



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 6 June 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

Pastoral Visit to the Archdiocese of Milan

7th World Meeting of Families

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“*The Family: Work and Celebration*” was the theme of the Seventh World Meeting of Families which has taken place in Milan in the past few days. I still have in my eyes and in my heart the images and emotions of this unforgettable and marvellous event that transformed Milan into a city of families: families from all over the world, united by the joy of believing in Jesus Christ. I am profoundly grateful to God who has granted me to live this event “with” families and “for” the family.

In all those who listened to me during these days I met with a sincere readiness to accept and to witness to the “Gospel of the family”. Yes, for without the family humanity has no future; young people in particular need to learn the values that give meaning to life, they need to be born into and grow up in that community of life and love which God himself desired for men and women.

The meeting with the many families from the different continents has given me the happy opportunity to visit the Archdiocese of Milan for the first time as Successor of Peter. Cardinal Angelo Scola, the priests and all the faithful, as well as the Mayor and the other authorities, welcomed me with great warmth — for which I am deeply grateful. I was thus able to experience

from close at hand the faith of the people of Milan, rich in history, culture, humanity and active charity.

The first event of this busy three-day Pastoral Visit took place in the square outside the cathedral, the symbol and heart of the city. I cannot forget the warm embrace of the crowd of Milanese people and participants in the Seventh World Meeting of Families that accompanied me throughout my Visit, overflowing the streets.

An expanse of celebrating families that with sentiments of deep participation joined in particular with the affectionate thoughts and solidarity that I wanted to address straight away to all those in need of help and comfort, those who are troubled by various anxieties and, especially, the families worst hit by the economic crisis, as well as the beloved peoples struck by the earthquake.

At this first meeting with the City, I first wanted to speak to the hearts of the faithful of the Ambrosian City. I urged them to live out their faith in their experience as individuals and as a community, in private and in public, so as to foster an authentic “well-being”, starting with the family which must be rediscovered as humanity’s principal patrimony. From the top of the Cathedral, the statue of Our Lady, with her arms wide open, seemed to welcome with motherly tenderness all the families of Milan and of the whole world!

Then Milan reserved a unique and noble greeting for me in one of the most evocative and meaningful places in the city, La Scala, where important pages of the country’s history have been written, under the impulse of great spiritual values and ideals.

In this temple of music, the notes of Ludwig van Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony gave a voice to that example of universality and brotherhood which the Church reposes tirelessly by proclaiming the Gospel. And at the end of the concert — which I dedicated to our many brothers and sisters who have been sorely tried by the earthquake — I referred specifically to the contrast between this ideal and the dramas of history, and to the need for a God who is close and who shares in our suffering. I emphasized that in Jesus of Nazareth God makes himself close and shoulders our suffering with us.

At the end of that intense musical and spiritual moment I mentioned the family of the third millennium, recalling that it is in the family that we first feel that the human person is not created to live withdrawn into him- or herself but rather in relationships with others; and it is in the family that the light of peace is first kindled in hearts so that it may illuminate our world.

The next day, in the Cathedral thronged with priests and men and women religious and in the presence of numerous Cardinals and Bishops from various countries of the world, I celebrated Terce according to the Ambrosian Liturgy. On that occasion I wished to reaffirm the value of celibacy and consecrated virginity, so dear to the great St Ambrose. Celibacy and virginity in the

Church are a luminous sign of love for God and for the brethren, which stems from an ever closer relationship with Christ in prayer and is expressed in the total gift of oneself.

Then the event in the Meazza Stadium was an encounter charged with enthusiasm. Here I experienced the embrace of a joyful multitude of young men and women who have received this year or who are about to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. The careful preparation of the event, with meaningful texts and prayers, as well as choreography, made the meeting even more stimulating. To the youth of Milan I addressed the appeal to say a free and conscious “yes” to the Gospel of Jesus, accepting the gifts of the Holy Spirit which make it possible to be formed as Christians, to live the Gospel and to be active members of the community. I encouraged them to be dedicated to their studies in particular and to generous service of their neighbour.

The meeting with the representatives of institutional authorities, of business people and of workers, of the worlds of culture and of education of the Milanese and Lombard society enabled me to highlight how important it is that legislation and the work of the State institutions be at the service and for the safeguard of the person in his many aspects, starting with the right to life — whose deliberate suppression can never be legitimate — and with recognition of the identity proper to the family founded on the marriage of a man and a woman.

After this appointment dedicated to the situation of the diocese and the city, I went to the vast Parco Nord in the territory of Bresso. Here I took part in the involving Feast of Testimonies entitled “*One world, family, love*”. Here I had the joy of meeting thousands of people, a rainbow of families from Italy and from across the world, who had already gathered in the early hours of the afternoon in a genuinely family atmosphere of festivity and warmth. Answering the questions of several families resulting from their life and experience, I wanted to give them a sign of the open dialogue that exists between families and the Church, between the world and the Church.

I was deeply impressed by the moving testimonies of married couples and children from different continents on highly topical themes of our times: the economic crisis, the difficulty in reconciling work time with time for the family, the spread of separations and divorces, and also existential questions that affect adults, young people and children. I would like here to recall what I said in defence of time for the family, threatened by a sort of “dictatorship” of work commitments: Sunday is the day of the Lord and of men and women, a day in which everyone must be able to be free, free for the family and free for God. In defending Sunday we defend human freedom!

The Holy Mass on Sunday, 3 June, for the conclusion of the Seventh World Meeting of Families was an immense and prayerful crowd that completely filled the area of Bresso Airport which seemed transformed into an open air cathedral, partly because of the reproductions of the magnificent polychrome stained-glass windows of the Cathedral that stood out on the dais.

To that multitude of the faithful from different nations, deeply immersed in the beautifully prepared

liturgy, I launched an appeal to build ecclesial communities that would be increasingly families and would be able to reflect the beauty of the Blessed Trinity and to evangelize not only with words but by outreach, with the power of love lived, because love is the only power that can transform the world. I also stressed the importance of the “triad” of family, work and celebration. These are three gifts of God, three dimensions of our life that must find a harmonious balance in order to build societies with a human face.

I feel deeply grateful for these magnificent days in Milan. I thank Cardinal Ennio Antonelli and the [Pontifical Council for the Family](#), all the Authorities, for their presence and collaboration in these event; my thanks also goes to the Prime Minister of the Italian Republic for having taken part in Holy Mass on Sunday. And I renew my cordial “thank you” to the various institutions which generously cooperated with the Holy See and with the Archdiocese of Milan in the organization of the Meeting; which had tremendous pastoral and ecclesial success, and vast echoes throughout the world. In fact it brought to Milan more than a million people, who peacefully invaded the streets for several days, witnessing to the beauty of the family, hope for humanity.

The World Meeting in Milan thus resulted from this most eloquent “epiphany” of the family, which was demonstrated in the variety of its expressions, but also in the oneness of its essential identity: that of a communion of love, founded on marriage and called to be the sanctuary of life, a miniature Church, the cell of society.

From Milan a message of hope was launched to the entire world. It was substantiated by the living experiences: it is possible and joyous, although demanding, to live faithful love open to life “forever”; it is possible to participate as families in the mission of the Church and in the construction of society. With the help of God and the special protection of Mary Most Holy, Queen of the Family, may the Milan experience bring abundant fruit to the Church’s journey; and may it be a harbinger of increased attention to the cause of the family, which coincides with that of man and of civilization. Many thanks.

To special groups:

I offer a cordial welcome to the Felician Sisters assembled for their General chapter and I offer my prayerful good wishes for their deliberations. I thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, including those from England, Ireland, Sweden, Zimbabwe, Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and the United States of America, I invoke God’s blessings of joy and peace.

I address a thought to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Dear *young people*, may the faithful love of God be the model of your relations with your brothers and sisters; dear *sick people*, you are never alone in your suffering but the whole Church prays for you and with you; lastly, dear

newlyweds, may the communion of love which God lives in himself always be the basis of your conjugal and family relationship.

Finally, I would like to remind you that tomorrow, the *Feast of Corpus Christi*, we shall be celebrating Holy Mass at St John Lateran at 7:00 p.m., as we do every year. After the Mass the solemn procession down Via Merulana will end at St Mary Major. I invite the faithful of Rome and the pilgrims to join in this act of profound faith for the Eucharist, which is the most precious treasure of the Church and of humanity.

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