



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO MEMBERS OF "THE NEW FAMILIES MOVEMENT"

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 3 November 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome and thank you for coming to visit me. You come from the five continents and belong to *The New Families Movement* which came into being 40 years ago in the context of the *Focolare Movement*. You are thus a branch of *Focolare* and today form a network of at least 800,000 families working in 182 nations, all committed to making their home a "focolare" [hearth] which radiates in the world the witness of a Gospel-style family life. I offer each one of you my most cordial greeting, which I extend also to those who have wished to accompany you at our meeting. I greet in a special way your leaders who have conveyed your common sentiments and described to me your Movement's working methods as well as its goals. I thank you for the greetings you have brought me from Chiara Lubich, to whom I send my warm good wishes, thanking her because she continues to guide the large family of the *Focolare* with wisdom and unswerving attachment to the Church.

As has just been recalled, it is precisely in the context of this vast and praiseworthy institution that you, dear married couples, place yourselves at the service of the world of families with an important and ever timely pastoral action that has four orientations: spirituality, education, sociability and solidarity. Your task is effectively a silent and deep commitment to evangelization with the goal of testifying that only family unity, a gift of God-Love, can make the family a true nest of love, a home that welcomes life and a school of virtue and Christian values for children. As you confront the many social and economic, cultural and religious issues that challenge contemporary society in every part of the world, your work, truly providential, is a sign of hope and an encouragement for Christian families to be a privileged "space" where the beauty of making Jesus Christ the focus and of faithfully following his Gospel is proclaimed in everyday life, sometimes despite many difficulties. Indeed, your meeting's theme: *"A house built on the rock - the Gospel*

lived, a response to the problems of families today", emphasizes the importance of this ascetical and pastoral itinerary. The secret is precisely to live the Gospel!

Rightly, therefore, in the work of the assembly during these days, in addition to contributions that illustrate the situation of today's families in the different cultural contexts, you have planned to deepen your knowledge of the Word of God and to hear the testimonies that show how the Holy Spirit acts in hearts and in family life, even in complex and difficult situations. Only think of the uncertainties of engaged couples as they face definitive decisions for the future, of the crisis of couples, of separations and divorces as well as irregular unions, of the condition of widows, of families in difficulty and of welcoming abandoned minors. I warmly hope that also thanks to your commitment, pastoral strategies may be identified to cope with the increasing needs of families today and the multiple challenges that face them, so that they will not fail in their special mission in the Church and in society.

In this regard, in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, my venerable and beloved Predecessor John Paul II noted that the Church maintains that for the faithful, "the first and basic expression of the social dimension... is the married couple and the family" (n. 40). To bring this vocation to fruition, the family, aware that it is the primary cell of society, must not forget that it can find strength in a Sacrament desired by Christ to reinforce the love between man and woman: a love understood as a gift of self, reciprocal and profound. As John Paul II likewise observed: "The family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church, his Bride" (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 17). Thus, according to the divine plan, the family is a sacred and sanctifying place and the Church, which has always been close to the family, supports it in this mission, especially today when the internal and external threats to it are so numerous. In order not to succumb to discouragement, divine help is essential; thus, every Christian family must look with trust to the Holy Family, the original "domestic Church" in which "through God's mysterious design, it was in that family that the Son of God spent long years of a hidden life. It is therefore the prototype and example for all Christian families" (*ibid.*, n. 86).

Dear brothers and sisters, the humble and holy Family of Nazareth, the icon and model of every human family, will not let you go without its heavenly support. Nonetheless, your ceaseless recourse to prayer, to listening to the Word of God and to an intense sacramental life is indispensable, together with a constant effort to live Christ's commandment of love and forgiveness. Love does not seek its own interests, it does not harbour rancour for evil received but rejoices in truth. Love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (I Cor 13: 5-7). Dear brothers and sisters, continue your journey and be witnesses of this Love which will make you increasingly the "heart" and "leaven" of the entire *New Families Movement*. I assure you of my remembrance in prayer for each one of you, for your activities and all those you meet in your apostolate, and with affection I now impart to you all the Apostolic Blessing.

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