



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MILAN
AND 7th WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES
(1-3 JUNE 2012)

EVENING OF WITNESS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

Bresso Park
Saturday, 2 June 2012

THE HOLY FATHER CELEBRATES WITH THE FAMILIES OF THE WORLD

1 CAT TIEN (Vietnamese girl): Hello Papa. I am Cat Tien and I come from Vietnam.

I am seven years old and I wish to present my family to you. This is my Dad, Dan, and my mother is called Tao, and this is my little brother Binh.

I would very much like to know something about your own family and when you were very young like me.

HOLY FATHER: Thank you, my dear, and warm thanks also to your parents. You have asked me about my family memories. They are so many, and I can only speak of a few. The most important

moment for our family was always Sunday, but Sunday really began on Saturday afternoon. My father would read out the Sunday readings from a book that was very popular in Germany at that time, which also included explanations of the texts. That is how we began our Sunday, entering into the Liturgy in an atmosphere of joy. The next day we would go to Mass. My home is very close to Salzburg and so we had plenty of music – Mozart, Schubert, Haydn – and when the *Kyrie* began it was as if Heaven was opening up. Then once we were back home, naturally our Sunday meal together was important. We sang a lot together. My brother is a fine musician; he was already composing pieces for all of us as a boy, and the whole family would sing them. My father would play the zither and sing. These were unforgettable moments. Naturally we would go on journeys and walks together. We lived near a forest and it was so enjoyable to walk and have adventures and play there. In a word, we were one in heart and soul, enjoying so many experiences together, even though times were hard, as this was during the war: first we had the dictatorship and then poverty. But the mutual love that we shared, our joy, even in simple things, was so strong that it enabled us to endure and overcome these things. I think it is very important to understand that even little things were a source of joy because they were an expression of warm-heartedness. And so we grew up convinced that it was good to be human, because we saw God's goodness reflected in our parents and our brothers and sisters. And indeed when I try to imagine what Heaven will be like, I think it must be like the time when I was a small boy. In this environment of trust, joy and love, we were happy, and I think that Heaven must be rather like those early years. So in a way, I am hoping to return "home" when I leave for "the other part of the world".

2 SERGE RAZAFINBONY AND FARA ANDRIANOMBONANA (Engaged couple from Madagascar):

SERGE: Your Holiness, we are Fara and Serge and we come from Madagascar. We met in Florence as students – I was studying engineering, Fara economics. We have been engaged for four years and as soon as we graduate, our dream is to return to our country to help our people, not least through our professional activity.

FARA: The family models that prevail in the West leave us unconvinced, but we realize that in Africa too there are many traditional elements that need somehow to be set aside. We feel that we were made for one another. That is why we want to marry and build our future together. We also want every aspect of our lives to be shaped by Gospel values.

But speaking of marriage, Your Holiness, there is a phrase that attracts us more than anything else, and yet it also frightens us: "for ever".

HOLY FATHER: Dear friends, thank you for this testimony. My prayers go with you in this journey

of engagement, and I hope that you will be able to build a family “for ever”, upon Gospel values. You mentioned different types of marriage: we know the African *mariage coutumier* and we know Western marriage. Even in Europe, to tell the truth, until the nineteenth century, a different model of marriage prevailed from what we have today: marriage was often in reality a contract between *clans*, intended to preserve the *clan*, to make preparations for the future, to defend property, etc. Marriage partners were sought out by the clan, in the hope that they would be suited to one another. To some extent it was like that in our countries too. I remember that in a small town where I went to school, it was still very much like that. But then, from the nineteenth century onwards, there came the emancipation of the individual, personal freedom, and marriage was no longer based on the will of others, but on one’s own choice; first a couple would fall in love, then they would become engaged, and marriage would follow. At that time everyone was convinced that this was the only just model, and that love by itself would guarantee the “for ever”, because love is absolute, it wants everything, and thus it demands permanence: it is “for ever”. Unfortunately, reality was not like that: we see that falling in love is a wonderful thing, but perhaps it does not always last for ever: it is a feeling which does not remain indefinitely. So it is clear that the progression from falling in love to engagement and then to marriage requires a number of decisions, interior experiences. As I said, this loving sentiment is a wonderful thing, but it has to be purified, it has to undergo a process of discernment, that is, reason and will have to come into it. Reason, sentiment and will have to come together. In the Rite of Marriage, the Church does not say: “Are you in love?” but “Do you wish?” “Have you decided?” In other words, falling in love has to become true love by involving the will and the reason in a deeper journey of purification which is the journey of engagement, such that the whole person, with all his or her faculties, with the discernment of reason and strength of will, says: “Yes, this is my life”. I often think of the wedding-feast of Cana. The first wine is very fine: this is falling in love. But it does not last until the end: a second wine has to come later, it has to ferment and grow, to mature. The definitive love that can truly become this “second wine” is more wonderful still, it is better than the first wine. And this is what we must seek. Here it is important that the “I” and the “you” are not alone, but that the parish community is also involved, the Church, the circle of friends. All this – the right degree of personal maturity, communion of life with others, with families who support one another – is very important, and only in this way, through this involvement of the community, friends, the Church, the faith, God himself, can a wine emerge that will last for ever. I wish you well!

3. PALEOLOGOS (Greek family)

NIKOS: *Kalispera!* We are the Paleologos family from Athens. My name is Nikos and this is my wife Pania. And these are our two children, Pavlos and Lydia.

Years ago, together with two other partners, we invested everything we had in setting up a small IT company.

When the present severe economic crisis broke, our client base was drastically reduced, and the remaining customers take longer and longer to pay their bills. We can barely manage to pay the salaries of our two employees, and very little is left over for the partners: so much so that with every day that passes, we have less with which to support our families. Our situation is just one among many millions of similar situations. In town, people go around with their heads down. No one trusts anyone else any more, hope has vanished.

PANIA: We too, even though we continue to believe in Providence, find it hard to imagine a future for our children.

There are days and nights, Holy Father, when we find ourselves asking what to do in order not to lose hope. What can the Church say to all these people, to these individuals and families who no longer have anything to look forward to?

HOLY FATHER: My dear friends, thank you for this testimony which touches my heart and the hearts of us all. What can we respond? Words are not enough. We ought to do something concrete, and we all suffer on account of our inability to do anything concrete. Let us speak first about politics: it seems to me that all the parties need to develop a stronger sense of responsibility, not to make promises they cannot keep, nor just to seek votes for themselves, but to take responsibility for the good of everyone, and to understand that politics always has to include human and moral responsibility before God and before the world. Then, of course, individuals suffer and have to accept the situation in which they find themselves, often without any possibility of avoiding it. Nevertheless, we can also say this: let everyone strive to do whatever they can, thinking of themselves, their family, other people, with a great sense of responsibility, knowing that sacrifices are necessary in order to move forward. And thirdly, what can we do ourselves? This is my question, at this moment. I think that perhaps twinning arrangements between cities, families, and parishes could help. In Europe we now have a whole system of twinning, but it takes place at the level of cultural exchanges, which are certainly good and useful in themselves. Yet perhaps there is a need for twinning in another sense: that a family from the West – from Italy, Germany, France ... should take on the responsibility of helping another family. So too between parishes, and between cities: that they might genuinely assume responsibility and offer concrete assistance. And be sure of this: I and many others are praying for you, and this praying is not just a matter of words, it opens the heart to God and thus it also leads to creativity in finding solutions. Let us hope that the Lord will help us, that the Lord will always help us! Thank you.

4. RERRIE FAMILY (from the United States)

JAY: We live near New York.

My name is Jay, I am of Jamaican origin and I work as an accountant.

This is my wife Anna, who is a supply teacher.

And these are our six children, aged from 2 to 12. From this you can well imagine, Holy Father, that our life is made up of constant racing against time, anxieties, highly complex situations.

In our country too, in the United States, one of the absolute priorities is to hold onto our jobs, and if we are to do so it's no use keeping to the timetable, and often this comes at the cost of our family relationships.

ANNA: It certainly isn't easy ... Our impression, Holy Father, is that institutions and businesses don't make it easy to reconcile work schedules with the demands of family life.

Your Holiness, we imagine that for you too it isn't easy to reconcile the enormous number of commitments you have with the need for rest.

Do you have any advice to help us rediscover this essential harmony? In the maelstrom of so many stimuli coming at us from modern society, how can we help families to live and celebrate according to God's heart?

HOLY FATHER: It is a big question, and I think I understand this dilemma of reconciling the two priorities: the priority of the workplace is fundamental, and so is the priority of the family. How are we to reconcile them? I can only seek to offer a few suggestions. Firstly, there are businesses that allow something *extra* for families – birthdays, etc. – and they realize that to grant a little freedom ultimately brings benefits for the business too, because it strengthens people's love for their work, for their workplace. So I would like to invite employers to think of the family, to think of helping to reconcile these two priorities. Secondly, it seems to me that a certain creativity has to be achieved, and this is not always easy. But at least, every day, try to offer some element of joy to the family, some attention, some sacrifice of one's own will in order to be together as a family, to accept and overcome the dark moments, the trials of which we spoke earlier, and to think of the great good that the family is, and hence, in the determination to do something good every day, to find a way of reconciling the two priorities. And finally, there is Sunday, the day of celebration: I hope that Sunday is observed in America. Sunday, the Lord's Day, seems to me to be of great importance, and as such it is also "our day", because we are free. In the creation account, this was the Creator's original intention: that on one day we should all be free. In this freedom for one another, for ourselves, we are free for God. And this is how I think we defend human freedom, by defending

Sunday and feast-days as the Lord's days and thus as our days. I wish you well! Thank you!

5 THE ARAUJO FAMILY (a Brazilian family from Porto Alegre)

MARIA MARTA: Holy Father, in our country, just as in the rest of the world, marriage breakdowns are continually increasing.

My name is Maria Marta and this is Manoel Angelo. We have been married for 34 years and we are now grandparents. As a doctor and a family psychotherapist, we meet a great many families and we notice that couples in difficulties are finding it harder and harder to forgive and to accept forgiveness. We often encounter the desire and the will to establish a new partnership, something lasting, for the benefit of the children born from this second union.

MANOEL ANGELO: Some of these remarried couples would like to be reconciled with the Church, but when they see that they are refused the sacraments they are greatly discouraged. They feel excluded, marked by a judgement against which no appeal is possible.

These sufferings cause deep hurt to those involved. Their wounds also afflict the world and they become our wounds, the wounds of the whole human race.

Holy Father we know that the Church cares deeply about these situations and these people. What can we say to them and what signs of hope can we offer them?

THE HOLY FATHER: Dear friends, thank you for your very important work as family psychotherapists. Thank you for all that you do to help these suffering people. Indeed the problem of divorced and remarried persons is one of the great sufferings of today's Church. And we do not have simple solutions. Their suffering is great and yet we can only help parishes and individuals to assist these people to bear the pain of divorce. I would say, obviously, that prevention is very important, so that those who fall in love are helped from the very beginning to make a deep and mature commitment. Then accompaniment during married life is needed, so that families are never left on their own but are truly accompanied on their journey. As regards these people - as you have said - the Church loves them, but it is important they should see and feel this love. I see here a great task for a parish, a Catholic community, to do whatever is possible to help them to feel loved and accepted, to feel that they are not "excluded" even though they cannot receive absolution or the Eucharist; they should see that, in this state too, they are fully a part of the Church. Perhaps, even if it is not possible to receive absolution in Confession, they can nevertheless have ongoing contact with a priest, with a spiritual guide. This is very important, so that they see that they are accompanied and guided. Then it is also very important that they truly realize they are participating in the Eucharist if they enter into a real communion with the Body of

Christ. Even without “corporal” reception of the sacrament, they can be spiritually united to Christ in his Body. Bringing them to understand this is important: so that they find a way to live the life of faith based upon the Word of God and the communion of the Church, and that they come to see their suffering as a gift to the Church, because it helps others by defending the stability of love and marriage. They need to realize that this suffering is not just a physical or psychological pain, but something that is experienced within the Church community for the sake of the great values of our faith. I am convinced that their suffering, if truly accepted from within, is a gift to the Church. They need to know this, to realize that this is their way of serving the Church, that they are in the heart of the Church. Thank you for your commitment.

GREETING TO THE VICTIMS OF THE EARTHQUAKE

HOLY FATHER. Dear friends, you know that we are deeply involved in your pain and suffering; above all, I pray every day that this earthquake will finally come to an end. We are all eager to offer you assistance. Be assured that we will not forget you, that we are all doing all we can to help you – *Caritas*, the agencies of the Church and the State, the various communities. Each of us wants to help you spiritually, with our prayers and heartfelt sympathy, as well as materially, and I pray for you insistently. May God assist you, may he assist us all! I offer you my good wishes. May the Lord bless you!