

OUR HEARTS ARE RESTLESS UNTIL THEY REST IN GOD ALONE

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When I was 12--almost 13--years old, before an image of Our Lady, I remember asking myself a *fundamental question....* "do I love God enough to say yes to his will?" I realized, looking at Our Lady's image, Her hands held and crossed together upon Her Heart, that I did not love God enough to really trust Him and place my life with generosity at the disposal of His designs of love for my life, and through my life for others. How did I realize that my heart was lacking love for the Lord? Because, when I gazed into Our Lady's Heart, I simply understood that Her love was capable of great things.... capable of saying yes.... capable of giving Herself as a gift to the Lord, to His loving plan for Her life and to cooperate with Him in doing good for humanity. I remember praying before that image... "Mother, how were you able to love God that way?" and I sensed in my heart, a fundamental response to a fundamental question: *"because I knew how much He loved me..."*. Her response was simple and yet it was a very profound and piercing word to my young heart, a word that has guided my path since then, and I pray it guides me until the end of my life: *"I can only love God with all my heart.... I can only rest and trust in His will, His Word, His plan for my life... I can only love Him with all that I am and all that I have.... if I have experienced in the deepest recesses of my heart the truth, the beauty, and the goodness of His love.... if I have experienced the luminous truth that "He has loved me first" (cf. 1 Jn 4:19)... and the effects of His love...His infinite, eternal, unchangeable and faithful love... This truth would evoke in my heart a deep and courageous, total, faithful and joyful, a trusting response of love.*

We all desire love... the greatest fear of the human heart is to not know love, to not find love, to not live in love...to not be able to love. The greatest wounds of our hearts are always related to love: if we have not been loved, if our love has been ignored, rejected or used...or if love has been offended and abused... When we are so afraid, so restless, it is because deep down inside, we have not yet found the profound meaning of love in our lives... because we have not yet searched for love in the right places (where true and sincere love can be found)... We are still restless because those who were supposed to love us, who we expected to love us, have not truly fulfilled the deepest desire of our hearts to be loved... we are restless because our hearts were created for love... and they will not rest until they rest in the love of God... a love that is infinite, eternal, faithful, unchangeable, permanent, true, sincere, generous...a love that has been given to the extreme of the Cross and in the Eucharist, just to do good for us... true love seeks the good of the beloved. Our hearts are restless, until we can exclaim like St. John in his first letter, chapter 4: *"God is love..... And "I" have come to believe and to know the love that God has for me".... (v. 16). Yes, dear young people, our hearts, the human heart is restless until it can understand as a living personal experience the words of St. Paul in Ephesians 3: "that you come to comprehend, to know the width, the length, the height, the depth of the love of Christ that surpasses all understanding (expectations) and that leads us to fullness in God" (3:17-19).*

Yes, His love surpasses all that you expect of love... all that you desire...all that you dream about love...His love is much more than that... it is perfect love...it is the fulfillment of the human heart.... it is the guarantee of true and everlasting joy for the human heart.... His love is capable of so much more... and His love makes us capable of loving as He has loved us.

OUR HEARTS CAN ONLY REST IN GOD'S LOVE

The love of God is a mystery which surpasses our understanding....(said St. Paul) Perhaps it is the most profound, the most immeasurable, and the most incomprehensible... He is love... God is Love! It is an unfathomable love because its depth is something no one can fully probe. It has a height no one can fully climb. It has a length and a width no one is capable of measuring completely. God is love; His

essence is love. It is not just that He loves us, but rather, that He is Love. Everything that emanates from Him is love; there is nothing in Him that is not love; His being is Love; all his interior activity is love; all His external acts are love. Dear young people, God loves you!! He loves infinitely, He loves immutably, He loves eternally, and He loves faithfully and mercifully... and He loves you! Your hearts and mine can only rest when we rest in His Love... in this love... our happiness, our rest, and our fulfillment is grounded in His love. We are loved! Say it out loud, "I AM SO LOVED! I AM LOVABLE and I can love!"

God wants us to know that we are loved, and only then... our hearts will rest because our hearts can only rest in knowing that we are loved. This knowledge causes a profound healing in our hearts... the heart of man. Knowing and living in this love of God is the fulfillment of the human heart. (3:17-19). Only in God and in the intimate knowledge of His love will your hearts find peace. Only in His love will you find life, true joy, healing, stability, security, true meaning for your life, confidence, clear identity. His love is your refuge and your courage, strength.... Only in His love... will your hearts find the most profound rest.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel of Matthew, *"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (11:28).* Only in God's love, revealed to us in Jesus' Heart, can the human heart rest because only God's love can deeply heal us and convince us of our identity, our dignity, our destiny, the true meaning and the purpose for our lives... And how to live a life worthy of the dignity of the human person, a life worth living...because it is a life given to generously serve, to build the kingdom of love, to build in the world a new civilization of love.... a civilization where peace and truth can triumph. The future, said John Paul II, is placed in the hands of the young people.

Only the love of God, said Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical "Deus Caritas Est", *can quench the thirst of the restless heart and heal humanity.* Only the love of God is the answer to your inner struggles, confusions, darkness, anguish, shadows and disorientations of your hearts, only the love of God is the answer to your most profound questions... only the love of God is the remedy to all the evil and darkness we see around...only the love of God is the peace of the human heart...only the love of God has a plan that will make you happy, only God has the words of eternal life and abundant life, as St. Peter told Jesus: *"to whom shall we go? Only you have words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6: 68)*

OUR HEARTS CAN ALSO REST IN HIS TRUTH: THE ROCK OF SALVATION.

Many times your hearts are restless because you have two voices competing in your soul.... Do not listen to the world. In his homily, at the World Youth Day in Toronto, Bl. John Paul II called young people to make a definite choice between "Jesus and the spirit of the world" and he said: *"Dear young people, on a hillside near the lake of Galilee, Jesus' disciples listened to His gentle and urgent voice; as gentle as the landscape of Galilee itself, as urgent as a call to choose between life and death, between truth and falsehood. The Lord spoke words of life that would echo forever in the hearts of His followers. Today He is speaking the same words to you. (...) Listen to the voice of Jesus in the depths of your hearts! His words tell you who you are as Christians. They tell you what you must do to remain in His love. "But Jesus offers one thing, and the 'spirit of the world' offers another. "The 'spirit of the world' offers many false illusions and parodies of happiness. There is perhaps no darkness deeper than the darkness that enters young people's souls when false prophets extinguish in them the light of faith and hope and love. The greatest deception, and the deepest source of unhappiness, is the illusion of finding life by excluding God, of finding freedom by excluding moral truths and personal responsibility.*

"The Lord is calling you to choose between these two voices competing for your souls. That decision is the substance and challenge of World Youth Day. Why have you come together from all parts of the world? To say in your hearts: 'Lord, to whom shall we go?' Who has the words of eternal life? 'You have

the words of eternal life' (Jn 6,68). Jesus – the intimate friend of every young person – has the words of life.

Dear young people, you must come to believe in the truth of God's word. His word is to be the lamp unto your feet, the star that guides your path, your decisions, your choices... and you must be convinced that He loves you, and His word is the path to true happiness, not only in heaven but here on earth, since in the mountain of the Beatitudes, Jesus said: Happy are you!... He came to offer you an everlasting happiness, a happiness that will never cease...

John Paul II, told the youth of the world in Toronto during the World Youth Day, 2002, his last one: *"Young People, you are made for happiness. Rightly, then, you thirst for happiness. Christ has the answer to this desire of yours. But He asks you to trust Him. True joy is a victory, something which cannot be obtained without a long and difficult struggle. Christ holds the secret of this victory. (...) It is by walking with Christ that we can achieve joy, true joy! Precisely for this reason He again repeats the proclamation of joy to you today: 'Blessed are they...' Dear friends, the Church today look to you with confidence and expect you to be the people of the Beatitudes. Blessed are you if, like Jesus, you are poor in spirit, good and merciful; if you really seek what is just and right; if you are pure of heart, peacemakers, lovers of the poor and their servants. Blessed are you!... Happy are you!*

Your happiness, your fulfillment are defined by God... and your deepest hunger and thirst are satisfied in God alone... do not settle for less.... "Break down the barriers of superficiality and fear"... World Youth Day, XII. God's love is sufficient! God's will is your happiness! Consumerism makes you need more... and you are never satisfied...

Listen to the words of Blessed John Paul II in his letter to the Youth in 1985: *"Dear young people, you are under threat from the bad use of advertising techniques, which plays upon the natural tendency to avoid effort and promises the immediate satisfaction of every desire, while the consumerism that goes with it suggests that man should seek self-fulfillment especially in the enjoyment of material goods. How many young people, succumbing to the fascination of deceptive mirages, give themselves up to the uncontrolled power of the instincts, or venture on to paths which seem full of promise but which in reality are lacking in genuinely human prospects! I feel the need to repeat what I wrote in the Message which I dedicated precisely to you for the World Day of Peace: "Some of you may be tempted to take flight from responsibility: in the fantasy worlds of alcohol and drugs, in short-lived sexual relationships without commitment to marriage and family, in indifference, in cynicism and even in violence. Put yourselves on guard against the fraud of a world that wants to exploit or misdirect your energetic and powerful search for happiness and meaning".(Letter to Youth, 1985)*

It has been 27 years since John Paul II gave us this message...It seems that in the world nothing has changed. The world continues to present to us the same temptations over and over...Can you identify with this? This is why the people out there continue to live restless... *But God's love is our rest.... His love quenches our thirst, satisfies our hunger, and leads us, to the full realization of our selves...to the true realization of ourselves. Only in God, we rest...!*

St. Augustine prayed, **"Oh God, you have made us for thyself alone, and our hearts will remain restless until they rest in thee"** (Confessions. Book I, Ch. I). In all his writings St. Augustine asked the question of how man could find the true happiness he so desires. After much thought and many different paths, St. Augustine concluded that the happiness of the human heart lies in discovering God and knowing that God is Love...and that God loves him, **God loves YOU and ME!** And this love, this love of God, this eternal love, this imperishable love is the only love that is capable of guaranteeing man his happiness because it is the only love that excludes all fear of losing the beloved. It is the only guarantee of man's happiness because man always fears losing his beloved. And the only love that excludes all fear of losing the beloved is the love of God. That is why, after St. John tells us twice in the same chapter of his first

letter that God is love, he next gives us these words: *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear" (4:18). John Paul II told the young people during the World Youth Day in Poland: "Do not be afraid of Christ! Trust him completely! Christ never lets us down! Never!" (John Paul II in Poland). It is hard to believe this... this kind of love... because we all have experienced people we loved letting us down... How would our hearts be healed if we only knew, deeply knew the truth.... the truth that Christ's love will never let us down!*

John Paul II, from the first day of his pontificate when he came out on the balcony of the Vatican to wave at the people of God, exclaimed, *"DO NOT BE AFRAID! Open wide the doors of your hearts to the redemptive love of Christ!" (October 22, 1978).* This "Do not be afraid" that he especially cried out to the young people in all his messages and World Youth Day, means.... Do not be afraid because you are loved! The Holy Father tells us in his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope, "Be Not Afraid...All have a need to hear these words: each person, each family, all peoples and nations of the whole world" (cf. p. 221). "we need to know and grow in the certainty that Someone exists who holds in His hands the destiny of this passing world...Someone who is the Alpha and the Omega of human history – be it the individual or collective history. And this Someone is Love" (ibid, 222).* And because He is Love, John Paul II tells us, He is the only one – the only one who can truly say to us as He said to the Apostles: *"let your hearts not be troubled...have faith in me"....(Jn 14, 1)* Because He loves us with a fatherly heart, He can tell you: *"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."* And Jesus can also look at your eyes, dear young people and tell you: *"have peace in me, in the world you would have difficulties, but have courage, I have conquered the world" (Jn 16:33)*

GOD'S LOVE.... AN ENCOUNTER THAT RE-DIRECTS OUR LIVES

"We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction". (DCE,1) We must have an encounter with the living God, the God who is love, and this encounter must produce and effect a response... a fundamental response of love to God, who loves me. Since God has first loved us, love is now no longer a mere command; it is a response to His gift of love. The greatest response of the human heart to God's love *is the sincere gift of ourselves to him....* This is our task: to love and "glorify Him by accomplishing the work He has entrusted us to do" (Jn 17: 4) This is why it is so necessary that you ask Jesus, as John Paul II told you in his letter to the Youth in 1985: *"What must I do? "What must I do to inherit eternal life?". What must I do so that my life may have full value and full meaning?*

There is a treasure that is hidden precisely in these questions. Man asks himself these questions throughout his life. But in the time of youth they are particularly urgent, indeed insistent. And it is good that this is so. These questions precisely show the dynamism of the development of the human personality, the dynamism which is proper to your age. You ask yourselves these questions sometimes with impatience, and at the same time you yourselves understand that the reply to them cannot be hurried or superficial the reply must have a specific and definitive weight. It is a question here of a reply that concerns the whole of life, that embraces the whole of human existence.

We must ask these important questions....we must seek these fundamental answers.... We must seek the answers before Christ in the Eucharist, and ask Him...what must I do? He will speak to your hearts, He will respond and let you know His will... He will give you the graces to follow Him wherever He may lead you and to live courageously the call, the vocation to love and to give the gift of yourselves totally

and sincerely."The Lord will help you, young people, to know his will, and he will help you to follow your vocation courageously". (John Paul II in St. Louis, Missouri)

OUR HEARTS WILL REST IN KNOWING AND DOING HIS WILL

John Paul told young people in his first words dedicated to you: *"I believe in you!* With these words, he affirmed your goodness and challenged you to higher standards and to do greater things. Yes, young people, you need courage and perseverance to follow the Lord and to do great works for the Lord...You, young people, are capable of so much more....you are capable of holiness like St. Therese of Lisieux, Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, St. Gemma Galgani and Bl. Jacinta and Francisco, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, and St. Kateri Tekakwitha

You are capable of great sacrifices and renunciations...you are capable of making fundamental choices responding to God's love... you are capable of fidelity, of selfless service, responsibility and hard work.... You are capable of bringing new and beautiful things into our world....you are capable of realizing God's will and his designs of love with generosity, courage and diligence. You are capable of giving your life totally and generously.... you are capable of building a better world for your own generation and the future ones.... You are capable of much more than our contemporary culture tells us, you are capable of love, of responsible, self-giving, not self-seeking love. *"The way Jesus shows us is not easy. Rather, sometimes is like a path winding up a mountain. ... Do not lose heart! The steeper the road, the faster it raises towards ever wider horizons"* (John Paul II, World Youth Day XI). *Love will open your hearts, your ears and your eyes to see wider horizons, wider roads to give yourself. Selfishness causes blindness and deafness....but love has no limits...! Love must be the motor, the fire, and the zeal of your lives.*

Dear young people, "Allow me, dear young people, to consign this hope of mine to you: you must be those 'builders'! You are the men and women of tomorrow. The future is in your hearts and in your hands. God is entrusting to you the task, at once difficult and uplifting, of working with him in the building of the civilization of love". (John Paul II, in Toronto)...

And as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI called the youth in his message of peace this January 2012: *"Dear young people, you are a precious gift for society. Do not yield to discouragement in the face of difficulties and do not abandon yourselves to false solutions which often seem the easiest way to overcome problems. Do not be afraid to make a commitment, to face hard work and sacrifice, to choose the paths that demand fidelity and constancy, humility and dedication. Be confident in your youth and its profound desires for happiness, truth, beauty and genuine love! Live fully this time in your life so rich and so full of enthusiasm".*

Yes, dear young people, do not let this beautiful and profound time in your life, your youth, to simply pass. This is a very particular time to responsibly and enthusiastically live for Christ and to allow your heart to ask profound and fundamental questions.... It is a time of knowing God's love...of resting in his love and his truth, and a time of preparation to make of your life a sincere gift of self, to others...for the good of the Church and of humanity.

I would like to finish with the same prayer that John Paul II prayed at his last World Youth Day: "O Lord Jesus Christ, keep these young people in Your love. Let them hear Your voice and believe what You say, for You alone have the words of life. Teach them how to profess their faith, bestow their love, and impart their hope to others. Make them convincing witnesses to Your Gospel in a world so much in need of Your saving grace. Make them the new people of the Beatitudes, that they may be the salt of the earth and the light of the world at the beginning of the Third Christian Millennium! Mary, Mother of the Church, protect and guide these young men and women of the Twenty-first Century. Keep us all close to Your maternal heart. Amen."

Let us now prepare to receive Love Incarnate, the very presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and let us rest in the fact that we are loved, that You are loved!