



Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, 1925.  
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Blessed are  
the pure in  
heart for  
they shall see  
God



**ARCHBISHOP'S PENTECOST LETTER TO YOUTH 2015**  
CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

The higher  
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Christ



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## Listening to the voice of God

Dear young friends,

What voices do you listen to in order to guide your life? The voice of your parents? Your friends? The voice of your conscience? Things you read on the internet?

There are many voices that envelop our lives; some that mean well, others that do not really know us at all. The voices of those we admire and look up to may lead us in different directions; the voices of others we encounter may lead us to places we do not really want to go.

Life is a gift from God, and God wants us to enjoy it to the full. For fullness of life, there is one voice that knows us above all, a voice that is infinitely beyond us and yet very close to us.

I am speaking of the voice of God in his Son, Jesus Christ.

A word of warning, however: if you listen to the voice of Christ, nothing will ever be the same again. When you listen to the voice of Jesus, be ready for an adventure because your life will take on 'a new horizon and a definite direction'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict, *Deus Caritas est*, §1

## Verso l'alto—To the heights!

It was a sad day for the Frassati family in June 1925 as they set out for the funeral of their 24-year-old son, Pier Giorgio. The Frassatis were a wealthy family in the Italian town of Turin, so naturally they expected their friends and other prominent citizens to be present at the funeral. Imagine their surprise when they found the streets of the city lined with thousands of mourners, including many of Turin's poorest citizens. Who were all these people?

The stories started to come out. As a boy, Pier Giorgio would give his bus fare to people in need, and then run home to be on time for meals so his parents wouldn't know what he had done. When he was older, his father offered him the choice of money or a car. He took the money and distributed it to poor families. One time he found a home for a woman who had been evicted from her flat. Another time he gave his shoes to a beggar's son who was barefoot. When a widow was sick he supported her three children, and he found a bed for a tuberculosis sufferer. Even on his deathbed, he was concerned to send a message to ensure a sick man whom he had been visiting was looked after.

Pier Giorgio had also been active in working for social justice, especially for workers. He was studying to become a mining engineer because he thought he could 'serve Christ better among

the miners'. He was also active in causes for social reform, saying that 'charity is not enough', and even started his own newspaper to promote Catholic principles of social justice. Having been a teenager during the First World War, he was moved to organise a worldwide association for Catholic students to work for universal peace.

In all this, Pier Giorgio's motivation was simple: he was a Christian. He attended Mass regularly, read scripture and prayed the rosary. He joined the lay order of the Dominicans and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (the 'Vinnies' as we know them). Everything he did, he did because he made it his goal to listen to the voice of Christ.

But don't get the idea that he didn't enjoy life! He liked to go to the theatre and museums, to read literature and enjoy art. He was physically active and had a passion for mountain climbing. When climbing with his friends, he would shout out '*Verso l'alto!*', '*To the heights!*'. The thrill of climbing had a spiritual parallel for Pier Giorgio. In his own words: 'The higher we go, the better we shall hear the voice of Christ'.

Pier Giorgio died young but lived life to the full in following Jesus and caring for others. For him, life as a disciple of Jesus was a true adventure. He embodied Jesus' saying: 'If you try to save your life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 8:35

## Blessed are the pure in heart

In 1990, years after his death, Pier Giorgio Frassati was declared 'Blessed', the first step toward becoming a saint of the Church. Pope Saint John Paul II, himself a lover of mountains and skiing, described Pier Giorgio as 'a man of the Beatitudes'. The Beatitudes are sayings from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. One of the Beatitudes is 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'.<sup>3</sup>

What does it mean to be 'pure'? The writers of the bible often used snow as an image of purity: 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow'.<sup>4</sup> Snow reflects the light of the sun, even on the greyest day or at night, and makes the smallest amount of light seem even brighter. Snow also absorbs sound, making the landscape around it quiet, enabling us to hear the smallest whisper of a voice.

Like snow, which is receptive to the slightest hint of light and sound, purity of heart 'enables us even now to see things according to God'.<sup>5</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes purity as loving one another 'with an upright and undivided heart',<sup>6</sup> seeking and defending the true purpose of every human life, and finding and fulfilling God's will in all things.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:8

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 51:7

<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2531

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, §2520

Blessed Pier Giorgio said: 'The higher we go, the better we shall hear the voice of Christ'. He showed us how rising to the virtue of purity can lead to a life that is full, joyful, wildly generous and strikingly unique. Of course, rising higher in integrity and spiritual virtue is, like mountain climbing, a difficult and often rocky journey that requires courage. You can stay below, among the crowds of the city, following the voices that often come from anonymous places, or you can listen to the voice of Jesus and follow him up the mountain to a higher place.

## Go higher!

Dear young friends, there is a saying that 'If you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you've always got'. Jesus, who knows and loves you, invites you to something new—to live life as an adventure! He came to give you life in abundance, not just a bit, but 'good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over'.<sup>7</sup>

This Pentecost, I urge you to lift up your eyes and to go 'to the heights' in your life, that in the power of the Holy Spirit you may hear the voice of Christ and see God.

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 6:38



+ Denis J. Hart

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