



The Holy See

TE DEUM OF THANKSGIVING FOR THE END OF THE YEAR
IN THE CHURCH OF THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 31 December 1978

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

First of all I wish to greet all present here, Romans and visitors, who have come to celebrate the closing of the year 1978—to celebrate it religiously. I address my cordial greeting to the Cardinal Vicar, to the brother bishops, to the representatives of civil Authority, to the priests, to the men and women religious, especially those of the Society of Jesus with their Father General.

1. The Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, that is, the present Sunday, unites, in the liturgy, the solemn memory of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The birth of a child always gives rise to a family. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem gave rise to this unique and exceptional Family in the history of mankind. In this Family there came into the world, grew and was brought up the Son of God, conceived and born of the Virgin-Mother, and at the same time entrusted, from the beginning, to the truly fatherly care of Joseph. The latter, a carpenter of Nazareth, who vis-à-vis Jewish law was Mary's husband, and vis-à-vis the Holy Spirit was her worthy spouse and the guardian, really in a fatherly way, of the maternal mystery of his Bride.

The family of Nazareth, which the Church, especially in today's liturgy, puts before the eyes of all families, really constitutes that culminating point of reference for the holiness of every human family. The history of this Family is described very concisely in the pages of the Gospel. We get to know only a few events in its life. However what we learn is sufficient to be able to involve the fundamental moments in the life of every family, and to show that dimension, to which all men who live a family life are called: fathers, mothers, parents, children, The Gospel shows us, very clearly, the educative aspect of the family. "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was

obedient to them" (Lk 2:51).

This submission, obedience, readiness to accept the mature examples of the human conduct of the family, is necessary, on the part of children and of the young generation. Jesus, too, was "obedient" in this way. And parents must measure their whole conduct with this "obedience", this readiness of the child to accept the examples of human behaviour. This is the particularly delicate point of their responsibility as parents, of their responsibility with regard to the man, this little and then growing man entrusted to them by God himself. They must also keep in mind everything that happened in the life of the Family of Nazareth when Jesus was twelve years old; that is, they bring up their child not just for themselves, but for him, for the tasks which he will have to assume later. The twelve-year-old Jesus replied to Mary and Joseph: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Lk 2:40).

The deepest human problems are connected with the family. It constitutes the primary, fundamental and irreplaceable community for man. "The mission of being the primary vital cell of society has been given to the family by God himself", the Second Vatican Council affirms. (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11). The Church wishes to bear a particular witness to that too during the Octave of Christmas, by means of the feast of the Holy Family. She wishes to recall that the fundamental values, which cannot be violated without incalculable harm of a moral nature, are bound up with the family. Material perspectives and the "economic-social" point of view often prevail over the principles of Christian and even human morality. It is not enough, then, to express only regret. It is necessary to defend these fundamental values tenaciously and firmly, because their violation does incalculable harm to society and, in the last analysis, to man. no experience of the different nations in the history of mankind, as well as our contemporary experience, can serve as an argument to reaffirm this painful truth, that is, that it is easy, in the fundamental sphere of human existence in which the role of the family is decisive, to destroy essential values, while it is very difficult to reconstruct these values.

What are these values? If we had to answer this question adequately, it would be necessary to indicate the whole hierarchy and the set of values which define and condition one another. But trying to express oneself concisely, let us say that here it is a question of two fundamental values which fall strictly into the context of what we call "conjugal love". The first of them is the value of the person which is expressed in absolute mutual faithfulness until death: the faithfulness of the husband to his wife and of the wife to her husband. The consequence of this affirmation of the value of the person, which is expressed in the mutual relationship between husband and wife, must also be respect for the personal value of the new life, that is, of the child, from the first moment of his conception.

The Church can never dispense herself from the obligation of guarding these two fundamental values, connected with the vocation of the family. Custody of them was entrusted to the Church by Christ, in such a way as leaves no doubt. At the same time, the self-evidence of these

values—humanly understood— is such that the Church, defending them, sees herself as the spokesman of true human dignity: of the good of the person, of the family, of the nations. While maintaining respect for all those who think differently, it is very difficult to recognize, from the objective and impartial point of view, that anyone who betrays conjugal faithfulness, or who permits life conceived in the mother's womb to be wiped out and destroyed, behaves in a way consistent with true human dignity. Consequently, it cannot be admitted that programmes which suggest, which facilitate, which admit such behaviour serve the objective well-being of man, the moral well-being, and help to make human life really more human, really more worthy of man; that they serve to construct a better society.

3. This Sunday is also the last day of the year 1978. We have gathered here, in this liturgy to give thanks to God for all the good he has bestowed on us and given us the grace to do during the past year, and to ask his forgiveness for all that, being contrary to good, is also contrary to his holy will. Allow me, in this thanksgiving and in this request for forgiveness, to use also the criterion of the family, this time, however, in the wider sense. As God is the Father, then the criterion of the family has also this dimension; it refers to all human communities, societies, nations and countries; it refers to the Church and to mankind.

Concluding this year in this way, let us give thanks to God for everything that—in the various spheres of earthly existence—makes men even more of a "family", that is, more brothers and sisters, who have in common the one Father. At the same time, let us ask for forgiveness for everything that is alien to the common brotherhood of men, that destroys the unity of the human family, that threatens it and impedes it.

Therefore, having always before my eyes my great predecessor Paul VI, and the most beloved Pope John Paul I, I their successor, in the year of the death of both, today say: "Our Father, who are in heaven, accept us on this last day of the year 1978 in Christ Jesus, your Eternal Son, and lead us forward in him in the future, in the future that you yourself desire: God of Love, God of Truth, God of Life!".

With this prayer on my lips, I, successor of the two Pontiffs who died during this year, cross, together with you, the frontier which, in a few hours, will divide the year 1978 from 1979.

