



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF
THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 13 May 2006*

*Your Eminences,
Reverend Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

It gives me great pleasure to meet you at the end of the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Council for the Family, created by my Venerable Predecessor, John Paul II, on 9 May 1981, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary in these days. I address my cordial greeting to each one of you with a special thought for Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, whom I thank for having interpreted your common sentiments.

This meeting has given you an opportunity to examine the challenges and pastoral projects concerning the family, rightly considered a domestic church and a sanctuary of life. It is a vast, complex and delicate field of apostolate to which you devote energy and enthusiasm, with the intention of promoting the "Gospel of the family and of life". In this regard, how can we forget the broad and far-sighted vision of my Predecessors and especially of John Paul II, who have courageously promoted the cause of the family, considering it a decisive and irreplaceable value for the common good of the peoples?

The family, founded on marriage, is the "patrimony of humanity", a fundamental social institution; it is the vital cell and pillar of society and this concerns believers and non-believers alike. It is a reality that all States must hold in the highest regard because, as John Paul II liked to repeat, "the future of humanity passes by way of the family" (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 86).

In the Christian vision, moreover, marriage, which Christ raised to the most exalted dignity of a

sacrament, confers greater splendour and depth on the conjugal bond and more powerfully binds the spouses who, blessed by the Lord of the Covenant, promise each other faithfulness until death in love that is open to life.

For them, the Lord is the centre and heart of the family. He accompanies them in their union and sustains them in their mission to raise children to maturity. In this way the Christian family not only cooperates with God in generating natural life, but also in cultivating the seeds of divine life given in Baptism. These are the well-known principles of the Christian view of marriage and the family. I recalled them once again last Thursday, when I spoke to the members of the [John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family](#).

In today's world, where certain erroneous concepts concerning the human being, freedom and love are spreading, we must never tire of presenting anew the truth about the family institution, as God has desired it since creation. Unfortunately, the number of separations and divorces is increasing.

They destroy family unity and create numerous problems for children, the innocent victims of these situations. In our day it is especially the stability of the family that is at risk; to safeguard it one often has to swim against the tide of the prevalent culture, and this demands patience, effort, sacrifice and the ceaseless quest for mutual understanding. Today, however, it is possible for husbands and wives to overcome their difficulties and remain faithful to their vocation with recourse to God's support, with prayer and participating devotedly in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The unity and strength of families helps society to breathe the genuine human values and to be open to the Gospel. The apostolate of many of the Movements called to work in this context in harmonious understanding with the dioceses and parishes contributes to this.

Furthermore, a particularly sensitive topic today is the respect due to the human embryo, which ought always to be born from an act of love and should already be treated as a person (cf. [Evangelium Vitae](#), n. 60). The progress of science and technology in the area of bioethics is transformed into a threat when human beings lose the sense of their own limitations and, in practice, claim to replace God the Creator. The Encyclical [Humanae Vitae](#) reasserts clearly that human procreation must always be the fruit of the conjugal act with its twofold unitive and procreative meaning (cf. n. 12).

The greatness of conjugal love in accordance with the divine plan demands it, as I recalled in the Encyclical [Deus Caritas Est](#): "Eros reduced to pure 'sex', has become a commodity, a mere 'thing' to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity.... Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body" (n. 5).

Thanks to God, many, especially young people, are rediscovering the value of chastity, which appears more and more as a reliable guarantee of authentic love. The historical period in which

we live asks Christian families to witness with courageous coherence to the fact that procreation is the fruit of love. Such a witness will not fail to encourage politicians and legislators to safeguard the rights of the family. Indeed, it is well known that juridical solutions for the so-called "de facto" unions are gaining credibility; although they reject the obligations of marriage, they claim enjoyment of the same rights.

Furthermore, at times there are even attempts to give marriage a new definition in order to legalize homosexual unions, attributing to them the right to adopt children. Vast areas of the world are suffering from the so-called "demographic winter", with the consequent gradual ageing of the population. Families sometimes seem ensnared by the fear of life and of parenthood. It is necessary to restore their trust, so that they can continue to carry out their noble mission of procreation in love.

I am grateful to your Pontifical Council because at various continental and national meetings, it seeks to enter into dialogue with those who have political and legislative responsibility in this regard, as it also strives to set up a vast network of conversations with Bishops, offering the local Churches the opportunity of courses for those with pastoral responsibilities.

Next, I take this opportunity to repeat my invitation to all the diocesan communities to take part with their delegations in the Fifth World Meeting of Families that will take place next July in Valencia, Spain, and in which, please God, I will have the joy of participating.

Thank you again for your work; may the Lord continue to make it fruitful! For this I assure you of my remembrance in prayer while, invoking Mary's motherly protection, I impart to all of you my Blessing, which I willingly extend to families so that they will continue to build their homes on the model of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

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