

Decision to follow Christ requires support from others, pope says

VATICAN CITY - The decision to follow Christ is not an easy one to make, so young people should look for support from the Christian community and the church, Pope Benedict XVI said in his message for World Youth Day 2011.

"Do not believe those who tell you that you don't need others to build up your life! Find support in the faith of those who are dear to you, in the faith of the church," the pope wrote in his message, released Sept. 3.

Pope Benedict called on all young people, even those who are no longer active members of the church as well as nonbelievers, to attend the World Youth Day celebrations in Madrid Aug. 16-21, 2011. He said the international gathering offers people a powerful experience of Jesus Christ and his love for everyone.

"The decision to believe in Jesus Christ and to follow him is not an easy one. It is hindered by our personal failures and by the many voices that point us toward easier paths," he said.

The pope urged youths to not be discouraged and to look for the support of the Christian community and the church.

The theme of World Youth Day 2011 is: "Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith."

The pope struck a very personal tone in his written message, relaying some of his own dreams and worries from his youth.

When they were young, he said he and his friends "were not willing to settle for a conventional middle-class life."

Growing up during the Nazi dictatorship and the Second World War definitely contributed to their youthful ambitions of breaking free from the reigning power structures and to "experience the whole range of human possibilities," he said.

But it is also true that a love for life and the urge to experience and achieve something great are present in every generation, he said.

Pope Benedict said “the desire for a more meaningful life is a sign that God created us and that we bear his ‘imprint.’ ”

He urged young people to strengthen their faith in God, who is the source of life, love, joy and peace.

Believing in God is especially difficult in cultures that choose to reject or marginalize God’s place in the world and try to “create a paradise without him” here on earth, he said.

“Yet experience tells us that a world without God becomes a ‘hell’: filled with selfishness, broken families, hatred between individuals and nations and a great deficit of love, joy and hope,” he said.

Many young people today lack solid values and stable points of reference upon which they can build their lives, establish a strong sense of security and make the right choices in life, he said.

As St. Paul urged the Colossians, people need to be rooted in Jesus, “built upon him, and established in the faith as you were taught,” the pope said.

Putting down roots means to trust in God and building upon him means accepting God’s call and putting his words into practice, he said.

The pope said he knew from early on that God wanted him to be a priest, but after the war and while pursuing his seminary studies, “I had to recapture that certainty.”

He said he needed to reevaluate his true path in life, to understand if the priesthood really was God’s plan for him and if he would be able to be faithful and completely at God’s service.

A “certain struggle” to understand one’s vocation is normal, he said. He said by listening to God and walking with him, he concluded that the priesthood was the right path for him because the Lord wanted him and would give him the strength he

needed.

“What counts is not the fulfillment of my desires, but of his will. In this way life becomes authentic,” he said.

People are constantly being seduced into thinking there are easier choices and an easier way of life, he told young people, “but you yourselves know that these are ultimately deceptive and cannot bring serenity and joy.”

Only God can show the way and he will walk with his children and sustain them, helping them face the difficulties and disappointments in life, he said.

Being a Christian is building a relationship with Christ every day through prayer, reading the Gospels and participating in the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist where Christ “is present and close to us, and even becomes food for our journey.”

He asked young people to spend the next year before World Youth Day 2011 in spiritual preparation for the event through prayer and mutual support.

The text of the pope's message in English is posted online at:
https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/youth/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100806_youth_en.html

The text of the pope's message in Spanish is posted online at:
https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/youth/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100806_youth_sp.html