communicate with God

<sup>34</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily, Eucharistic Concelebration with the Members of the International Theological Commission*, 6 October 2006, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20061006\\_commissione-teologica.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20061006_commissione-teologica.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

<sup>35</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, P. Hünermann, T. Söding, *God’s Word...*, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> Second Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict XVI, *Private Prayer in the Holy House*, Loreto, 1 September 2007, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/prayers/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_20070901\\_prayer-loreto.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/prayers/documents/hf_ben-xvi_20070901_prayer-loreto.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

and with others. In this perspective, faith and evangelization necessitate the power of the Word and the strength of silence working in harmony.

### **“Do not be afraid to risk your lives for Jesus”**

A third invitation to the youth involves a personal commitment and a risk that anyone takes when one becomes a disciple of Jesus.<sup>38</sup> The joy which the first Christians experienced was occasioned by this risk! They were never afraid to stand up for their faith through martyrdom. Their life project was marked by love, altruism and positivity. This stemmed from a spiritual rather than a mundane perspective. Pope Benedict explains that the priority was not one of personal profit, but one of self-giving and service to the community. Christians did not consider faith as a personal journey, but indeed as a journey together with Jesus and through him, with the community of the faithful.<sup>39</sup> This is the perspective through which we need to understand Pope Benedict's vision. The challenge which he poses to young people is for them to 'risk all' in order to receive many times more. He wants to make known that God's measure is far more generous than the human measure. It is worthwhile to lose all in order to later acquire all/(much) more in the Lord. This is the fullness of all that a person seeks for.

The logic which the Pope is trying to explain is very different from that offered by the world. It is when one gives more than when one receives that a person finds inner joy. It is when a young person is ready to embrace life as a total gift to Jesus that he finds happiness. The Pope is very clear in his address: "If you want to find joy, you need to risk!" Joy is the heart of the Christian experience. It is the joy of being together, the joy of being Christian, the joy of faith. In a world often characterised by sorrow and anxiety, joy is an important witness to the beauty and the reliability which the Christian faith offers. The Pontiff refers to a range of personal experiences and invites young people to boldly entrust themselves to Jesus' hands. A similar idea had already been expressed in his installation mass:

Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something

<sup>38</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? . . . No! 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. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen.<sup>40</sup>

The Pope explains that it is for the young people's benefit that they turn towards Christian joy and strive to experience it in their hearts. The one thing that lasts is interior joy. For the question "how do we receive and keep this gift of deep and spiritual joy?" the Pope turns to the psalms and tells us "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps 37:4). In this perspective, Jesus also says: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field" (Matt 13:44). The discovery and cherishing of this spiritual joy are the encounter with the Lord. Jesus calls everyone to follow him and risk all their lives for him. This is the risk that leads to joy.

In this context, the Pope refers to the liturgy as the special place where the Church expresses the joy it receives from the Lord Jesus and which it transmits to the world. Every Sunday, the Christian community celebrates the central mystery of salvation which is the death and resurrection of Christ. Benedict explains that this is a very important moment for the disciples of the Lord because the sacrifice of love happens at that very moment. Sunday is the day when we meet with the Risen Christ, we listen to his word and we are sustained with his body and blood, as is in the psalms: "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it!" (Ps 118:24). Benedict continues that after Easter Vigil, the Church sings the Exultet, a joyful hymn to celebrate the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death: "Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven, . . ." The Christian joy is born from this knowledge that we are loved by God who became man, who gave himself for us and who won over evil and

<sup>40</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass Imposition of the Pallium...*, op. cit.



death. It means that we live a life of love for him. Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, a young Carmelite, wrote "Jesus, my happiness is in loving you."<sup>41</sup>

The Pope's main line of thought is that joy also has its place in times of trial. He acknowledges that sometimes in the depths of young hearts, they can still ask whether its truly possible to live happily amidst all the turmoil in life, especially those that are tragic and mysterious. However, he also shows how they are sometimes surprised that when they follow the Lord and place their hope in him, they are still led to joy. The Pope encourages young people to look for an answer in the experiences of other young people who found, in Christ, a light which gives strength and hope in difficult situations. An example of all this is the Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati who, even though he died at a young age, could write to his sister: "You ask me if I am happy. How could I not be? As long as faith gives me strength, I am happy. A Catholic could not be other than happy . . . The goal for which we were created involves a path which has its thorns, but it is not a sad path. It is joy, even when it involves pain."<sup>42</sup> He was described as "a young person with infectious joy, the joy that overcame many difficulties in his life."<sup>43</sup>

Another experience which Pope Benedict refers to is that of Chiara Badano, who, faced with cancer, says/said: "Jesus, if you desire it, I will desire it too." Whilst praying for a cure, she still prayed to God so that he enlightens young people with his Spirit and gives them the grace to see the light. "It was really a moment of God's presence. I was suffering physically, but my soul was singing."<sup>44</sup> The Pope explains that these are only two witnesses amongst many others who show that authentic Christians do not despair when they are sad, even when they are faced with challenges. Christian joy is not an escape from reality, but it is supernatural strength which helps us cope with the daily struggles of life. We know that the Crucified Christ and the Risen Christ is with us here and that he is always a faithful friend. When we join him in his sorrows, we share his glories. With him and in him, pain is changed into love. It is there that we find joy (Col 1:24). These closing remarks lead us now to the fourth invitation.

<sup>41</sup> St. Therese of Lisieux, *My Joy* [Jésus, ma joie c'est de t'aimer], [in:] *The Poetry of St. Therese of Lisieux: The Complete Edition*, transl. D. Kinney, Washington, DC 1996, PN 45 (21 January 1897).

<sup>42</sup> *Letter to his sister Luciana*, Turin 14 February 1925.

<sup>43</sup> Giovanni Paolo II, *Discorso ai giovani. Torino, 13 aprile 1980*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1980/april/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19800413\\_torino-giovani.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1980/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19800413_torino-giovani.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

<sup>44</sup> C. Badano, *Letter to Chiara Lubich*, Sassello, 20 December 1989, <https://www.chiaralucebadano.it/2016/07/30/chiara-lubich-e-chiara-badano/> [access: 26.05.2023].

## “Rejoice in the Lord, always”

Pope Benedict extends a fourth invitation, urging both the youth and all individuals to explore the path towards inner happiness.<sup>45</sup> Christians are joyful beings particularly because of encountering and realising the truth in Christ. It is this reality that leads them to true happiness. In his message to young people, the Pope recalls the words of St Paul to the community of Philippi: “Rejoice in the Lord, always, I will say it again, rejoice” (Phil 4:4). In the light of what has been presented so far, the encounter with Christ through Scripture and in silence, together with one’s gift of self out of love towards him, leads to joy! “Joy is at the heart of Christian experience,” continued the Pope, and “we can see the great attraction that joy exercises. In a world of sorrow and anxiety, joy is an important witness to the beauty and reliability of the Christian faith.”<sup>46</sup> He explains how human hearts are made for joy, that God is the source of true joy, that joy is contagious, that is conscious of others’ needs and that the world today needs witnesses to joy.

The nature of human hearts, Pope Benedict accentuates, is inherently destined for experiencing joy. He explains that the yearning for joy is etched in the heart of every human being. Apart from immediate and illusory pleasures, the heart seeks deep, meaningful and lasting joy. It is this Christian joy that yields hope and gives quality to human existence. This applies mostly for the period of youth which is a time when one tries to understand life, the world, others and one’s own being. The Pope encourages young people to look forward and acknowledge their great desires for happiness, friendship, sharing and truth so as to realise their ideals in worthwhile projects/undertakings. We find here the distinction which helps us understand what we are saying: between simple joys and entire joy. Whilst the two are most important we need to understand that simple joys lead to full joy. The Pope explains that it is God in his providence that gives everyone simple joys: the joy in living, the joy at the beauty of nature, the joy at a job well done, the joy when one is of service, the joy of sincere and pure love, amongst others. He says:

If we look carefully, we can see many other reasons to rejoice. There are the happy times in family life, shared friendship, the discovery of our talents, our successes, the compliments we receive from others, the ability to express ourselves and to know that we are understood, and the feeling of being of

<sup>45</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

help to others. There is also the excitement of learning new things, seeing new and broader horizons open up through our travels and encounters, and realizing the possibilities we have for charting our future. We might also mention the experience of reading a great work of literature, of admiring a masterpiece of art, of listening to or playing music, or of watching a film. All these things can bring us real joy.<sup>47</sup>

Benedict clarifies that the endurance of joy is linked to its source, which he firmly states is God—the origin of true joy. He acknowledges that it is natural for young people to question whether their longings are mere illusions or ways to escape reality, and he believes that the answer lies in the very essence of joy itself. Despite the many difficulties and anxieties concerning their future that the youth may encounter, Pope Benedict assures them that there is a genuine possibility of experiencing true joy. He affirms/asserts that while individuals may pursue various paths in their quest for happiness, it is crucial to discern true joy from fleeting and deceptive pleasures. Ultimately, what matters, he clarifies, is that young people discover a profound and enduring joy in life that remains steadfast even during challenging times.

In reality, authentic joy, including the simple daily joys, finds its source in God. At first, this might not be evident, but God, who is a communion of eternal love, is also the infinite joy who did not remain closed in on himself but spread to those whom he loves and who love him! God created us in his own image and out of love to fill us with his own love, with his presence and his grace. God wants us to share in his divine and eternal joy, by showing us that the deep value and meaning of life lies in being accepted, welcomed and loved by God. This is not a fragile welcome, as any human encounter can be, but an unconditional acceptance and a realisation that “I am loved; I have a place in the world and in history, I am personally loved by God. If God accepts and loves me and I am sure of this, then I know clearly and with certainty that it is good that I am alive.” This leads Pope Benedict to speak of joy and love.

Joy is interwoven with love. These two qualities or virtues are gifts of the Holy Spirit which are inseparable. Love leads to joy and joy is the form of love. The Pope refers to Saint Theresa of Calcutta (1910–1997), who thus draws/drew on Christ's words: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Or: “Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls; God loves a cheerful giver. Whoever gives with joy gives more.” As Saint Paul VI (1897–1978; canonised

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<sup>47</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

14 October 2018) wrote: “In God himself, all is joy because all is giving.”<sup>48</sup> When he addressed young people, the Pope explained that in all aspects of life they know that when one loves it means that one is steadfast, reliable and faithful to commitments. This applies above all to friendships. Our friends expect us to be sincere, loyal and faithful because true love perseveres even in difficult times. The same can be said for work, studies and the service they carry out. Faithfulness and perseverance in doing what is good leads to joy, even if not always immediately.

Furthermore, joy leads to generosity and attention to others. Benedict says that if young people want to experience the joy of love, they also need to be generous. They cannot be satisfied with the bare minimum. The world needs men and women who are competent and generous, ready to be of service to the common good. The Pope encourages and urges them to study conscientiously, to develop their talents and place them at the service of others. He maintains that they need to find ways to make society more just and humane wherever they are. He augurs that their entire life ought to be guided by a spirit of service rather than the pursuit of power, material success or money.

One last point here is that joy is not meant to be lived in isolation. The youth are called to become witnesses to Christian joy. The Pope ceaselessly encourages young people to be “missionaries of joy.” Joy does not allow a person not to share one’s positive experience with another. Joy is such a precious treasure, it is so spontaneous that one needs/is compelled to share it with others. Confronted with this reality, the Pope inspires/emboldens young people to “narrate” to other young people that joy which they found in Jesus. In the same way, a person cannot keep the joy of faith to himself because in order to keep it, we must give it away. Saint John said: “What we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; we are writing this so that our joy may be complete” (1 John 1:3–4).

Contrary to the impression that Christianity stifles one’s freedom or goes against one’s desires for happiness and joy, the Pope points out that Christians experience true faith because they know they are children of God. They are happy because they know that they are never alone, that God is always holding them in his hands! The role of young people now, says the Pope, is to show the world that it is faith that brings happiness and a joy that is true, full and enduring. He continues to say, “if the way Christians live at times appears dull

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<sup>48</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, 1975. See also the introduction by Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi in C. Stercal (ed.), *Paolo VI. Un ritratto spirituale*, Brescia–Roma 2016.

and boring, you should be the first to show the joyful and the happy side of faith.”<sup>49</sup> Then the Pope made one of the most beautiful exhortations where he shows that the gospel is the good news, that God is love and that every one of us is important to him:

Be enthusiastic witnesses of the new evangelization! Go to those who are suffering and those who are searching, and give them the joy that Jesus wants to bestow. Bring it to your families, your schools and universities, and your workplaces and your friends, wherever you live. You will see how it is contagious. You will receive a hundredfold: the joy of salvation for yourselves, and the joy of seeing God's mercy at work in the hearts of others. And when you go to meet the Lord on that last day, you will hear him say: "Well done, my good and faithful servant . . . Come, share your master's joy" (Matt 25:21).<sup>50</sup>

### “Our hope is in the living God”

One last invitation which Pope Benedict extends to young people is to overcome fear and choose “the great hope” (1 Tim 4:10).<sup>51</sup> He does not refer to any kind of hope, but a firm and reliable hope. It is a great hope that surpasses all, and youth is a special time of hope because it looks to the future with a whole range of expectations.<sup>52</sup> He makes a distinction between various kinds/qualities/dimensions of hope. He explains that young people can satisfy their hope in a great love or in achieving a professional position since the success of love or work determines the rest of life. However, when one achieves these goals, sometimes it becomes clear that in reality they are not fulfilling/satisfying. Benedict emphasised that hope needs to go beyond these goals.

<sup>49</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

<sup>50</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit. See also G. Cucci, *La gioia di annunciare il vangelo*, “La Civiltà Cattolica” 168/2 (2015), pp. 30–44.

<sup>51</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message to the Young People of the World on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fourth World Youth Day 2009*, 22 February 2009, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20090222\\_youth.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20090222_youth.html) [access: 26.05.2023]. Pope Benedict XVI uses the term “great hope” in Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* eleven times in the following paragraphs 3, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35 and 39. See [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

<sup>52</sup> See Benedict XVI, *Message on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fourth World Youth Day 2009*, op. cit.

In what follows, reference is made to some ideas through which Pope Benedict stressed various dimensions of hope. He argued that the youth should never stop believing in overcoming challenges, even if contemporary times have overly optimistically promised the hope of creating a perfect world. Life will never stop presenting challenges to youth. Pope Benedict explained that while scientific knowledge and scientifically based politics have contributed to progress, humans remain a mystery to themselves. The Pope exhorts the youth, emphasizing that the hope one should seek can only be found in the Kingdom of God, rather than in the kingdom of man. Hope should not be displaced; it ought to be sought in Scripture.<sup>53</sup> In this light, hope should not be passive but a driving force that inspires individuals to take action, make a positive impact on the world, and contribute to the betterment of society. Through facing and overcoming these challenges, young people can grow in character and wisdom. Pope Benedict's message is a call for active engagement and a reminder that true hope lies in the spiritual rather than the material. It encourages the youth to seek purpose and meaning in a higher realm, transcending the fleeting promises of a perfect worldly utopia.

The first idea that we come across in this regard is that *youth is a time of hope*. "I urge you", says the Pope, "to let yourselves be shaped by him in order to be messengers of divine love, capable of building a future of hope for all humanity. The question of hope is truly central to our lives as human beings and our mission as Christians, especially in these times." We are all conscious of the need for hope, not any hope, but that which is steadfast and reliable, as emphasised in *Spe Salvi*. Pope Benedict continues that youth is a special time of hope because one looks to the future with great expectations. Young people have many ideals, dreams and plans. Youth is a time for the accomplishment of many decisive choices about the rest of our life.

Pope Benedict encourages the youth, which is faced with/confronted with persistent questions or obstacles that seem insurmountable, to seek God. He explains that while one can experience difficulties with studies, unemployment, arguments within the family, crises in friendships or in building good loving relationships, illness or disability, or lack of adequate resources, one should never stop asking how one can keep alive the flame of hope burning in one's heart. He says:

Let yourselves be shaped by him in order to be messengers of divine love, capable of building a future of hope for all humanity. The question of hope is truly

<sup>53</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, no. 30.

central to our lives as human beings and our mission as Christians, especially in these times. We are all aware of the need for hope, not just any kind of hope, but a firm and reliable hope.<sup>54</sup>

Benedict continues by saying that if one wishes to seek the 'great hope,' then one is to seek Christ. Like Paul, young people are to believe, the Pope insists, that hope is not simply an ideal or sentiment, but a living person: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the true hope: the Christ who lives with us and in us and who calls us to share in his eternal life. If we are not alone, if he is with us, even more, if he is our present and our future, why be afraid? The youth are to seek the way towards the great hope and through prayer become men and women of hope.<sup>55</sup> When we express our faith in prayer, we find him even in times of darkness because he offers himself to us. Pope Benedict exhorts the young generation to make space for prayer in their lives! Persevering prayer opens the heart to receive him, he says, as Saint Augustine explains: "Our Lord and God . . . wants our desire to be exercised in prayer, thus enabling us to grasp what he is preparing to give."<sup>56</sup>

Benedict explains that the human experience confirms that qualities and material goods are not enough to serve as a guarantee for the hope that a person always seeks. Referring to *Spe Salvi*, he explains that politics, science, technology, economy, and other material resources are not sufficient in themselves to provide the great hope towards which everyone aspires. This great hope "can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain." Pope Benedict explains that the pivotal outcome of distancing oneself from God is the evident loss of societal direction, leading to a state of loneliness and violence, accompanied by a deficiency in contentment and trust, ultimately culminating in despair. On the contrary, the youth are invited to frequent groups and movements to grow in the experience of faith. He says:

Take part in your parish liturgies and be abundantly nourished by the word of God and your active participation in the Sacraments. As you know, the summit and centre of the life and mission of every believer and every Christian community is the Eucharist, the sacrament of salvation in which Christ becomes present and gives his Body and Blood as spiritual food for eternal life. A truly ineffable mystery! It is around the Eucharist that the Church comes to birth and grows.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fourth World Youth Day 2009*, op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, no. 34.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, *Letter 130*:8,17.

<sup>57</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fourth World Youth Day 2009*, op. cit.

Another idea concerns Benedict's encouragement to the youth to *live according to Christian hope*. He explains that if they find their sustenance in Christ, and if they live profoundly in him as did the Apostle Paul, they will not be able to refrain from speaking about him and making him known and loved by many of their friends and contemporaries. He identifies with Paul who through his example became a great witness to the Risen Christ. Pope Benedict exhorts young people to be Christ's faithful disciples, and in so doing help form Christian communities that are filled with love, like those described in the Acts of the Apostles. He insists that no one should get discouraged by the difficulties and trials one encounters. Conversely, all are to be patient and persevering so as to overcome the natural youthful tendency to rush ahead and to want everything immediately. He says:

If Jesus has become your hope, communicate this to others with your joy and your spiritual, apostolic and social engagement. Let Christ dwell within you, and having placed all your faith and trust in him, spread this hope around you. Make choices that demonstrate your faith. Show that you understand the risks of idolizing money, material goods, career and success, and do not allow yourselves to be attracted by these false illusions.<sup>58</sup>

In this context, Pope Benedict portrays Mary as the beacon of hope, a figure to whom everyone can turn for inspiration and guidance. The Virgin Mary, Benedict XVI affirms, accompanies the youth on their spiritual journey. Everyone looks at her since she was the one who gave life to the hope of Israel, the one who bore a saviour unto the world, and who stood at the foot of the cross with steadfast hope. Mary is a model to all and true support. Pope Benedict continues that, above all, Mary intercedes for humans and leads everyone in the hour of darkness and trials towards the radiant dawn of our encounter with the Risen Christ.<sup>59</sup> The Pontiff refers to a most beautiful prayer of Saint Bernard inspired by the title of Mary, *Stella Maris* (Star of the Sea).<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fourth World Youth Day 2009*, op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> For brief studies on Ratzinger's devotional and theological reference to Mary, see M. Farina, *Maria riflesso della tenerezza di Dio nella prospettiva di Benedetto XVI*, "Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione" 46/1 (2008), pp. 42–63; S.M. Perrella, *Maria persona in relazione nel magistero dei vescovi di Roma: da Paolo VI a Benedetto XVI*, "Theotokos" 18/1 (2010), pp. 167–255.

<sup>60</sup> "You who amid the constant upheavals of this life find yourself more often tossed about by storms than standing on firm ground, do not turn your eyes from the brightness of this Star, if you would not be overwhelmed by boisterous waves. If the winds of temptations rise, if you fall among the rocks of tribulations, look up at the Star, call on Mary . . . In



With the last invitation to place hope in the living God, Pope Benedict is empowering the youth to make Christ known, among their own age group and beyond, to those who are in search of “the great hope” that would give meaning to their lives. He encourages cultivating love of the neighbour and putting oneself and one’s talents and professional abilities at the service of the common good and truth. In this light, true Christians are never sad, even if they have to face trials of various kinds, because the presence of Jesus is the secret of their joy and peace. The youth are to spread hope around them and to always be prepared to share their faith in view of God’s love toward everyone.

## Conclusion

The five invitations of Pope Benedict XVI, highlighted in this article, represent an empowering opportunity for young people to embrace wholeheartedly, enabling them to genuinely proclaim Christ and live as his devoted followers. In this light, Bishop Ignatius of Antioch’s message gains significance, as he emphasises that it is not enough to simply bear the name of Christians; true adherence to the faith is essential. Pope Benedict urges young people not only to hear the Word of God but, more importantly, to act it out and demonstrate it in their public lives. The recognition of Christians should stem not merely from their intentions but from their unwavering dedication to their faith. These challenges are all purposefully designed to guide young people towards a positive and enduring encounter with God. To achieve this, they must become attentive listeners of the Word, consistently orienting their lives towards it, thus establishing a firm and steadfast foundation for their journey.

Pope Benedict’s legacy to the youth is nothing less than a challenge posed to young people to embody “a new generation of apostles,” deeply rooted in Scripture, equipped with it to confront the contemporary problems, and prepared to proclaim the Gospel. This aligns with God’s desire for them and is an invitation extended by and to the Church. The world, even if unaware, anticipates their presence. If Jesus calls them, there should be no fear in responding with generosity, especially when the call leads to consecrated life or

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dangers, in distress, in perplexities, think on Mary, call on Mary . . . Following her, you will never go astray; when you implore her aid, you will never yield to despair; thinking on her, you will not err; under her patronage you will never wander; beneath her protection you will not fear; she being your guide, you will not weary; with her assistance, you will arrive safely in the port.” (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mother*, Kalamazoo, MI 1993, 2,17).

priesthood. Trusting him is key, and such trust will not lead to disappointment. His challenge to the youth is to cultivate hope through their faith and to seek support and identity in Christ within the Church, all of which should enable them to become joyful witnesses in the world.

By listening, embracing silence, making decisive choices, rejoicing, and placing trust, young people can be likened to the “wise man who built his house on the rocks.” Benedict’s fundamental message is for them to anchor their lives in Christ, joyfully welcoming the Word and living its teachings. His legacy resonates through the call to be authentic disciples of Christ, acknowledging that faith and reason complement each other, valuing the sanctity of human life, finding hope and joy in their relationship with God, understanding the significance of prayer and the Eucharist, pursuing holiness and cultivating virtues, and being proactive agents of positive change, promoting justice, peace, and solidarity with the marginalised and the poor. Despite his advanced age, Benedict’s message endures as a timeless legacy that inspires and guides young people on their journey of faith, empowering them to participate in the life of the Church and society. In conclusion, this resonates perfectly with the recognition of the vital role young people play in the Church’s present and future, and urges them to engage and contribute wholeheartedly:

what we need in these times in history are persons, who through an enlightened faith, and in practice, present God in a credible manner to the world.... We need persons who keep their eyes on God, whilst learning what authentic humanity is all about. We need persons whose intellect is enlightened by divine light and whose hearts are prepared by God so that their intellect dialogues with the intellect of others, and so that their hearts open to the hearts of others. It is only through persons that have an experience of God that God approaches man.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, the youth are the present of the Church, the ones that keep her truly alive.

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<sup>61</sup> J. Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto nella crisi della cultura*, Siena 2005, pp. 63–64 (my translation).

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