



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF FAMILIES

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II ON THE THIRD WORLD MEETING WITH FAMILIES

Saturday, 14 October 2000

1. It is a great joy for me to welcome you, dear families, who have come here from the most diverse regions of the world! I also greet the families who, in every clime, are linked with us now by radio and television and are joining in this Jubilee of Families.

I thank Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, for his address to me in your name. I also greet the other Cardinals and my Brother Bishops present here, as well as the priests and religious who are taking part in this festive meeting.

I recently had the joy of going as a pilgrim to Nazareth, the place where the Word became flesh. *On that visit I carried you all in my heart*, fervently praying for you to the Holy Family, the sublime model of all families.

It is precisely the spiritual atmosphere of the House at Nazareth that we want to relive this evening. The great space where we are gathered, between the basilica and Bernini's colonnade, is like a house for us, a great, open-air house. Having gathered as a true family, "one heart and one soul" (cf. *Acts* 4: 32), we can sense and make our own the sweet and intimate savour of that humble home, where Mary and Joseph lived praying and working, and Jesus "was obedient to them" (*Lk* 2: 51), gradually taking part in their common life.

2. In looking at the Holy Family, you, Christian spouses, are prompted to ask yourselves about the tasks that Christ assigns to you in your wonderful and demanding vocation.

The theme of your Jubilee - *Children: springtime of the family and society* - can offer you some

significant suggestions in this regard. Do not children themselves *in a way continually "examine" their parents?* They do so not only with their frequent "whys?", but with their very faces, sometimes smiling, sometimes misty with sadness. It is as if *a question* were inscribed in their whole existence, a question which is expressed in the most varied ways, even in their whims, and which we could put into questions like these: Mama, papa, do you love me? Am I really a gift for you? Do you accept me for what I am? Do you always try to do what is really best for me? These questions perhaps are asked more with their eyes than in words, but they hold parents to their great responsibility and are in some way an echo of God's voice for them.

3. Children are a "springtime": what does this metaphor chosen for your Jubilee mean?

It takes us into that panorama of life, colours, light and song which belongs to the spring season. Children are all of this by nature. They are *the hope that continually blossoms*, a project that starts ever anew, the future that opens without ceasing. They represent the flowering of married love, which is found and strengthened in them. At their birth they bring a *message of life* which in the ultimate analysis refers back to the very Author of life. In need of everything as they are, especially in the first stage of life, they *naturally appeal to our solidarity*.

Not by chance did Jesus invite his disciples to have a child's heart (cf. *Mk 10: 13-16*). Today, dear families, you wish to give thanks for the gift of children and, at the same time, to accept the message that God sends you through their existence.

4. Unfortunately, as we know so well, the situation of children in the world is not always what it should be. In many regions, and paradoxically right in the more prosperous countries, bringing children into the world has become a decision taken with great hesitation, well beyond that prudence which is necessarily required for responsible procreation. It could be said that at times children are seen as *more of a threat than a gift*.

And what can we say then of the other sad sight of abused and exploited children, to which I called attention in the *Letter to Children?*

But you are here this evening to bear witness to your conviction, based on trust in God, that this trend can be reversed. You are here for a "feast of hope", making your own the active "realism" of this fundamental Christian virtue.

5. The situation of children is really *a challenge for society as a whole*, a challenge posed directly to families. No one knows as you do, dear parents, how essential it is for children to be able to count on you, on both of you - fathers and mothers - *in the complementarity of your gifts*. No, it is not a step forward for civilized society to support trends that obscure this elementary truth and even demand to be legally recognized.

Are children not already too heavily penalized by the scourge of divorce? How sad it is for a child

to have to divide his love between parents in conflict! So many children *will always bear the psychological scar of the suffering* that their parents' separation caused them.

6. As for the many broken families, the Church feels called not to express a harsh, detached judgement, but rather to *shed the light of God's word*, accompanied by the witness of his mercy, *on the depths of so many human tragedies*. This is the spirit in which the pastoral care of the family must also address the situation of *divorced and remarried believers*. They are not excluded from the community; they are invited, instead, to share in its life, undertaking a journey of growth in the spirit of what the Gospel requires. The Church, while not concealing from them the truth about the objective moral disorder of their situation and the resulting consequences for sacramental practice, wishes to show them all her maternal closeness.

Be certain of this, Christian spouses: the sacrament of Matrimony assures you of the necessary grace to persevere in the mutual love that your children need as much as bread.

Today you are called to question yourselves about this profound communion of love between you, as you ask for an abundance of Jubilee mercy.

7. At the same time, you cannot avoid *the essential question about your mission as teachers*. Having given life to your children, you are also obliged to accompany them, in a way appropriate for their age, in their directions and life-decisions, while being concerned for all their rights. In our era, the recognition of children's rights has made doubtless progress, but *the practical denial of these rights*, as seen in the many terrible assaults on their dignity, remains a cause of distress. We must be on guard so that *the good of the child is always given priority*: beginning with the moment that a child is desired. The tendency to use morally unacceptable reproductive practices reveals the absurd mentality of a "right to a child", which has replaced the due recognition of the "right of a child" to be born and later to grow in a fully human way. How different and worthy of encouragement, on the other hand, is *the practice of adoption!* A true act of charity, which looks to the welfare of children before the demands of parents.

8. Dear friends, let us commit all our forces to defending the value of the family and respect for human life from the moment of conception. These are values which belong to the basic "grammar" of dialogue and human coexistence among peoples. *I fervently hope that governments and national parliaments, international organizations and, in particular, the United Nations Organization will not lose sight of this truth*. I ask all people of good will who believe in these values to join forces effectively so that the latter may prevail in daily life, in cultural trends and in the mass media, in political decisions and the laws of nations.

9. To you dear mothers, who bear deep within you an irrepressible instinct for the defence of life, I make a heartfelt appeal: *always be sources of life, never of death!*

I say to you both, mothers and fathers: you have been called to the exalted mission of cooperating with the Creator in the transmission of life (Letter to Families, n. 8); do not be afraid of life!
Together proclaim the value of the family and of life. Without these values, there is no future worthy of man!

May the marvellous sight of your lighted torches in this square accompany you at length as a sign of the One who is the light and who calls you to shed the light of your witness on humanity's way along the paths of the new millennium!

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