

(English translation)

Rome, April 12, 1984

Catechesis for the Youth Jubilee

### **The fullness of joy**

My dear young people,

...

In this hour we will spend together, we have been asked to talk about joy.

In our day Christians often cannot be distinguished by any particular joy. Generally speaking, to visit a predominantly Christian city is not very different from visiting a city inhabited by persons of other religions, or non believers.

This is certainly not the way it was at the beginning of Christianity.

At that time, Christians were so fascinated by what had just taken place, they saw so clearly that the promises of the Old Testament concerning salvation and the restoration of mankind to union with God had been fulfilled in Christ, they were so convinced that he had brought the solution to everything, to all their problems, that they exulted for joy. "With exultant and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, praising God..." (Acts 2: 46-47).

...

If the Israelites sang hymns to Yahweh for the law, which God had communicated to them through Moses, so that they now knew how to walk through life, what hymns of praise must have been raised to heaven by the early Christians who, having received the law of heaven itself, brought on earth by Christ – the law of *love* – had found in it, by putting it into practice, *a wellspring of joy!*

Yes, my dear young people, this is what the early Christians found: a wellspring of joy. And they found it in love. (Applause)

They were happy, undoubtedly, because God dwelled in them, because they had become his temple, because they had become aware of the power of God. Their joy, however, their joy was not only motivated by external circumstances, or by these supernatural and divine realities. The joy – this is the point – the joy they experienced was also a gift which they had felt welling up in their hearts when they had begun to love.

To love one's neighbour was everything for a Christian, and this was very clear to them right from the beginning. It seemed that the echo of Jesus' words was still in the air – the words he used to describe the impressive scene of the last judgment, when one by one we will all be examined on our lives, which will be nothing other than an exam on love. Remember: "I was hungry and you gave me food... I was thirsty and you gave me drink..." (Mt 25:35-36).

They were also mindful of St. Paul's letter in which he taught how to love, indeed, in which he shared his experience: "For the weak I made myself weak... I made myself all things to all men..." (1 Cor 9:22).

For this reason, for this reason, they made themselves one with every neighbour they met; they shared in the events of their lives, they participated in their sufferings, in their joys, they made the concerns of the others their own. In other words, they lived for the others, serving the others. We could say that their motto was this: *'to live the other,'* to live the others and no longer to live 'themselves.'

It is possible to understand then how in this love they also found the possibility to live out that renunciation required by the Gospel, self-denial, because they lived the others; they no longer lived themselves and so they denied themselves. They were dead to themselves because alive to love: they

were all love and, before God who is Love, they were like small suns before *the* Sun. Before the Infinite Happiness like, like happiness, like joy. These were the early Christians. (Applause)

This is the way they loved, this is the way they loved, they loved friends and enemies.

They loved one another.

They loved one another, they loved one another.

What distinguished them from other people? Was it their large-scale endeavours, their impressive works, their profound studies, their refined eloquence? Was it perhaps the miracles or ecstasies, which were certainly not lacking? No, no, no, no, no, it was mutual love that distinguished them. “Look at the way they love one another,” it was said of them, “and how they are ready to die for one another” (Tertullian, *Apologetics* 39:7).

They loved one another and achieved unity, that unity for which Jesus promised the fullness of joy. (Applause)

The joy of the early Christians – and this is true in all times, in every century in which Christianity is understood in its essence and lived accordingly –, the joy of the early Christians, was a joy which was truly new, a joy they had never experienced before. It had nothing to do with simple laughter, cheerfulness or light-heartedness, or – as Paul VI would say – it had nothing to do with “the exulting joy of living and being alive,” with “the peaceful joy,” he would say, “of nature,” with “the joy of silence.” Nor was it the joy or satisfaction you feel, for example, for a job well done; nor simply “the transparent joy of purity” or the joy of “chaste love...”<sup>1</sup> It wasn’t that. These are all wonderful examples of joy.

But the joy of the early Christians was different: it was similar to the exhilarating joy of the disciples at the descent of the Holy Spirit. (Applause)

It was, it was, it was *the joy of Jesus, the joy of Jesus*. For just as Jesus has *his* peace, he also has *his* joy.

And the joy of the early Christians, which sprang forth spontaneously from the depths of their being, truly satisfied them.

They had truly found what people in the past, today and always need, what they are searching for. They had found God, they had found communion with God, and this satisfied them completely and led them to self-fulfilment. They were human beings.

In fact, love – charity – with which through baptism and the other sacraments Christ enriches the hearts of Christians – can be compared to a tiny plant. The deeper it sends its roots into the ground (that is, the more people love their neighbours), the higher the plant, the stem grows upwards; that is, the more we love our neighbours, the more our heart is filled with the love of God. But it is not merely a love we believe in, a communion with God we believe in through faith; it is a communion we experience. And this is happiness, this is *the* happiness: we love and we feel loved.

This was the joy of the early Christians (Applause), this was the happiness of the early Christians, adults and young people like you. It was expressed in wonderful, festive liturgical celebrations filled with hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

Joy grew in their hearts also because of another fact, because with love they received light, light. They could *see*; they could understand the things of God which, in themselves would be beyond human understanding (cf. 1 Cor 2: 19-16). For example, while they accepted the mysteries through faith, these mysteries were not as obscure as one might think. They were able to penetrate them, to a certain extent, with such light that they had the impression of truly understanding them, of possessing them. This made them rejoice even more, and the joy of truth was added to the joy of love.

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<sup>1</sup>. “Where people find joy” Paul VI.

Armed, therefore, only with love and light, and clothed with joy, in a short amount of time they conquered the world known at that time: “We were born only yesterday,” wrote Tertullian, “and we have already invaded the world...” (Tertullian, *Apologetics* 37:7).

Joy, therefore, joy and the early Christians. Joy and true, authentic Christians. Joy and young Christians.

...

A typical example of these are the young people who belong to the new Movements which have begun in recent decades. Imitating the early Christians, they are setting off in our day, in a variety of ways and with modern means but all based on love and communion, (otherwise it is not Christianity), they are setting off the Christian revolution from the angle of universal brotherhood. (Applause)

They are among the finest forces of the Church and they express its present-day hopes. They know, as did their first brothers and sisters, the first Christians, they know the meaning of joy, *the true joy, the joy of Jesus*; it shines on their faces and overflows onto all those with whom they come in contact.

They know what joy is. Why? Because they have experienced it through loving.

And they know what joy is because they have discovered another source of joy, the one discovered by the early Christians who rejoiced in being persecuted and who sang even as they went to martyrdom.

They have understood a paradox of Christianity: and it is that joy, the supernatural joy of Jesus, can be found precisely where there does not seem to be joy – in suffering: *but* in suffering that is loved.

It is true that at times the combination of psychological and physical conditions or really big spiritual trials can inhibit our joy, at least in its outward expression, as it was for Jesus on the cross with that trial.... But, usually, these Christians, and all those who embrace their cross, have understood and experienced that, just as the pruning of a tree is the prelude to a blossoming of new life, just as the cut of engrafting announces new fruits, suffering which is embraced out of love for Christ is an extraordinary fount of joy. (Applause)

In fact, the joy of a Christian is like a ray of light reflected from a tear, like a rose flourished from a spot of blood and the essence of love distilled from suffering. That is why it is a unique joy and it has an apostolic power, that is, it impacts everyone, it has an apostolic power, which attracts others as would a glimpse of Paradise.

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