

Be Not Afraid: The Message of Pope Benedict XVI

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Hundreds of thousands came from a multitude of nations to hear him speak. Their numbers were so vast that, in photographs, their faces converged to form a great featureless throng. The occasion was the inaugural Mass of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Square on April 24, 2005. The world watched as the Church both honored the passing of one beloved Holy Father and witnessed the beginning of a new pope's journey. Though he was among a distinguished audience of cardinals, bishops, and dignitaries, Pope Benedict used the final words of his homily to address the youth of the world. In what was to become a frequently voiced theme of his papacy, Pope Benedict declared, "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."

This sentiment is important for today's young Americans. We have not lived sheltered from the realities of the world. Technology has thrown open the channels of human experience. Images of violence, hate, and prejudice stream unfiltered into our homes each night. The standards glorified by society frequently conflict with the ideals championed by the Church. Youth who want to be both spiritual and worldly must struggle, for as the Gospel of Luke states, "A servant cannot serve two masters." We feel we must make a choice, and the allure of the material world is tempting. It possesses none of Christ's mystery and requires no belief in the intangible and unseen. In addition, the world does not seem to infringe on our freedom. It is from our love of freedom that a fear of Christ is born. It is a fear of conforming, of becoming something less than we are,

and of sacrificing our identities. What Pope Benedict communicates in his homilies, speeches, and encyclicals is that these fears are unfounded.

Jesus calls us all to be disciples. The word disciple means “learner”, not blind follower. Pope Benedict assures us that the same invitation is always present and extended to the young, that merging ourselves with Christ is not an act of relinquishing our individuality, but of wholeness. If we cease thinking of Christ as a peddler of rules and a taker of independence, we can use His message to greater effect both personally and globally. As His Holiness stated in a meeting with the young in Pacaembu, Sao Paulo, “You can be the builders of a new society if you seek to put into practice a conduct inspired by universal moral values, but also a personal commitment to a vitally important human and spiritual formation.”

A yearning for God and a desire for truth are what distinguish human beings from all other life forms. We who look for God in the largely godless culture of teenagers encounter difficulties at every turn. We become like the disheartened Apostles who cast their nets again and again into the sea and emerged with nothing. The great power of Pope Benedict’s message is its hope and encouragement. He, like Christ, inspires us to cast our nets into the water once more, without trepidation, seeking God with the fullness of our hearts and minds.

Words of Welcome

Welcome to our beloved Hope Father Pope Benedict XVI! We are overjoyed to host your historic visit to the United States. We thank you for bringing your unshakeable faith in the power of God's love and your message of hope to our country. We also thank you for your advocacy of young people, to who you entrust the future of the Church. May you inspire all you meet, from the smallest child to the most distinguished dignitary. We wish you a safe and joyful visit.