



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CROATIA
(JUNE 4-5, 2011)

HOLY MASS ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL DAY
OF CROATIAN CATHOLIC FAMILIES

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Zagreb Hippodrome
Sunday, 5 June 2011*

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

In this Mass at which it is my joy to preside, concelebrating with numerous brothers in the Episcopate and with a great number of priests, I give thanks to the Lord for all the beloved families gathered here, and for all the others who are linked with us through radio and television. I offer particular thanks to Cardinal Josip Bozanić, Archbishop of Zagreb, for his kind words at the beginning of this Mass. I address my greetings to all and express my great affection with an embrace of peace!

We have recently celebrated the Ascension of the Lord and we prepare ourselves to receive the great gift of the Holy Spirit. In the first reading, we saw how the apostolic community was united in prayer in the Upper Room with Mary, the mother of Jesus (cf. *Acts* 1:12-14). This is a picture of the Church with deep roots in the paschal event: indeed, the Upper Room is the place where Jesus instituted the Eucharist and the priesthood during the Last Supper, and where, having risen from the dead, he poured out the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles on the evening of Easter Sunday (cf. *Jn* 20:19-23). The Lord directed his disciples “not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father” (*Acts* 1:4); he asked that *they might remain together* to prepare themselves

to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And they gathered together in prayer with Mary in the Upper Room, waiting for the promised event (cf. *Acts* 1:14). Remaining together was the condition given by Jesus for them to experience the coming of the Paraclete, and prolonged prayer served to maintain them in harmony with one another. We find here a formidable lesson for every Christian community. Sometimes it is thought that missionary efficacy depends primarily upon careful planning and its intelligent implementation by means of specific action. Certainly, the Lord asks for our cooperation, but his initiative has to come first, before any response from us: his Spirit is the true protagonist of the Church, to be invoked and welcomed.

In the Gospel, we heard the first part of the so-called “high-priestly prayer” of Jesus (cf. *Jn* 17:1-11a) – at the conclusion of his farewell discourses – full of trust, sweetness and love. It is called “the high-priestly prayer” because in it Jesus is presented as a priest interceding for his people as he prepares to leave this world. The passage is dominated by the double theme of the *hour* and the *glory*. It deals with the hour of death (cf. *Jn* 2:4; 7:30; 8:20), the hour in which the Christ must pass from this world to the Father (13:1). But at the same time it is also the hour of his glorification which is accomplished by means of the Cross, called by John the Evangelist “exaltation”, namely the raising up, the elevation to glory: the hour of the death of Jesus, the hour of supreme love, is the hour of his highest glory. For the Church too, for every Christian, the highest glory is the Cross, which means living in charity, in total gift to God and to others.

Dear brothers and sisters! I very willingly accepted the invitation given to me by the Bishops of Croatia to visit this country on the occasion of the first National Gathering of Croatian Catholic Families. I express my sincere appreciation for this attention and commitment to the family, not only because today this basic human reality, in your nation as elsewhere, has to face difficulties and threats, and thus has special need of evangelization and support, but also because Christian families are a decisive resource for education in the faith, for the up-building of the Church as a communion and for her missionary presence in the most diverse situations in life. I know the generosity and the dedication with which you, dear Pastors, serve the Lord and the Church. Your daily labour for the faith formation of future generations, as well as for marriage preparation and for the accompaniment of families, is the fundamental path for regenerating the Church anew and for giving life to the social fabric of the nation. May you remain dedicated to this important pastoral commitment!

Everyone knows that the Christian family is a special sign of the presence and love of Christ and that it is called to give a specific and irreplaceable contribution to evangelization. Blessed John Paul II, who visited this noble country three times, said that “the Christian family is called upon to take part actively and responsibly in the mission of the Church in a way that is original and specific, by placing itself, in what it is and what it does as an ‘intimate community of life and love’, at the service of the Church and of society” (*Familiaris consortio*, 50). The Christian family has always been the first way of transmitting the faith and still today retains great possibilities for evangelization in many areas.

Dear parents, commit yourselves always to teach your children to pray, and pray with them; draw them close to the Sacraments, especially to the Eucharist, as we celebrate the 600th anniversary of the Eucharistic miracle of Ludbreg; and introduce them to the life of the Church; in the intimacy of the home do not be afraid to read the sacred Scriptures, illuminating family life with the light of faith and praising God as Father. Be like a little Upper Room, like that of Mary and the disciples, in which to live unity, communion and prayer!

By the grace of God, many Christian families today are acquiring an ever deeper awareness of their missionary vocation, and are devoting themselves seriously to bearing witness to Christ the Lord. Blessed John Paul II once said: “An authentic family, founded on marriage, is in itself ‘good news’ for the world.” And he added: “In our time the families that collaborate actively in evangelization are ever more numerous [...] the hour of the family has arrived in the Church, which is also the hour of the missionary family” (*Angelus, 21 October 2001*). In today’s society the presence of exemplary Christian families is more necessary and urgent than ever. Unfortunately, we are forced to acknowledge the spread of a secularization which leads to the exclusion of God from life and the increasing disintegration of the family, especially in Europe. Freedom without commitment to the truth is made into an absolute, and individual well-being through the consumption of material goods and transient experiences is cultivated as an ideal, obscuring the quality of interpersonal relations and deeper human values; love is reduced to sentimental emotion and to the gratification of instinctive impulses, without a commitment to build lasting bonds of reciprocal belonging and without openness to life. We are called to oppose such a mentality! Alongside what the Church says, the testimony and commitment of the Christian family – your concrete testimony – is very important, especially when you affirm the inviolability of human life from conception until natural death, the singular and irreplaceable value of the family founded upon matrimony and the need for legislation which supports families in the task of giving birth to children and educating them. Dear families, be courageous! Do not give in to that secularized mentality which proposes living together as a preparation, or even a substitute for marriage! Show by the witness of your lives that it is possible, like Christ, to love without reserve, and do not be afraid to make a commitment to another person! Dear families, rejoice in fatherhood and motherhood! Openness to life is a sign of openness to the future, confidence in the future, just as respect for the natural moral law frees people, rather than demeaning them! The good of the family is also the good of the Church. I would like to repeat something I have said in the past: “the edification of each individual Christian family fits into the context of the larger family of the Church which supports it and carries it with her ... And the Church is reciprocally built up by the family, a ‘small domestic church’” (*Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, 6 June 2005*). Let us pray to the Lord, that families may come more and more to be small churches and that ecclesial communities may take on more and more the quality of a family!

Dear Croatian families, living the communion of faith and charity, be ever more transparent witnesses to the promise that the Lord, ascending into heaven, makes to each one of us: “I am

with you always, to the close of the age” (*Mt* 28:20). Dear Croatian Christians, hear yourselves called to evangelize with the whole of your life; hear the powerful word of the Lord: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (*Mt* 28:19). May the Virgin Mary, Queen of Croatia, accompany you always on your way. Amen! Praised be Jesus and Mary!

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