



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE SCHÖNSTATT FAMILY ASSOCIATION**

Friday, 17 April 1998

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I cordially welcome you to the Apostolic Palace and assure you that I was pleased to grant your request for this meeting. For the third time you are making a pilgrimage to Rome as the Schönstatt Family Association. This year the days spent near the tombs of the Apostles should be an important stage in the spiritual path leading us to the threshold of the third millennium.

2. Today I am in the midst of many families, surrounded by different generations, grown-ups and children, young and old. Your presence shows me that the family is alive! Better than so many words, your living community demonstrates that today there are still many successful Christian couples and families. Moreover, there is a growing awareness of the need to form relationships between individual families for mutual spiritual and material help. The Schönstatt Family Association is indeed an eloquent example that more and more families are discovering their ecclesial mission and their responsibility for building a more just society.

3. Just as God has a plan for each individual, so he has a plan for the family. In this divine plan the family not only finds its identity - what it "is" - but especially its mission, that is, what it can and should "do". According to God's will, the family has been established as "an intimate partnership of life and love" (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 48). It has been sent to become more and more what it is, that is, a partnership of life and love. Thus, a person's life decision for marriage and the family is a response to a personal call from God. It is a genuine vocation, which includes a mission.

4. In a family that fulfils God's plan, the individual experiences a living community, in which each one knows he is responsible for the others. In the family the law of mutual co-operation applies: husband and wife, adults and children, brothers and sisters accept one another as God's gift and give each other the life and love of God. In the family the healthy and the sick stand by one another. Young and old speak up for one another. They try to solve problems together. The individual experiences his own uniqueness and, at the same time, his interconnectedness with others. Because everyone is different and yet knows he is part of the family community, the family becomes the privileged place where one can learn to live together in peace despite differing interests. Lastly, the family is also the place where everyone can experience mutual forgiveness in an atmosphere of love. A "culture of peace", which the world is still seeking, is based on the family, as I expressed it four years ago in the theme for the World Day of Peace: "The family creates the peace of the human family".

5. Everything great requires patience. It must grow. Marriage and the family also develop. In your marriages and families, dear brothers and sisters, your own salvation history is unfolding, in which God accompanies you on every path, even paths that are incorrect, misleading or erroneous. The personal religious life of children also begins in the family. In short, basic experiences such as the joy of life, confidence, gratitude and solidarity are imparted here, on which all later instruction in the faith is based. This enjoys greater success, the more that the life of the family corresponds to a church in miniature. The domestic church needs forms in which to live: prayer in common; observance of Sunday, which must be more than a holiday; attention to religious customs, which contain profound wisdom; and the lived love of neighbour, without which Christian witness remains ineffective.

6. Dear members of the Schönstatt Family Association, I express my deep appreciation that you have joined together as family groups and support one another in faith. May the Mother of God, under whose special protection you have placed your community, intercede so that families may increasingly become communities of life and love. For this I cordially give you my Apostolic Blessing.