



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI AT A MEETING ON FAMILY AND LIFE ISSUES IN LATIN AMERICA

Saturday, 3 December 2005

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I am pleased to receive you on the occasion of the Third Meeting of the Presidents of the Episcopal Commissions for the Family and Life of Latin America. I should like to express my gratitude for the words addressed to me by Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family.

Together with the whole Church, I witnessed Pope John Paul II's concern for this most important topic. For my part, I make my own this same concern, which will have a far-reaching effect on the future of the Church and the peoples since, as my Predecessor said in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, "*The future of humanity passes by way of the family!*"

"It is therefore indispensable and urgent that every person of good will should endeavour to save and foster the values and requirements of the family". And he added: "Christians also have the mission of *proclaiming with joy and conviction the 'Good News' about the family*, for the family absolutely needs to hear ever anew and to understand ever more deeply the authentic words that reveal its identity, its inner resources and the importance of its mission in the City of God and in that of man" (*Conclusion*, n. 86).

The Apostolic Exhortation cited together with the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane* and the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* constitute, as it were, a luminous triptych that must inspire your task as Pastors.

2. I wish to thank you in particular for your pastoral concern which seeks to safeguard the

fundamental values of marriage and the family. They are threatened by the current phenomenon of secularization that prevents the social conscience from discovering adequately the identity and mission of the family institution and recently, by the pressure of unjust laws that fail to recognize its fundamental rights.

In light of this situation, I am pleased to note the increase in and consolidation of the particular Churches' work for this human institution, which is rooted in God's loving plan and represents the irreplaceable *model* for the common good of humanity. Homes that give a generous response to the Lord abound and there is also a wealth of pastoral experiences, a sign of new vitality, in which family identity is reinforced by means of better marriage preparation.

3. Your duty as Pastors consists in presenting in its full richness the extraordinary value of marriage, which as a natural institution is a "patrimony of humanity". Moreover, its elevation to the loftiest dignity of a sacrament must be seen with gratitude and wonder, as I recently said, affirming:

"The sacramental quality that marriage assumes in Christ therefore means that the gift of creation has been raised to the grace of redemption. Christ's grace is not an external addition to human nature, it does not do violence to men and women but sets them free and restores them, precisely by raising them above their own limitations" (*Address to the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome*, 6 June 2005; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 15 June, p. 6).

4. The spouses' love and total gift of self, with their special connotations of exclusivity, fidelity, permanence in time and openness to life, are at the root of this communion of life and love that constitutes the married state (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 48).

Today, it is necessary to proclaim with renewed enthusiasm that the Gospel of the family is a process of human and spiritual fulfilment in the certainty that the Lord is always present with his grace. This proclamation is often distorted by false concepts of marriage and the family that do not respect God's original plan. In this regard, people have actually reached the point of suggesting new forms of marriage, some unknown to popular cultures in that its specific nature is altered.

Also in the life context, new models are being proposed that dispute this fundamental right. As a result, the elimination of embryos or their arbitrary use in the name of scientific progress, which fails to recognize its own limits and to accept all the moral principles that make it possible to safeguard the dignity of the person, becomes a threat to the human being who is reduced to an object or a mere instrument. When such levels are reached, society itself is affected and every kind of risk shakes its foundations.

5. In Latin America, as in all other places, children have the right to be born and to be raised in a family founded on marriage, where parents are the first educators of the faith for their children in

order for them to reach full human and spiritual maturity.

Children truly are the family's greatest treasure and most precious good. Consequently, everyone must be helped to become aware of the intrinsic evil of the crime of abortion. In attacking human life in its very first stages, it is also an aggression against society itself. Politicians and legislators, therefore, as servants of the common good, are duty bound to defend the fundamental right to life, the fruit of God's love.

6. It is certain that for pastoral action in so delicate and complex an area, in which various disciplines are involved and fundamental issues faced, a *careful training* of pastoral workers in the Dioceses is essential.

Priests, therefore, as the immediate collaborators of the Bishops, must receive a sound training in this field that will enable them to face competently and with conviction the problems that arise in their pastoral activity.

As for lay people, especially those who devote their energy to this service of families, they in turn need a proper and sound formation that will help them witness to the greatness and lasting value of marriage in today's society.

7. Dear brothers and sisters, as you know well, the Fifth World Meeting of Families is not far off. It will be held in Valencia, Spain, on the theme: *The transmission of faith in the family*.

In this regard, I would like to offer my cordial greeting to Archbishop Agustín García-Gasco of that city, who is taking part in this Meeting and who, with the Pontifical Council for the Family, is sharing the challenging task of its preparation. I encourage you all so that numerous delegations of the Bishops' Conferences, Dioceses and movements of Latin America will be able to take part in this important ecclesial event.

For my part, I firmly support the holding of this Meeting and place it under the loving protection of the Holy Family.

Dear Pastors, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the families in Latin America.

