



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
ORGANIZED BY THE JOHN PAUL II INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 5 April 2008*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I meet you with great joy on the occasion of the International Congress on "*Oil on the wounds: A response to the ills of abortion and divorce*", promoted by the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in collaboration with the *Knights of Columbus*. I congratulate you on the topical and complex theme that has been the subject of your reflections in these days and in particular for the reference to the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37), which you chose as a key to approach the evils of abortion and divorce that bring so much suffering to the lives of individuals, families and society. Yes, the men and women of our day sometimes truly find themselves stripped and wounded on the wayside of the routes we take, often without anyone listening to their cry for help or attending to them to alleviate and heal their suffering. In the often purely ideological debate a sort of conspiracy of silence is created in their regard. Only by assuming an attitude of merciful love is it possible to approach in order to bring help and enable victims to pick themselves up and resume their journey through life.

In a cultural context marked by increasing individualism, hedonism and all too often also by a lack of solidarity and adequate social support, human freedom, as it faces life's difficulties, is prompted in its weakness to make decisions that conflict with the indissolubility of the matrimonial bond or with the respect due to human life from the moment of conception, while it is still protected in its mother's womb. Of course, divorce and abortion are decisions of a different kind, which are

sometimes made in difficult and dramatic circumstances that are often traumatic and a source of deep suffering for those who make them. They also affect innocent victims: the infant just conceived and not yet born, children involved in the break-up of family ties. These decisions indelibly mark the lives of all those involved. The Church's ethical opinion with regard to divorce and procured abortion is unambivalent and known to all: these are grave sins which, to a different extent and taking into account the evaluation of subjective responsibility, harm the dignity of the human person, involve a profound injustice in human and social relations and offend God himself, Guarantor of the conjugal covenant and the Author of life. Yet the Church, after the example of her Divine Teacher, always has the people themselves before her, especially the weakest and most innocent who are victims of injustice and sin, and also those other men and women who, having perpetrated these acts, stained by sin and wounded within, are seeking peace and the chance to begin anew.

The Church's first duty is to approach these people with love and consideration, with caring and motherly attention, to proclaim the merciful closeness of God in Jesus Christ. Indeed, as the Fathers teach, it is he who is the true Good Samaritan, who has made himself close to us, who pours oil and wine on our wounds and takes us into the inn, the Church, where he has us treated, entrusting us to her ministers and personally paying in advance for our recovery. Yes, the Gospel of love and life is also always the *Gospel of mercy*, which is addressed to the actual person and sinner that we are, to help us up after any fall and to recover from any injury. My beloved Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, the third anniversary of whose death we celebrated recently, said in inaugurating the new Shrine of Divine Mercy in Krakow: "Apart from the mercy of God there is no other source of hope for mankind" ([17 August 2002](#)). On the basis of this mercy the Church cultivates an indomitable trust in human beings and in their capacity for recovery. She knows that with the help of grace human freedom is capable of the definitive and faithful gift of self which makes possible the marriage of a man and woman as an indissoluble bond; she knows that even in the most difficult circumstances human freedom is capable of extraordinary acts of sacrifice and solidarity to welcome the life of a new human being. Thus, one can see that the "No" which the Church pronounces in her moral directives on which public opinion sometimes unilaterally focuses, is in fact a great "Yes" to the dignity of the human person, to human life and to the person's capacity to love. It is an expression of the constant trust with which, despite their frailty, people are able to respond to the loftiest vocation for which they are created: the vocation to love.

On that same occasion, John Paul II continued: "This fire of mercy needs to be passed on to the world. In the mercy of God the world will find peace" (*ibid.*, p. 8). The great task of disciples of the Lord Jesus who find themselves the travelling companions of so many brothers, men and women of good will, is hinged on this. Their programme, the programme of the Good Samaritan, is a "'heart which sees'. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 31). In these days of reflection and dialogue you have stooped down to victims suffering from the wounds of divorce and abortion. You have noted first of all the sometimes traumatic

suffering that afflicts the so-called "children of divorce", marking their lives to the point of making their way far more difficult. It is in fact inevitable that when the conjugal covenant is broken, those who suffer most are the children who are the living sign of its indissolubility. Supportive pastoral attention must therefore aim to ensure that the children are not the innocent victims of conflicts between parents who divorce. It must also endeavour to ensure that the continuity of the link with their parents is guaranteed as far as possible, as well as the links with their own family and social origins, which are indispensable for a balanced psychological and human growth.

You also focused on the tragedy of procured abortion that leaves profound and sometimes indelible marks in the women who undergo it and in the people around them, as well as devastating consequences on the family and society, partly because of the materialistic mentality of contempt for life that it encourages. What selfish complicity often lies at the root of an agonizing decision which so many women have had to face on their own, who still carry in their heart an open wound! Although what has been done remains a grave injustice and is not in itself remediable, I make my own the exhortation in *[Evangelium Vitae](#)* addressed to women who have had an abortion: "Do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child" (n. 99).

I express deep appreciation for all those social and pastoral initiatives being taken for the reconciliation and treatment of people injured by the drama of abortion and divorce. Together with numerous other forms of commitment, they constitute essential elements for building that civilization of love that humanity needs today more than ever.

As I implore the Merciful Lord God that he will increasingly liken you to Jesus the Good Samaritan, that his spirit will teach you to look with new eyes at the reality of the suffering brethren, that he will help you to think with new criteria and spur you to act with generous dynamism with a view to an authentic civilization of love and life, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.