



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO RIO DE JANEIRO, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
2nd WORLD MEETING FOR FAMILIES
(OCTOBER 2-6, 1997)

MASS FOR THE SECOND WORLD MEETING WITH FAMILIES

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

5 October 1997

Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ!

1. "May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives" (responsorial psalm).

I give thanks to God for having permitted me to meet you again, families from all over the world, to reaffirm solemnly that you are "the hope of humanity"!

The First World Meeting with Families took place in Rome in 1994. The second ends today in Rio de Janeiro. I cordially thank Cardinal Eugênio de Araújo Sales for inviting me and I also thank all the Bishops and the Brazilian authorities who have contributed to the success of this great event. And I cordially thank Cardinal López Trujillo and all his assistants at the Pontifical Council for the Family. We are gathered here from various countries and Churches, not only from Brazil and Latin America but from all the continents, to raise this prayer to God together: "May the Lord bless us, all the days of our lives"!

In fact, the family is the particular and, at the same time, fundamental community of love and life on which all other communities and societies are based. Therefore, in invoking the blessings of the Most High upon families, let us pray together for all the great societies that we represent here. Let us pray for the future of the nations and States, and for the future of the Church and the world.

In fact, through the family all human life is oriented to the future. In the family man comes into the world, grows and matures. In it he becomes an increasingly mature citizen of his country, and an increasingly aware member of the Church. The family is also the first, fundamental environment where every person identifies and fulfils his own human and Christian vocation. Lastly, the family is a community that cannot be replaced by any other. This is what we can glimpse in today's liturgical readings.

2. The representatives of Jewish orthodoxy, the Pharisees, approached the Messiah to ask him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Christ then asks them what Moses had commanded. They answered that Moses had allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to put her away. But Christ said to them: "For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female'. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'. So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mk 10:5-9).

Christ referred to the beginning. This beginning is contained in the Book of Genesis, where we find the description of the creation of man. As we read in the first chapter of this book, God created man in his image and likeness; male and female he created them (cf. Gn 1:27), and he said: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gn 1:28). In the second description of creation, which is the first reading of today's liturgy, we read that woman was created from man. This is what Scripture says: "So the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man'. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gn 2:21-24).

3. The language uses the anthropological categories of the ancient world, but it has extraordinary depth: it expresses the essential truths in a truly spectacular way. All that was later discovered by human reflection and scientific knowledge has done no more than confirm what already existed from the start.

The Book of Genesis reveals first and foremost the cosmic dimension of creation. Man's appearance occurred within the immense horizon of the creation of the whole cosmos: it is not accidental that this takes place on the last day of the world's creation. Man entered the Creator's work at the moment when all the conditions necessary for human life were in place. Man is one of the visible creatures; at the same time, however, in Sacred Scripture it is said that he alone was made "in the image and likeness of God". This wonderful union of body and spirit was a decisive innovation in the process of creation. With the human being, all the greatness of the visible creation gains a spiritual dimension. The intellect and will, knowledge and love — all this enters

into the visible cosmos at the very moment of man's creation. It enters it showing, from the beginning, the compenetration of the life of the body with the life of the soul. Thus man leaves his father and mother, and is joined to his wife, to become one flesh; however this conjugal union is rooted at the same time in knowledge and love, that is, in the spiritual dimension.

The Book of Genesis speaks of all this in a language of its own which is, at the same time, marvellously simple and complete. Man and woman, called to live in the process of cosmic creation, appear on the threshold of their own vocation, bringing with them the ability to procreate in collaboration with God, who directly creates the soul of each new human being. Through mutual knowledge and love, and at the same time through physical union, they will call to life beings resembling themselves and, like them, created "in the image and likeness of God". They will give life to their own children, just as they received it from their parents. This is the truth, both simple and great, about the family, as it is presented in the pages of the Book of Genesis and of the Gospel: in God's plan, marriage — indissoluble marriage — is the basis of a healthy and responsible family.

4. In a brief incisive way, Christ describes in the Gospel the original plan of God the Creator. This plan is also found in the Letter to the Hebrews proclaimed in the second reading: "For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin" (Heb 2:10-11). The creation of man has its basis in this eternal Word of God. God called everything to life through the action of this Word, the eternal Son, through whom everything was created. Man too was created through the Word and was created male and female. The marriage covenant originates in the eternal Word of God. *In him the family was created.* In him the family is eternally conceived, imagined and realized by God. Through Christ it acquires its sacramental character, its sanctification.

The text of the Letter to the Hebrews recalls that the sanctification of marriage, like that of any other human reality, was accomplished by Christ at the price of his Passion and Cross. He reveals himself here as the new Adam. Just as in the natural order we all descend from Adam, so in the order of grace and sanctification, we all originate in Christ. The sanctification of the family stems from the sacramental character of marriage.

He who sanctifies — that is, Christ — and all those who are to be sanctified — you, fathers and mothers; you, families — appear together before God the Father ardently to ask that he will bless what he has accomplished in you through the sacrament of marriage. This prayer includes all married couples and families who live on the earth. God, the one Creator of the universe, is in fact the source of life and holiness.

5. Parents and families of the whole world, let me say to you: God calls you to holiness! He himself has chosen you "before the creation of the world", St Paul tells us, to "be holy and blameless

before him ... through Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:4). He loves you passionately, he desires your happiness, but he wants you to be always able *to combine fidelity with happiness, because one cannot exist without the other*. Do not let a hedonistic mentality, ambition and selfishness enter your homes. Be generous with God. I cannot fail to recall, once again, that the family, "*as an intimate community of life and love*" [is] at the service of the Church and of society" (*Familiaris consortio*, n. 50). The mutual gift of self, blessed by God and imbued with faith, hope and love, will enable both spouses to achieve perfection and sanctification. In other words, it will serve as the sanctifying centre of one's own family and of spreading the work of evangelizing the whole Christian home.

Dear brothers and sisters, what an immense task you have before you! Be bearers of peace and joy within the family; grace elevates and perfects love and with it grants you the indispensable family virtues of humility, the spirit of service and sacrifice, parental and filial affection, respect and mutual understanding. And since the good is self-diffusive, I also hope that your support of the family apostolate will be, as far as possible, an incentive to spread generously the gift that is in you, first to your children then among those couples — perhaps relatives and friends — who are far from God or who are experiencing moments of misunderstanding or distrust. On the journey towards the Jubilee of the Year 2000, I invite all those listening to me *to strengthen their faith and witness as Christians*, so that with God's grace there may be true conversion and personal renewal in all the world's families (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 42). May the spirit of the Holy Family of Nazareth reign in all Christian homes!

Families of Brazil, of Latin America and of the whole world, the Pope and the Church trust in you. Have trust: God is with us!

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