

spiritual closeness and active assistance is a great support and comfort to me. For this I thank you, and at the same time I invite all of you, priests, deacons, Religious and lay faithful, to join together in invoking the Holy Spirit, praying that the College of Cardinals may be ever more ardent in pastoral charity, so as to help the whole Church to radiate Christ's love in the world, to the praise and glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Amen!

Address to the participants in the UNIV International Congress, Rome (April 10, 2006)

Dear Friends,

I offer a cordial welcome to all of you who, continuing a tradition that has now existed for several years, have come to Rome to live Holy Week and take part in the international UNIV meeting. You belong, as one can see, to numerous countries and are diligently devoted to the activities of Christian formation that the Prelature of Opus Dei promotes in your city. Welcome to this meeting and thank you for coming.

I greet in particular your Bishop Prelate, Javier Echevarría Rodríguez, as well as your young representative, and I express my gratitude to them for the sentiments expressed to me on behalf of all.

Your presence in Rome, the heart of the Christian world, gives you an opportunity to live the Paschal Mystery intensely during Holy Week. In particular, it enables you to have a more intimate encounter with Christ, especially through contemplation of his passion, death and resurrection.

Christ guides you through life

As I wrote in my Message for the 21st World Youth Day, it is he who guides your steps, your university studies and your friendships in the comings and goings of daily life. Moreover, for each one of you, as for the Apostles, the personal encounter with the divine Teacher who calls you friends (cf. *Jn* 15:15) can be the beginning of an extraordinary adventure: that of becoming apostles among your peers, to lead them to have the same experience as you of friendship with God made Man, with God who made himself my friend. Never forget, dear young people, that in the end your happiness, our happiness, depends on the encounter with Jesus and on friendship with him.

I find the topic you are studying at your Congress very interesting: that is, culture and the means of social communication. Unfortunately, we are obliged to note that in our time the new technologies and the mass media do not always encourage personal relations, sincere dialogue and friendship between people; nor do they always help to cultivate the interiority of the relationship with God.

For you, as I know well, friendship and contact with others, especially with your peers, are an important part of everyday life. You must view Jesus as one of your dearest friends, indeed, the dearest. Then you will see how friendship with him will lead you to open yourselves to others, whom you consider as brothers or sisters, maintaining with each one a relationship of sincere friendship.

In fact, Jesus Christ is truly “the incarnate love of God” (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 12), and in him alone can we find the strength to offer our brothers and sisters human affection and supernatural love in a spirit of service, expressed above all in understanding.

It is great to feel oneself understood by another and to begin to understand the other person.

Dear young people, may I repeat to you what I said to your peers gathered at Cologne in August last year: those who have discovered Christ must bring others to him too, given that a great joy should not be kept for oneself but passed on.

This is the task to which the Lord calls you; this is the “apostolate of friendship” that St. Josemaría, Founder of Opus Dei, described as “a ‘personal’ friendship, self-sacrificing and sincere: face to face, heart to heart” (*Furrow*, no. 191). Every Christian is asked to be a friend of God and with God’s grace, attract his own friends to him.

In this way, apostolic love becomes an authentic passion that is expressed in communicating to others the happiness to be found in Jesus. Again, it is St. Josemaría who reminds you of some key words in your spiritual itinerary: “Communion, union, conversation, confidence: Word, Bread, Love” (*The Way*, no. 535), the important words that express the essential milestones on our way.

If you cultivate friendship with Jesus, if you are diligent in receiving the sacraments, and especially the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, you will be able to become the “new generation of apostles anchored firmly in the Word of Christ, capable of responding to the challenges of our times and prepared to spread the Gospel far and wide” (Message for the 21st World Youth Day, February 22, 2006; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, March 1, p. 3).

May the Blessed Virgin help you say your “yes” to the Lord, who calls you to follow him always, and may St. Josemaría intercede for you. As I express the hope that you will spend Holy Week in prayer and reflection, in contact with many of the early remains of the Christian faith in Rome, I bless with affection all those who are in charge of your formation and all your loved ones.