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FREIBURG IM BREISGAU - 24.09.2011 - 19:00

Trade Fair

Prayer vigil with the young people

Official translation

Dear young friends,

Throughout today I have been looking forward to this evening, and to this opportunity to be together with you and to join you in prayer. No doubt some of you were present at World Youth Day, where we were able to experience the special atmosphere of peace, deep fellowship and inner joy that characterizes an evening prayer vigil. It is my wish that we may experience the same thing now: that the Lord may touch our hearts and make us joyful witnesses who pray together and support one another, not just this evening but throughout our lives.

In all churches, in cathedrals and religious houses, wherever the faithful gather to celebrate the Easter Vigil, that holiest of all nights begins with the lighting of the Paschal candle, whose light is then passed on to all who are present. One tiny flame spreads out to become many lights and fills the darkness of God's house with its brightness. This wonderful liturgical rite, which we have imitated in our prayer vigil tonight, reveals to us in signs more eloquent than words the mystery of our Christian faith. Jesus who says of himself: "I am the light of the world" (*Jn 8:12*), causes our lives to shine brightly, so that what we have just heard in the Gospel comes true: "You are the light of the world" (*Mt 5:14*). It is not our human efforts or the technical progress of our era that brings light into this world. Again and again we have to experience how our striving to bring about a better and more just world hits against its limits. Innocent suffering and the ultimate fact of death awaiting every single person are an impenetrable darkness which may perhaps, through fresh experiences, be lit up for a moment, as if through a flash of lightning at night. In the end, though, a frightening darkness remains.

While all around us there may be darkness and gloom, yet we see a light: a small, tiny flame that is stronger than the seemingly powerful and invincible darkness. Christ, risen from the dead, shines in this world and he does so most brightly in those places where, in human terms, everything is sombre and hopeless. He has conquered death – he is alive – and faith in him, like a small light, cuts through all that is dark and threatening. To be sure, those who believe in Jesus do not lead lives of perpetual sunshine, as though they could be spared suffering and hardship, but there is always a bright glimmer there, lighting up the path that leads to fullness of life (cf. *Jn 10:10*). The eyes of those who believe in Christ see light even amid the darkest night and they already see the dawning of a new day.

Light does not remain alone. All around, other lights are flaring up. In their gleam, space acquires contours, so that we can find our bearings. We do not live alone in this world. And it is for the important things of life that we have to rely on other people. Particularly in our faith, then, we do not stand alone, we are links in the great chain of believers. Nobody can believe unless he is supported by the faith of others, and conversely, through my faith, I help to strengthen others in their faith. We help one another to set an example, we give others a share in what is ours: our thoughts, our deeds, our affections. And we help one another to find our bearings, to work out where we stand in society.

Dear friends, the Lord says: "I am the light of the world – you are the light of the world." It is mysterious and wonderful that Jesus applies the same predicate to himself and to each one of us, namely "light". If we believe that he is the Son of God, who healed the sick and raised the dead, who rose from the grave himself and is truly alive, then we can understand that he is the light, the source of all the lights of this world. On the other hand, we experience more and more the failure of our efforts and our personal shortcomings, despite our best intentions. In the final analysis, the world in which we live, in spite of its technical progress, does not seem to be getting any better. There is still war and terror, hunger and disease, bitter poverty and merciless oppression. And even those figures in our history who saw themselves as "bringers of light", but without being fired by Christ, the one true light, did not manage to create an earthly paradise, but set up dictatorships and totalitarian systems, in which even the smallest spark of true humanity is choked.

At this point we cannot remain silent about the existence of evil. We see it in so many places in this world; but we also see it – and this scares us – in our own lives. Truly, within our hearts there is a tendency towards evil, there is selfishness, envy, aggression. Perhaps with a certain self-discipline all this can to some degree be controlled. But it becomes more difficult with faults that are somewhat hidden, that can engulf us like a thick fog, such as sloth, or laziness in willing

and doing good. Again and again in history, keen observers have pointed out that damage to the Church comes not from her opponents, but from uncommitted Christians. So how can Christ say that Christians, presumably including these weak and often lukewarm Christians, are the light of the world? Perhaps we could understand if he were to call out to us: Repent! Be the light of the world! Change your life, make it bright and radiant! Should we not be surprised that the Lord directs no such appeal to us, but tells us that we are the light of the world, that we shine, that we light up the darkness?

Dear friends, Saint Paul in many of his letters does not shrink from calling his contemporaries, members of the local community, “saints”. Here it becomes clear that every baptized person – even before accomplishing good works or special achievements – is sanctified by God. In baptism the Lord, as it were, sets our life alight with what the Catechism calls sanctifying grace. Those who watch over this light, who live by grace, are indeed holy.

Dear friends, again and again the very notion of saints has been caricatured and distorted, as if to be holy meant to be remote from the world, naive and joyless. Often it is thought that a saint has to be someone with great ascetic and moral achievements, who might well be revered, but could never be imitated in our own lives. How false and discouraging this opinion is! There is no saint, apart from the Blessed Virgin Mary, who has not also known sin, who has never fallen. Dear friends, Christ is not so much interested in how often in your lives you stumble and fall, as in how often you pick yourselves up again. He does not demand glittering achievements, but he wants his light to shine in you. He does not call you because you are good and perfect, but because he is good and he wants to make you his friends. Yes, you are the light of the world because Jesus is your light. You are Christians – not because you do special and extraordinary things, but because Christ is your life. You are holy because his grace is at work in you.

Dear friends, this evening as we gather in prayer around the one Lord, we sense the truth of Christ’s saying that the city built on a hilltop cannot remain hidden. This gathering shines in more ways than one – in the glow of innumerable lights, in the radiance of so many young people who believe in Christ. A candle can only give light if it lets itself be consumed by the flame. It would remain useless if its wax failed to nourish the fire. Allow Christ to burn in you, even at the cost of sacrifice and renunciation. Do not be afraid that you might lose something and, so to speak, emerge empty-handed at the end. Have the courage to apply your talents and gifts for God’s kingdom and to give yourselves – like candlewax – so that the Lord can light up the darkness through you. Dare to be glowing saints, in whose eyes and hearts the love of Christ beams and who thus bring light to the world. I am confident that you and many other young people here in Germany are lamps of hope that do not remain hidden. “You are the light of the world”. Amen.
