



# The Holy See

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 8 October 1997*

***Live faithful love that is open to the family***

1. *"The Family, Gift and Commitment, Hope for Humanity"*: this was the theme of the Second World Meeting with Families which has just taken place in *Rio de Janeiro*, Brazil. The images and emotions of this event, which is one of the most significant phases of the Church's journey towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, are still vivid in my mind and in my heart.

I am profoundly grateful to God who, after World Youth Day in Paris, has granted me the joy of experiencing this gathering with families. *With young people, with the family!* Yes, because if it is true that young people are the future, it is also true that there is no future for humanity without the family. To assimilate the values that give life meaning, the new generations need to be born and raised in that community of life and love which God himself wanted for man and woman, in that "domestic church", which constitutes *the divine and human architecture* necessary for the harmonious development of every new-born being on earth.

The meeting with the world's families offered me the happy opportunity to visit the *Brazilian land* for the third time. Thus I have been able to meet that people again, who are so dear to the Church and to me personally, a people rich in history, culture and humanity, as well as faith and hope. The city of *Rio de Janeiro*, a symbol both of Brazil's beauty and of its contradictions, gave the meeting a very significant atmosphere, characterized by its many races and cultures. From the peak of the *Corcovado*, the great statue of Christ, his arms wide open, seemed to say to the families of the whole world: Come to me!

I address a respectful greeting to the *President of the Republic*, with whom I had a cordial talk in

*Rio*: I once again thank him and the city's civil and military authorities for their warm welcome. To Cardinal Eugênio de Araújo Sales, Archbishop of São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro, and to the *Brazilian Episcopate*, courageously committed to the cause of the family, I also express my gratitude, which I extend to everyone who collaborated for this great feast of love and life. I invoke the Lord's constant blessing upon the *Brazilian people* so that, with the efforts of all, the nation may grow in justice and solidarity.

2. The meeting in *Rio* was the *second great world meeting of families* with the Pope. The first took place in Rome in 1994, on the occasion of the International Year of the Family. These meetings, which the Church arranges on a world scale, express the will and commitment of the People of God to walk united on a privileged "path": the "path" of the Gospel, the "path" of peace, the "path" of youth, and, in this case, the "path" of the family.

Yes, the family is eminently the "*path of the Church*" which recognizes in it an essential and irreplaceable element of God's plan for humanity. The family is *the privileged place for personal and social development*. Whoever fosters the family, fosters the human person; whoever attacks it, attacks the human person. Today the family and life are confronted by a fundamental challenge which affects human dignity itself.

3. This is why the Church feels the need to witness to everyone the beauty of God's plan for the family, pointing it out as the hope of humanity. The great gathering of *Rio de Janeiro* had this aim: *to proclaim the "good news" of the family to the world*. This witness was given by men and women, parents and children of different cultures and languages, united to one another by their adherence to the Gospel of love of God in Christ.

Marriage and the family were the subject of deep reflection at the *Pastoral Theology Congress* I had the pleasure to conclude, addressing the participants in a talk on the centrality these themes must have in the Church's pastoral ministry.

In *Rio*, in the great *Maracanã Stadium*, we heard as it were the "symphony" of families: a unique symphony but one that was expressed in different cultural tones. The common basis of all the experiences was the *sacrament of Marriage*, as it is preserved by the Church on the basis of divine Revelation.

In the Eucharistic celebrations — in the Cathedral, but above all on Sunday at the *Flamengo Embankment* — the words of Sacred Scripture resounded, words which are the *basis of the Christian concept of the family*, words written in the Book of Genesis and confirmed by Christ in the Gospel: "He who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'" (Mt 19:4-5). "So", Jesus added, "they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt 19:6). This is the *truth about marriage*, on

which the *truth about the family* is based. Here is the secret of its success and at the same time the source of its mission, which is to light up the world with a reflection of the love of the Triune God, Creator and Redeemer of life.

The *Rio* meeting was thus *an eloquent "epiphany" of the family* which was shown in the variety of its contingent expressions, but also in the unity of its substantial identity: of a communion of love, founded on marriage and called to be the sanctuary of life, the small church, the cell of society. From Rio de Janeiro's *Maracanã Stadium*, become almost an immense cathedral, *a message of hope*, confirmed by lived experiences, was transmitted to the whole world: it is possible and joyful, although demanding, to live faithful love that is open to life; it is possible to participate in the Church's mission and in building society.

Today I would like to make this message ring out, at the end of my sixth journey abroad this year. With God's help and the special protection of Mary, Queen of the family, may the experience of *Rio de Janeiro* be a pledge of the Church's renewed journey on the privileged "path" of the family, and a hope of society's growing attention to the cause of the family, which is the very cause of humanity and civilization.

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To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, the Holy Father said:

Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from England, Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, and the United States, I invoke God's abundant blessings.

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