

John Paul II

“Dear young people, let yourselves be taken over by the light of Christ and spread that light wherever you are.”

We carry forward a statue of Blessed Pope John Paul II. John Paul had a special affinity with the young. He reached out to the youth of the world, not because he was young, but because he was youthful. He knew, and understood, the challenges which the youth of today face, and it is for this reason that we are here tonight. John Paul understood young people, their anxieties, and desires, their needs, and expectations. He knew the difficulties faced by youth in the world of today, and he knew that true happiness for them, and us, can only be found in Christ Jesus. John Paul believed in our youth; he realised and accepted that young people are the future of our world, and particularly our Church.

As we honour him tonight, we thank God for his wisdom, and for all the young people here who have chosen to listen to the words of John Paul II, who listened and lived the words of Jesus Christ. Let us thank God for the vibrant youth who keep our Church alive, and who choose to walk with the Lord, through their acts of love and faith.

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The Muiredach Cross

We carry forward the Muiredach Cross. It is a reminder of our Celtic heritage. The Catholic faith has flourished in Ireland since it was first brought to this country by St. Patrick. The Cross represents the Celtic influence, and it reminds us that faith has always been important in our country. As we present the Cross tonight let us honour all of our young people who have achieved the Muiredach Cross Award. Let us pray that each of these young people will continue to practice the faith, and hold the torch for all generations to come. Let us agree to work together for the preservation of our faith, and let us pray to be shining examples of what it means to be a young Catholic in this community in 21st Century Ireland.

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Year of Faith Logo

This is the Year of Faith. Symbolising this year, we carry forward a special logo. The logo is a square representing a field. Inside the square, we have a boat which represents our Church. The sails of the boat are formed by the letters, *IHS*, which are the first three letters of the Greek word for “Jesus”. There is a circle in the background, representing the sun. The circle and the trigram of letters also symbolise the Eucharist.

The Year of Faith represents an opportunity for all Catholics to renew their faith. Pope Benedict XVI wanted to provide an opportunity for us to become “credible, joy-filled witnesses to the Risen Lord in the world today, capable of leading others to faith.”

It is clear tonight that many young people have answered the call to be witnesses for their faith. Let us thank God for the joy in sharing such an occasion of affirmation for our youth. Let us resolve to be the joy filled creatures that Benedict asks. Let us bring the light of Christ to all others with whom we come in contact. Let us be inspired to bring Christ to every part of our life, and let us be energised to use our youth and vitality to spread the good news that Christ exists in all of us, and for all of us. Let us be Christ’s example in our world.

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The Paschal Candle

We bring forward the Paschal Candle which represents Christ, the Light of the World. This candle is made from beeswax, which symbolises the purity of the sinless Christ. The wick represents, not only Christ's humanity, but also his Divine nature, which is symbolised by the flame. The Greek letters of Alpha and Omega, are an acknowledgement that Jesus is the beginning, and the end.

The five grains of incense are a reminder of the five wounds of Christ, and they are formed into a cross, a reminder that our Saviour died so that we could be free.

The Candle is a reminder that Jesus is the light of the world. His flame will never be extinguished, and this is evident by the presence of so many young people here tonight. The light of Christ lives in every person here present. Let us acknowledge this light in our lives, and give thanks for the strength we receive from being close to the flame. Let us remember that we have a sacred duty to bring the flame of Christ to others, and let us further remember that we must, as young Catholics, share the joy of Christ with those who are in darkness.

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St. Patrick

We bring forward shamrocks. These represent the faith that St. Patrick brought to Ireland. Patrick was a young man when he first came to our country, and he was still a young man when he returned to bring the faith to the Irish. The symbolism of the shamrock explains for us the mystery of the Trinity of God. Let us celebrate our youth, and let us thank God for the very fine example that we have of youth, and the faith, when we look around tonight. St. Patrick is our inspiration, and he showed us the way to Jesus.

The faith that St Patrick brought to our isle is represented here tonight, and in all of these young people who are present. As our young people embark on their life's journey, let us pray that they will always aspire to live the values of Patrick, and our Catholic faith in particular. Let us pray that no matter their physical destination, these young people will always remain in the Catholic community which Patrick gave to us. Let us further pray that they will continue to build upon the work they have started, by their contribution to, and involvement in, the excellent opportunities represented by the awards tonight.

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The Staff

We carry forward a staff. It is the symbol of Christ who is the Good Shepherd. The shepherd looks after his flock. We are the flock of Christ. This staff reminds us that Christ is our support. When we are walking along the path of life, we need to remember that we have Christ to hold onto. Christ will guide our faltering footsteps; Christ will be our strength, and our support. Christ will be our strong, and sturdy, foundation. It is the Risen Christ who will help us to cope with the burdens of life, and when we feel that our human strength is weak, let us always be aware that Christ walks with us.

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Youcat

We carry forward a copy of the YouCat. John Paul II wrote:

“What is needed today is a church which knows how to respond to the expectations of young people. Jesus wants to enter into dialogue with them and, through his body, which is the Church, to propose the possibility of a choice, which will require a commitment of their lives. As Jesus, with the disciples of Emmaus, so the Church must become the travelling companion of young people.”

The Church has provided a travelling companion for every young person, in the form of **Youcat**. **Youcat** is the moral compass for all young people on a journey to Christ. The necessary requirements for any journey are:

- ❖ knowledge of destination
- ❖ appropriate means of travel
- ❖ good companionship
- ❖ itinerary of stops along the way
- ❖ excellent bases for the refreshment of body and soul
- ❖ and a means of protection and security.

Youcat is our guide book to Christ.

Let us resolve to carry it with us always.

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The Holy Spirit

We carry forward an image of the Holy Spirit. When we are baptised, we become members of the Catholic Church. We belong to the community of Christ. At Baptism and Confirmation we are imbued with the Holy Spirit of God, and from that time we belong to God. The Holy Spirit is our guide, and our light, and our source of life. We should always ask the Holy Spirit to be with us, every single second, of every single day of our lives. Our young people tonight need to recognise the existence of the Spirit in the Church and in their lives. Let us always be thankful for the Spirit of Christ which exists in us, and which has permeated our entire being. The Spirit will energise us in our faith, and support us as we walk the path of Jesus. Let us always nurture the Spirit in all we do, and thank God for the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

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Summary

- ❖ We are each on a journey, a journey to Jesus. He is our light and our guide.
- ❖ Let us hold before us the example of John Paul II, who, like Jesus, shines light on the dark patches of life, and who helps us to see the path ahead. He was our moral compass, and he will continue to direct us on the path to Christ.
- ❖ We need, too, to hold with us, the vision of the Muiredach Cross. It will strengthen our failing courage; it will help us to have a sense of time and place. We belong to a people, a people who never faltered, and who kept the faith against all the odds.
- ❖ Let us remember too, that we are children of faith, born of faith, and into faith. Let us cherish the faith that we have.
- ❖ Help will come from the Paschal Candle; it will shine forever in front of our stumbling feet. Jesus is the Paschal Candle; he is the light that will always shine.
- ❖ Let us see the shamrock along the way, and remember that we will negotiate the path because of the guidance of St. Patrick.
- ❖ As we place our feet on the path, let us bring a strong staff, to help steady our faltering steps, to steady our soul when we stumble. That staff is Jesus.
- ❖ Let us bring food for our journey, in the fruit of knowledge which is our catechism.
- ❖ When we need to rest from the toils of the journey, let us find refreshment in the Holy Spirit. Let us drink the water of the Spirit, and quench our thirst for Jesus.
- ❖ Let us realise the joy that walking with Jesus will bring along the way, and let us ask that each young person here tonight remembers,
- ❖ You are a gift from God, you are the future of our Church, you will shine your light in the world, and you will be a source of inspiration to all who meet you, on your own path to Jesus.

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