



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO VALENCIA (SPAIN) ON OCCASION
OF THE FIFTH WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES

VIGIL OF PRAYER

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

City of Arts and Sciences
Saturday, 8 July 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am most happy to take part in this prayer meeting which is meant to celebrate with great joy God's gift of the family. I feel very close in prayer to all those who have recently experienced this city's mourning and in our hope in the Risen Christ, which provides light and strength even at times of immense human tragedy.

United by the same faith in Christ, we have gathered here from so many parts of the world as a community which with gratitude and joy bears witness that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God for love, and that complete human fulfilment only comes about when we make a sincere gift of ourselves to others. The family is the privileged setting where every person learns to give and receive love. That is why the Church constantly wishes to demonstrate her pastoral concern for this reality, so basic for the human person. This is what she teaches in her Magisterium: "God, who is love and who created man and woman for love, has called them to love. By creating man and woman he called them to an intimate communion of life and love in Marriage. 'So they are no longer two but one flesh' (Mt 19:6)" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, Compendium, 337*).

This is the truth that the Church tirelessly proclaims to the world. My beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II said that "man has been made "in the image and likeness of God not only by his being human, but also by the communion of the persons that man and woman have formed since the beginning. They become the image of God, not so much in their aloneness as in their communion" (*Catechesis*, 14 November 1979). That is why I confirmed the calling of this Fifth World Meeting of Families in Spain, and specifically here in Valencia, a city rich in tradition and proud of the Christian faith lived and nurtured in so many of its families.

The family is an intermediate institution between individuals and society, and nothing can completely take its place. The family is itself based primarily on a deep interpersonal relationship between husband and wife, sustained by affection and mutual understanding. To enable this, it receives abundant help from God in the sacrament of Matrimony, which brings with it a true vocation to holiness. Would that our children might experience more the harmony and affection between their parents, rather than disagreements and discord, since the love between father and mother is a source of great security for children and it teaches them the beauty of a faithful and lasting love.

The family is a necessary good for peoples, an indispensable foundation for society and a great and lifelong treasure for couples. It is a unique good for children, who are meant to be the fruit of the love, of the total and generous self-giving of their parents. To proclaim the whole truth about the family, based on marriage as *a domestic Church and a sanctuary of life*, is a great responsibility incumbent upon all.

Father and mother have said a complete "yes" in the sight of God, which constitutes the basis of the sacrament which joins them together. Likewise, for the inner relationship of the family to be complete, they also need to say a "yes" of acceptance to the children whom they have given birth to or adopted, and each of which has his or her own personality and character. In this way, children will grow up in a climate of acceptance and love, and upon reaching sufficient maturity, will then want to say "yes" in turn to those who gave them life.

The challenges of present-day society, marked by the centrifugal forces generated especially in urban settings, make it necessary to ensure that families do not feel alone. A small family can encounter difficult obstacles when it is isolated from relatives and friends. The ecclesial community therefore has the responsibility of offering support, encouragement and spiritual nourishment which can strengthen the cohesiveness of the family, especially in times of trial or difficulty. Here parishes have an important role to play, as do the various ecclesial associations, called to cooperate as networks of support and a helping hand for the growth of families in faith.

Christ has shown us what is always to be the supreme source of our life and thus of the lives of families: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one had greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (*Jn 15:12-13*). The love of God

himself has been poured out upon us in Baptism. Consequently, families are called to experience this same kind of love, for the Lord makes it possible for us, through our human love, to be sensitive, loving and merciful like Christ.

Together with passing on the faith and the love of God, one of the greatest responsibilities of families is that of training free and responsible persons. For this reason the parents need gradually to give their children greater freedom, while remaining for some time the guardians of that freedom. If children see that their parents - and, more generally, all the adults around them - live life with joy and enthusiasm, despite all difficulties, they will themselves develop that profound "joy of life" which can help them to overcome wisely the inevitable obstacles and problems which are part of life. Furthermore, when families are not closed in on themselves, children come to learn that every person is worthy of love, and that there is a basic, universal brotherhood which embraces every human being.

This Fifth World Meeting invites us to reflect on a theme of particular importance, one fraught with great responsibility: *the transmission of faith in the family*. This theme is nicely expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "As a mother who teaches her children to speak and so to understand and communicate, the Church our Mother teaches us the language of faith in order to introduce us to the understanding and the life of faith" (No. 171).

This is symbolically in the liturgy of Baptism: with the handing over of the lighted candle, the parents are made part of the mystery of new life as children of God given to their sons and daughters in the waters of baptism.

To hand down the faith to children, with the help of individuals and institutions like the parish, the school or Catholic associations, is a responsibility which parents cannot overlook, neglect or completely delegate to others. "The Christian family is called the domestic church because the family manifests and lives out the communal and familiar nature of the Church as the family of God. Each family member, in accord with his or her own role, exercises the baptismal priesthood and contributes towards making the family a community of grace and of prayer, a school of human and Christian virtues, and the place where the faith is first proclaimed to children" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Compendium, 350). And what is more: "Parents, in virtue of their participation in the fatherhood of God, have the first responsibility for the education of their children and they are the first heralds of the faith for them. They have the duty to love and respect their children as *persons* and as *children of God*... in particular, they have the mission of educating their children in the Christian faith" (*ibid*, 460).

The language of faith is learned in homes where this faith grows and is strengthened through prayer and Christian practice. In the reading from *Deuteronomy* we have heard the prayer constantly repeated by the Chosen People, the "Shema Israel", which Jesus himself would have heard and recited in his home in Nazareth. He himself would refer to it during his public life, as we

see in the Gospel of Mark (12:29). This is the faith of the Church, which is born of God's love which comes through your families. To live the fullness of this faith, in all its wondrous newness, is a great gift. All the same, at those times when God's face seems to be hidden, believing can be difficult and takes great effort.

This meeting provides a new impetus for proclaiming the Gospel of the family, reaffirming the strength and identity of the family founded upon marriage and open to the generous gift of life, where children are accompanied in their bodily and spiritual growth. This is the best way to counter a widespread hedonism which reduces human relations to banality and empties them of their authentic value and beauty. To promote the values of marriage does not stand in the way of fully experiencing the happiness that man and women encounter in their mutual love. Christian faith and ethics are not meant to stifle love, but to make it healthier, stronger and more truly free. Human love needs to be purified and to mature if it is to be fully human and the principle of a true and lasting joy (cf. *Address at Saint John Lateran*, 5 June 2006).

And so I invite government leaders and legislators to reflect on the evident benefits which homes in peace and harmony assure to individuals and the family, the neuralgic center of society, as the Holy See has stated in the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*. The purpose of laws is the integral good of man, in response to his needs and aspirations. This good is a significant help to society, of which it cannot be deprived, and for peoples a safeguard and a purification. The family is also a school which enables men and women to grow to the full measure of their humanity. The experience of being loved by their parents helps children to become aware of their dignity as children.

Children need to be brought up in the faith, to be loved and protected. Along with their basic right to be born and to be raised in the faith, children also have the right to a home which takes as its model the home of Nazareth, and to be shielded from all dangers and threats. I am the grandfather of the world, we have heard.

I would now like to say a word to grandparents, who are so important for every family. They can be - and so often are - the guarantors of the affection and tenderness which every human being needs to give and receive. They offer little ones the perspective of time, they are memory and richness of families. In no way should they ever be excluded from the family circle. They are a treasure which the younger generation should not be denied, especially when they bear witness to their faith at the approach of death.

I now wish to recite a part of the prayer which you have prayed in asking for the success of this World Meeting of Families.

*O God, who in the Holy Family
left us a perfect model of family life*

lived in faith and obedience to your will.

Help us to be examples of faith and love for your commandments.

Help us in our mission of transmitting the faith that we received from our parents.

Open the hearts of our children

so that the seed of faith, which they received in Baptism, will grow in them.

Strength the faith of our young people,

that they may grow in knowledge of Jesus.

Increase love and faithfulness in all marriages,

especially those going through times of suffering or difficulty.

(...)

United to Joseph and Mary,

we ask this through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen.

© Copyright 2006 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana