



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO ANCONA

MEETING WITH FAMILIES AND PRIESTS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Cathedral of Saint Cyriac, Ancona

Sunday, 11 September 2011

[\[Video\]](#)

Dear Priests and Dear Married Couples,

The hill on which this cathedral is built gives us a very beautiful view of the city and of the sea, but in passing through its majestic portal the mind is fascinated by the harmony of the Romanesque style, enriched by an interweaving of Byzantine with Gothic elements

In your presence too — priests and married couples from different Italian dioceses — we perceive the beauty of the harmony and complementarity of your different vocations. In sharing the same faith, your mutual knowledge and esteem lead to an appreciation of each other's charism and to recognizing that we are in the one "spiritual house" (1 Pt 2:5) which, with Jesus Christ himself as cornerstone, develops in a well-ordered way to become a holy temple in the Lord (cf. Eph 2:20-21). So I thank you for this meeting: and I thank dear Archbishop Edoardo Menichelli — also for the words with which he has introduced it — and each one of you.

I would like to reflect briefly on the need to lead Sacred Orders and Matrimony back to the one Eucharistic source. Indeed, 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 (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1534).

First of all, this perspective makes it possible to overcome a reductive vision of the family, which sees it merely as the object of pastoral action. It is true that in these difficult times families require special attention. This is not a reason for the family's identity to be diminished or for its specific responsibility to be humiliated. 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.

At the ecclesial level appreciating the family means recognizing its importance in pastoral action. The ministry that is born from the Sacrament of Matrimony is important for the life of the Church: the family is the privileged place of human and Christian education and remains, for this end, as the closest ally of the priestly ministry. It is a precious gift for the edification of the community.

The priest's closeness to the family helps it in its turn to become aware of its own profound reality and its own mission, fostering the development of a strong ecclesial sensitivity. No vocation is a private matter, and even less so is the vocation to marriage, because its horizon is the entire Church. Thus an effort should be made in pastoral action to integrate and harmonize the priestly ministry with "the authentic Gospel of marriage and of the family" (cf. *Direttorio di pastorale familiare*, Italian Episcopal Conference, 25 July 1993, n. 8) for an effective and fraternal communion. And the Eucharist is the centre and source of this unity that enlivens the whole of the Church's action.

Dear priests, because of the gift you have received in Ordination, you are called to serve as Pastors the ecclesial community, which is the "family of families", and therefore to love each one with a paternal heart, with genuine detachment from yourselves, with full, continuous and faithful dedication. You are a living sign that refers to Jesus Christ, the one Good Shepherd. Conform yourselves to him, to his style of life, with that total and exclusive service of which celibacy is an expression.

The priest also has a spousal dimension: to identify himself with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom, who gives his life for the Church his Bride (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 24). Cultivate deep familiarity with the Word of God, a light on your way.

May the daily and faithful celebration of the Eucharist be the place in which to find the strength to give yourselves in the ministry every day and to live constantly in God's presence. He is your dwelling place and your heritage. You must be witnesses of this to the family and to every person whom the Lord sets on your path, even in the most difficult circumstances (cf. *ibid.*, nn. 79-80).

Encourage married couples, share their educational responsibilities, help them to renew continually the grace of their marriage. Make the family play the lead in pastoral action. Be welcoming and compassionate also to those who find it harder to fulfil the commitments taken on with the bond of marriage, and to all those who, unfortunately, have failed in it.

Dear married couples, your marriage is rooted in the belief that “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), and that following Christ means “abiding in love” (cf. Jn 15:9-10). Your union — as the Apostle St Paul teaches — is a sacramental sign of the love of Christ for the Church (cf. Eph 5:32), a love that culminates in the Cross and is “signified and made present in the Eucharist” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 29).

May the Eucharistic mystery have an ever deeper effect on your daily life; draw inspiration and strength from this sacrament for your conjugal relationship and for the educational mission to which you are called. Build your families in unity, a gift that comes from on high and nourishes your commitment in the Church and in promoting a just and fraternal world. Love your priests, tell them of your appreciation of the generous service they carry out. May you also be able to be supportive despite their limitations, without ever giving up asking them to be exemplary ministers among you who speak to you of God and lead you to God. Your brotherliness is a precious spiritual help to them and a support in the trials of life.

Dear priests and dear married couples, may you always be able to find in Holy Mass the strength to live belonging to Christ and to his Church in forgiveness, in the gift of yourselves and in gratitude. May the origin and centre of your daily activity be sacramental communion so that all things may be done for the glory of God.

In this way Christ’s sacrifice of love will transform you, until it makes you in him “one body and one spirit” (cf. Eph 4:4-6). Educating the new generations in the faith also passes through your consistent witness. Bear witness to them of the demanding beauty of Christian life with the trust and patience of those who know the potential of the seed scattered on the ground.

As in the Gospel episode that we heard (Mk 5:21-24, 35-43), may you be to all those entrusted to your responsibility a sign of Jesus’ kindness and tenderness. In him it was visible that the God who loves life is not foreign or remote from human affairs but is the Friend who never abandons us. And in moments when the temptation creeps in to consider every educational commitment vain, draw from the Eucharist the light to reinforce your faith, in the certainty that the grace and power of Jesus Christ can reach the human being in every situation, even the most difficult.

Dear friends, I entrust you all to the protection of Mary, venerated in this cathedral by the title: “Queen of all the Saints”. Tradition links this to the image of the *ex voto* given by a sailor in thanksgiving to her for saving his son, who emerged unharmed from a storm at sea. May the motherly gaze of Mary also accompany your steps in holiness on the way towards a landing-place of peace. Many thanks.

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