



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY**

Friday, 18 October 2002

*Your Eminences,
Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Married Couples,*

1. I am happy to welcome you for the Fifteenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family. To everyone a cordial greeting. I thank Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council, for the kind words he addressed on behalf of everyone who is present. I wish to thank each of you and also those who are on the staff of the Council for carrying out with generosity and competence such an important mission for the Church and for society to serve the family, the domestic church and the cradle of life.

Much has been done in these years, much remains to be done. I encourage you not to be discouraged by the immensity of the challenge today, but continue without hesitation to fulfill the duty of safeguarding and promoting the immeasurable good of marriage and the family. On this endeavour, to a great extent, depend the destiny of society and the future of evangelization.

The theme of your plenary meeting is very timely: *The Pastoral Care of the Family and of Couples in Difficulty*. This is a broad and complex topic; you will deal with only a few aspects since you have had the opportunity to examine it on other occasions. In this regard, I would like to offer you a few starting points for your reflection and guidance.

2. In a world that is becoming ever more secularized, the great task of the believing family is to become conscious of its own vocation and mission. In every circumstance, the starting point for this work is to safeguard and intensify *prayer, an unceasing prayer to the Lord* to increase one's faith and make it more vigorous. As I wrote in the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*: "The

family that prays together, stays together" (n. 41).

It is true that, when one goes through difficult times, the support of science can be of great help, but nothing can replace an ardent, personal and confident faith that is open to the Lord, who said, "*Come to me, all you labour and are heavy burdened and I will give you rest*" (Mt 11,28).

The indispensable source of energy and renewal, when frailty and weakness increase, is the encounter with the living Christ, Lord of the Covenant. This is why you must develop an intense spiritual life and open your soul to the Word of life. In the depths of the heart the voice of God must be heard, even if at times it seems to be silent, in reality it resounds continually in the heart and accompanies us along the path that can have its burden of sorrow as happened to the two travellers of Emmaus.

Special care must be shown to young spouses so that they do not surrender in the face of problems and conflicts. Prayer, frequent recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation, spiritual direction, must never be abandoned with the idea that one can replace them with other techniques of human and psychological support. We must never forget what is essential, namely, to live in the family under the tender and merciful gaze of God.

The richness of the sacramental life, in the life of the family, that participates in the Eucharist every Sunday (cf. *Dies Domini*, n. 81) is undoubtedly the best antidote for confronting and overcoming obstacles and tensions.

3. This is even more necessary when there abound lifestyles, fashion and cultures that bring into doubt the value of the marriage, even reaching the point of holding that it is impossible to realize the mutual gift of self in marriage until death in joyful fidelity (cf. *Letter to Families*, n. 10). Human frailty grows if the divorce mentality dominates, something that the Council denounced with such vigour because it leads so often to separations and definitive break-ups. Even a bad education for sexuality harms the life of the family. When there is lacking an integral preparation for marriage that respects the gradual stages of the maturation of the engaged couple (cf. *Familiaris consortio*, n. 66), in the family this lessens the possibility of defence.

There is no difficult situation that cannot be adequately confronted when one cultivates a genuine atmosphere of Christian life. Love itself, wounded by sin, is still a redeemed love (cf. CCC, n. 1608). It is clear that, if sacramental life is weak, the family yields more easily to snares because it is deprived of any defences.

How important it is to foster family support for couples, especially young couples, by families who are spiritually and morally solid. It is a fruitful and necessary apostolate at this time in history.

4. I would like to offer a reflection on the dialogue that should go on at home in the formation of the

children. Often there is no time to live and dialogue in the family. Many times parents do not feel prepared and even fear to assume what is their duty, the task of the integral education of their children. It might be that, due to the lack of any dialogue, the children feel serious obstacles when it comes to seeing in their parents genuine models to imitate, and look elsewhere for models and lifestyles that are often false and harmful to human dignity and to genuine love. The *trivialization of sex* in a society that is saturated with eroticism, and the lack of any reference to ethical principles, can ruin the life of children, adolescents and youth, preventing their being formed in a responsible, mature love and in the harmonious development of their personality.

5. Dear Brothers and Sisters, thank you for the attention that you dedicate in your plenary assembly to such a timely topic that I have very much at heart. May God help you to focus on what is most useful for families today. Continue to prepare with enthusiasm for the World Family Day that will be held in Manila in January of the coming year.

I heartily hope that the convention that I convoked during the observance of the Jubilee of the Family and for which I assigned the theme: *The Christian Family: Good News for the Third Millennium*, might foster the missionary zeal of families around the world.

I entrust all of this to Mary, Queen of the Family. May she accompany and protect you always. With affection I bless you and those who collaborate with you in the service of the true good of the family.