



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II

TO THOSE TAKING PART IN THE RECITATION OF THE ROSARY

ON THE EVE OF PRO-LIFE DAY IN ITALY

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*1. I am spiritually united with you who have gathered in Paul VI Auditorium on this First Saturday of February to celebrate the feast of the family on the eve of Pro-Life Day. I greet you all with great affection. In particular, I greet the Cardinal Vicar, to whom I have entrusted the task of expressing my good wishes to you. I greet Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, who wished to take part in this gathering. I also greet Auxiliary Bishop Luigi Moretti, Director of the Centre for Family Ministry of the Diocese of Rome, and Mons. Renzo Bonetti, Director of the Italian Episcopal Conference's National Office for the Pastoral Care of the Family. By the recitation of the Holy Rosary, you wish to entrust to your heavenly Mother all the families of our city, so that their every expectation and hope may be heard and that, in fidelity to God's plan, they may fully respond to their special vocation in the Church and in society. This important moment of prayer, which follows the study conference "*Genome and Ageing: The Hope of Man*" held yesterday at La Sapienza University, prepares for the celebration of Pro-Life Day, which tomorrow will see the entire diocesan community gather in prayerful contemplation of the great gift of fatherhood and motherhood and of the demanding tasks that flow from it. I congratulate you on these interesting programmes, which clearly stress the efforts of our Diocese to proclaim and bear witness to the "*Gospel of life and of the family*" in the context of the City Mission.2. The recitation of the Holy Rosary was preceded by songs and testimonies on the family, which gave everyone the opportunity to stress how important it is for the civil and ecclesial community to defend this very special gift. In this regard, I would like to meditate with you on a biblical text taken from the Old Testament, which tells Ruth's story and helps us understand even better what the family's vocation and mission must be. The sacred author cites Ruth's words to her mother-in-law Naomi: "*Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God*" (Ru 1:16). In the complicated and sometimes sad story of Ruth, the Old Testament offers us a wonderful picture that speaks of motherhood and fatherhood. It shows us how society should help a family in a difficult situation. Ruth, a young woman, is widowed but immediately finds help in her mother-in-law Naomi who, despite being a mother deeply hurt by the death of her own children, continues her vocation to motherhood by adopting her daughter-in-law as a daughter. A man, Boaz, marries the widow Ruth in accordance with Israel's practice, restoring the very precious gift of family to her and guaranteeing her a secure future. "*Where you go I will go ... and your God [will be] my God*". Ruth trusts in God. She has heard others speak of him; she has learned of him through the faith of her mother-in-law who believes in the God of Israel. She abandons the pagan divinities to follow the one true God. God the Father, source of life, has the leading role in Ruth's story, which lacks unusual narrative elements, but is rich in everyday events filled with faith and love. From God's providence comes the fruitfulness of the soil and the fruitfulness of man and woman. God is the protagonist of all motherhood and fatherhood, through which husband and wife open themselves to the gift of new life.3. In *Familiaris Consortio* I noted that "love is

essentially a gift; and conjugal love, while leading the spouses to the reciprocal "knowledge" which makes them "one flesh", does not end with the couple, because it makes them capable of the greatest possible gift, the gift by which they become cooperators with God for giving life to a new human person" (n. 14). *"Motherhood and fatherhood: gift and commitment"*. This is the theme of Pro-Life Day, which the Italian Church will celebrate tomorrow, 7 February. No one can refuse the gift of fatherhood and motherhood. Neither for himself nor for others. It is every person's specific task to live this gift according to his or her own vocation. There is a fatherhood and motherhood even without procreation, but procreation cannot be divided from fatherhood and motherhood. No one can separate it from the love of a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in marriage to form "one flesh". Otherwise there is a risk of treating man and woman not as persons but as objects. I also observed in the Apostolic Exhortation on the family cited above that, "when they become parents, spouses receive from God the gift of a new responsibility. Their parental love is called to become for the children the visible sign of the very love of God *"from which every family in heaven and on earth is named"*" (ibid.). The parents' love is the element that characterizes their educational task. It is an original, primary, irreplaceable and inalienable right and duty. 4. *"Where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people"*. Society helps Ruth, even though she came from a foreign people, Moab, which after the exile in Babylon would reject Israel's exiles. According to the law of the time, a widow could follow the reapers and was allowed to glean the ears of grain that were left on the ground. The reapers, by order of the field's owner, let the ears of grain fall on purpose so that Ruth could collect enough of them. Therefore their generosity and solidarity go beyond the justice guaranteed by the law. Ruth is not only assisted; she is allowed to work and does so with a sense of responsibility. This is a lesson of life for contemporary society: the community's laws protect the family institution based on marriage, and families help other families. In present-day circumstances, when families form associations they become effective partners and a social, political and cultural leaven. At the invitation of the Bishops of Lazio, the Catholic family associations of the region have established the Regional Committee of Family Associations. I sincerely hope this Committee will work for the promotion of the family based on marriage and for the defence of life from conception until natural death. I hope that Christians in our city will become increasingly active in these associations, which give strength to the family. I accompany these wishes with the assurance of a constant remembrance in my prayer and, as I invoke the protection of Mary, Queen of Families, on all the families in our city and throughout the world, I sincerely impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each of you and to the entire diocesan community, which is the family of families. *From the Vatican, 6 February 1999.* **JOHN PAUL II**