

MEETING WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Saint Peter's Square
Saturday, 30 October 2010*

(Video)

A young boy's question: Your Holiness, what does it mean to grow up? What must I do to mature following Jesus? Who can help me?

Dear Friends of Italian Catholic Action!

I am simply delighted to meet you; you are here in great numbers in this beautiful square and I thank you from my heart for your affection! Welcome to you all! In particular I greet the President, Professor Franco Miano, and the General Chaplain, Mons. Domenico Sigalini. I greet Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, the other Bishops, priests, the educators and parents who wanted to come with you.

I heard the question of the young member of Children's Catholic Action. The best answer to the question about what it means to grow up is on your jerseys, your caps, your signs: "There is more". This motto of yours, which I did not know before, makes me think. What does a child do to see if he is growing up? He compares his height with his friends' and imagines becoming taller in order to feel more grown up. When I was a boy of your age, I was one of the smallest in my class, and so all the more I wanted to be very tall one day; and not only tall in terms of a measuring stick, but I wanted to do something big, something more in my life, even if I did not know this saying "There is more". Growing taller implies that "There is more". You are told this by your heart which wants to have a lot of friends, which is happy when you behave well, when you know how to bring joy to mom and dad, but above all when it meets a friend who is incomparable to others, so good and unique, Jesus.

You know how Jesus loved children and young people! One day, many children like you approached Jesus, because they were very drawn to him and in his eyes they saw God's love reflected. But there were adults too who were bothered by these children. This also happens to you sometimes, when you play, have fun with your friends — the grownups tell you not to bother them.... Well, Jesus rebukes those adults and tells them: leave all these children alone, because they have in their heart the secret of the Kingdom of God. So, Jesus taught the adults that you too are "great" and that adults have to protect this greatness, which is having a heart that loves Jesus. Dear children, dear young people: being "big" means loving Jesus very much, listening to him and talking to him in prayer, meeting him in the sacraments, in Holy Mass, in confession; it means getting to know him more and more and also letting others know about him, it means standing with our friends, the poorest ones too, the sick ones, to grow together.

And Children's Catholic Action is part of that "more", because you are not alone in loving Jesus. There are many of you, we see that this morning too! But help each other, because you don't want to let any friend be alone, but you want to tell everyone that it is great having Jesus as a friend and it is great being friends with Jesus; and it is great being with him, helped by your parents, priests and leaders! In this way you will truly grow up, not only because your height increases, but because

your heart opens to the joy and love that Jesus gives you. And thus you open up to true greatness, living in God's great love, which is always also loving our friends. Let us hope and pray that we grow in this way, to find the “more” and to be truly persons with a big heart, with a great Friend who gives his greatness to us too. Thank you.

A girl's question: Your Holiness, our teachers in Catholic Action tell us that to grow up it is necessary to learn to love; but often we fail and we suffer in our relationships, in our friendships, in our first loves. What does it mean to love completely? How can we learn to really love?

A great question. It is very important, fundamental, I would say, to learn to love, to really love, to learn the art of true love! In adolescence we pause in front of the mirror and we notice ourselves changing. But if you only look at yourself, you never grow up! You grow up when you no longer let the mirror be the only truth of yourselves but when you let your friends tell you the truth. You will grow up if you are able to make your life a gift to others, not to seek yourselves, but to give yourselves to others: this is the school of love. This love, however, must bring you into that “more”, which today you shout to everyone, “There is more!” As I have already said, I too, in my youth wanted something more than what the society and the mentality of the time offered me. I wanted to breathe pure air, above all I wanted a beautiful and good world, like our God, the Father of Jesus, wanted for everyone. And I understood more and more that the world becomes beautiful and good if one knows this Will of God and if the world corresponds to this Will of God, which is the true light, beauty, the love that gives the world meaning.

It is quite true: you cannot and must not adapt yourselves to a love reduced to a commodity, to be consumed without respect for oneself or for others, incapable of chastity and purity. This is not freedom. Much of the “love” that is proposed by the media, on the Internet, is not love but egoism, closure, it gives you a momentary illusion, but it does not make you happy, it does not make you grow up, it binds you like a chain which restrains the more beautiful thoughts and sentiments, the true aspirations of the heart, that irrepressible power that is love and has its maximum expression in Jesus and its strength and fire in the Holy Spirit, who enflames your lives, your thoughts and your affections. Of course it demands sacrifice to live love in the true way — without renunciation one does not find this road — but I am certain that you are not afraid of the toil of a challenging and authentic love. It is the only kind that ultimately gives true joy! There is a test that tells you whether your love is growing in a healthy way: if you do not exclude others from your life, above all your friends who are suffering and alone, people in difficulty, and if you open your heart to the great Friend, Jesus.

Catholic Action also teaches you the roads to take to learn authentic love: participation in the life of the Church, of your Christian community, loving your friends in the Children's Catholic Action group, in Catholic Action, availability to those of your age at school, in the parish or in other environments, the company of the Mother of Jesus, Mary, who knows how to guide your heart and lead you along the way of good. Moreover, in Catholic Action, you have many examples of genuine, beautiful, true love: Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, Bl. Alberto Marvelli; love that also leads to the sacrifice of one's life, like Bl. Pierina Morosini and Bl. Antonia Mesina.

Young people of Catholic Action, aspire to great things, because God gives you the strength. “More” is being young people and children who decide to love like Jesus does, to be the protagonists of your own lives, protagonists in the Church, witnesses of the faith to those who are your age. “More” is the human and Christian formation that you experience in Catholic Action, which unites spiritual life, brotherhood, public witness to the faith, ecclesial communion, love for the Church, collaboration with the Bishops and priests, spiritual friendship. “Growing up together”

speaks of the importance of being part of a group and a community that helps you to grow, to discover your vocation and to learn true love. Thank you.

A teacher's question: Your Holiness, what does it mean to be an educator today? How should we face the difficulties that we tackle in our service? And how can we do it in such a way that everyone concerns themselves with the present and the future of the new generations? Thank you.

A big question. We see the problem of education in this situation. I would say that being educators means having a joy in your heart and communicating it to all to make life beautiful and good; it means offering reasons and objectives for the journey of life, offering the beauty of the person of Jesus and making others fall in love with him, his way of life, his freedom, his great love full of confidence in God the Father. It means above all always keeping the goal of every existence high oriented to that “more” which comes from God. This demands a personal knowledge of Jesus, a personal, daily, loving contact with him in prayer, in meditation on God's Word, in fidelity to the sacraments, to the Eucharist, to confession; it demands communicating the joy of being in the Church, of having friends to share not only problems but also the beautiful things and surprises of the life of faith.

You know well that you are not the children's owners but servants of their joy in the name of Jesus, guides to him. You have received the mandate from the Church for this task. When you join Catholic Action you say to yourselves and to everyone that you love the Church, that you are ready to share responsibility with the Pastors for her life and her mission in an association that expends itself for the good of people, for their and your journey of holiness, for the life of the Christian community in their daily mission. You are good teachers if you know how to involve everyone for the benefit of the youngest. You cannot be self-sufficient but you must make the urgency of the education of the young generations felt at all levels. Without the presence of the family, for example, you risk building on sand; without the cooperation of the school you cannot form a deep understanding of the faith; without the involvement of the various members of the staff in the young people's free time and communication your patient work risks not being effective, of not impacting daily life. I am certain that Catholic Action is deeply rooted in the region and has the courage to be salt and light. Your presence here this morning tells not only me but everyone that it is possible to educate, that it is difficult but beautiful to give enthusiasm, to young people and to the littlest ones. Have the courage, I would like to say, the audacity, not to allow any context to be without Jesus, his tenderness that you make everyone experience, even the neediest and abandoned, with your mission as educators.

Dear Friends, lastly I thank you for having participated in this meeting. I would like to stay with you a little longer because when I am in the midst of such joy and enthusiasm, I too am full of joy, I feel rejuvenated! Yet unfortunately time passes quickly, others await me. But in my heart I am with you and remain with you! And I invite you, dear friends, to continue on your journey, faithful to the identity and purpose of Catholic Action. The strength of God's love can accomplish great things in you. I assure you of my remembrance in my prayer and I entrust you to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, so that like her you can bear witness that “there is more”, the joy of a life full of the Lord's presence. I thank all of you from my heart!