



The Holy See

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

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 1 December 2011

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family, on a double 30th anniversary: that of the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, published on 22 November 1981 by Bl. John Paul II and of the Dicastery itself, which he established on 9 March with the Motu Proprio *Familia a Deo instituta*, as a sign of the importance to be attributed to the family apostolate in the world and at the same time, as an effective tool to help promote it at every level (cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 73). I cordially greet Cardinal Ennio Antonelli, thanking him for his words introducing our meeting, as well as the Bishop Secretary, the staff and all of you gathered here.

The new evangelization depends largely on the Domestic Church (cf. *ibid.*, n. 65). In our time, as in times past, the eclipse of God, the spread of ideologies contrary to the family and the degradation of sexual ethics are connected. And just as the eclipse of God and the crisis of the family are linked, so the new evangelization is inseparable from the Christian family. The family is indeed the way of the Church because it is the “human space” of our encounter with Christ. Spouses, “not only receive the love of Christ and become a saved community, but they are also called upon to communicate Christ's love to their brethren, thus becoming a saving community” (*ibid.*, n. 49). The family founded on the Sacrament of Marriage is a particular realization of the Church, saved and saving, evangelized and evangelizing community. Just like the Church, it is called to welcome, radiate and show the world the love and presence of Christ. The reception and transmission of divine love are realized in the mutual commitment of the spouses, in generous and

responsible procreation, in the care and education of children, work and social relationships, with attention to the needy, in participation in church activities, in commitment to civil society. The Christian Family to the extent it succeeds in living love as communion and service as a reciprocal gift open to all, as a journey of permanent conversion supported by the grace of God, reflects the splendour of Christ in the world and the beauty of the divine Trinity. St Augustine has a famous phrase: “*immo vero vides Trinitatem, si caritatem vides*” — “Well, if you see charity, yes indeed you see the Trinity” (*De Trinitate*, VIII, 8). And the family is one of the fundamental places where you live and are educated in love and charity.

In the wake of my Predecessors, I too have repeatedly urged Christian spouses to evangelize both with their witness of life and their involvement in pastoral activities. I did so recently in Ancona, at the end of the Italian National Eucharistic Congress. There I wanted to meet with couples and priests. In fact, the two sacraments called “at the service of communion” (CCC, Chapter Three, n. 1534), Holy Orders and Matrimony, are traced to the sole source of the Eucharist “both these states of life share the same root in the love of Christ who gives himself for humanity’s salvation. They are called to a common mission: to witness to, and make present, this love at the service of the community in order to build up the People of God.... This perspective makes it possible to overcome a reductive vision of the family, which sees it merely as the object of pastoral action.... The family is a source of wealth for married couples, an irreplaceable good for children, an indispensable foundation of society and a vital community for the journey of the Church” (*Homily in Ancona, 11 September 2011*). By virtue of this the “family is the privileged place of human and Christian education and remains, for this end, as the closest ally of the priestly ministry.... No vocation is a private matter, and even less so is the vocation to marriage because its horizon is the entire Church” (*ibid.*).

There are some areas where the role of Christian families, in collaboration with priests and under the guidance of Bishops, is particularly urgent: the education of children, adolescents and young people in loving, understood as gift of self and communion; the preparation of engaged couples for married life with a journey of faith; the formation of married couples, especially young couples; the experiences of associations with charitable and educational purposes, and civic commitment; and the pastoral care of families for families, a life-long commitment, giving due value to the time dedicated to work and to rest.

Dear friends, we are preparing for the Seventh World Meeting of Families to be held in Milan from 30 May to 3 June 2012. It will be a great joy for me and for us all to come together, to pray and to celebrate with the families who will come from around the world, accompanied by their Pastors. I thank the Ambrosian Church for her great effort made so far and for that in the coming months. I invite the families of Milan and Lombardy to open the doors of their houses to accommodate the pilgrims who will come from all over the world. In hospitality we experience joy and enthusiasm: it is nice to make acquaintances and friendships, recounting the experience of family life and the faith experience associated with it. In my Letter convoking the Meeting in Milan I asked for “an

adequate process of ecclesial and cultural preparation”, so that the event will be a success and actively involve the Christian communities around the world. I thank those who have already taken steps in that direction and call on those who have not yet done so to make the most of the next few months. Your Dicastery has already provided valuable help in drawing up a catechism with the theme “The Family: Work and Rest”; it has also proposed a “family week” for the parishes, associations and movements, and other praiseworthy initiatives.

Thank you again for coming and for the work you do to promote the family at the service of the Gospel. While I assure you of my remembrance in prayer. I impart a special heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to each one of you and your loved ones.