



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)

MEETING WITH BISHOPS AND DELEGATES

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

3 October 1997

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate
Dear Members of the Congress,*

1. I am very pleased to meet the families representing various nations who are taking part in this Pastoral Theology Congress organized in view of the Second World Meeting of Families. I greet you all, venerable Brothers in the Episcopates of Brazil, Latin America and the whole world, and I also greet the families present and all those they represent. As I ask the Almighty for abundant graces of wisdom and strength which serve as an encouragement to reassert with faith the motto: "*The Family: Gift and Commitment, Hope for Humanity*", I would like to reflect with you on the ways and demands of apostolic and pastoral work with the families you have before you.

Some of the points I am proposing to you, Bishops, teachers of the faith and Pastors of the flock — called to instil a renewed dynamism in the pastoral care of the family — have already been the object of attentive study during the Pastoral Theology Congress. I thank Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, for the greetings he addressed to me, and I invite the participants — delegates of the Episcopal Conferences, movements, associations and groups — who have come from all over the world, to study and enthusiastically disseminate the results of this work, undertaken in total fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church.

2. Man is the way of the Church. And the family is the primary expression of this way. As I wrote in the *Letter to Families*: "*The divine mystery of the Incarnation of the Word thus has an intimate connection with the human family*. Not only with one family, that of Nazareth, but in some way with every family, analogously to what the Second Vatican Council says about the Son of God, who in the Incarnation 'united himself in some sense with every man' (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Following Christ who 'came' into the world 'to serve' (Mt 20:28), the Church considers serving the human family to be one of her essential duties. In this sense both man and the family constitute 'the way of the Church' (*Gratissimam sane*, n. 2)".

The Gospel thus sheds light on human dignity and redeems all that can impoverish the vision of man and his truth. It is in Christ that man perceives the greatness of his call to be an image and child of God; it is in him that God the Father's original plan for man is revealed in its full splendour, and it is in Christ that this original plan will be fully realized. It is in Christ that this first and privileged expression of human society, which is the family, finds light and the full capacity for fulfilment, in conformity with the Father's loving plan.

"If Christ fully discloses man to himself, he does so beginning with the family in which he chose to be born and to grow up" (*Gratissimam sane*, n. 2). Christ, *Lumen gentium*, light of peoples, illumines human paths, especially that of the spouses' intimate communion of life and love, which is the necessary crossroads in the lives of individuals and peoples where God has always gone to meet them.

This is the sacred meaning of marriage, present in some way in all cultures despite the shadows due to original sin, and which acquires an eminent greatness and value in Revelation: "Just as of old God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Saviour, the Spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of marriage. He abides with them in order that by their mutual self-giving spouses will love each other with enduring fidelity, as he loved the Church and delivered himself for her" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 48).

3. The family is not an accessory and extrinsic structure to man, hindering his development and his inner dynamism. "For by his innermost nature man is a social being; and if he does not enter into relations with others he can neither live nor develop his gifts" (ibid., n. 12). The family, far from being an obstacle to the person's development and growth, is the privileged place for the growth of the personal and social potential inscribed in his being.

The family, founded on love and enlivened by it, is the place where every person is called to experience, appropriate and participate in that love without which man could not live, and his whole life would be deprived of meaning (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 10; *Familiaris consortio*, n. 18).

Today the darkness that affects the very concept of man, directly and primarily attacks the reality

and expressions which are connatural to it. Person and family are correlated in esteem and in the acknowledgement of their own dignity, as well as in the attacks against them and attempts to destroy them. God's greatness and wisdom are manifest in his works. Today it seems that God's enemies, rather than directly attacking the Author of creation, prefer to strike him through his creatures. Man is the culmination, the apex of his visible works. "Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei" (St Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4, 20, 7).

Among the truths obscured in man's heart because of increasing secularization and the prevailing hedonism, all those concerning the family are particularly affected. *Today, the basic struggle for human dignity is centred on the family and life.* In the first place, the elements of equality in the spouses' dignity and their necessary diversity and sexual complementarity in the conjugal relationship are neither recognized nor respected. Even marital fidelity and the respect for life in every phase of its existence are subverted by a culture that denies the transcendence of man created in God's image and likeness. While the disintegrating forces of evil succeed in separating marriage from its mission to human life, they strike at humanity, depriving it of one of the essential guarantees of its future.

4. The Pope wanted to come to Rio de Janeiro to greet you with open arms like the statue of Christ the Redeemer which dominates this marvellous city from the top of Corcovado. And he has come to confirm you in faith and support your efforts in witnessing to Gospel values. Therefore, with regard to the central problems of the person and his vocation, the Church's pastoral activity cannot respond with a partial apostolate. It is necessary to undertake *a pastoral ministry in which the central truths of the faith radiate their own evangelizing power in the various areas of life, especially in that of the family.* This is a priority task based on the "certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church" (*Familiaris consortio*, n. 65). It is necessary to arouse and present a common front, inspired by and based on the central truths of Revelation, whose interlocutor is the *person* and whose agent is the *family*.

Therefore Pastors must be ever more aware of the fact that the family apostolate requires carefully trained pastoral workers, and consequently, efficient and adequate structures in the Episcopal Conferences and Dioceses, which will serve as dynamic centres of evangelization, dialogue and joint activities, with well-designed pastoral projects and plans.

At the same time, I would like to encourage every effort to promote adequate organizational structures, at both the national and international level, which would take responsibility for establishing constructive dialogue with the political authorities, on which, to a large extent, depend the destiny of the family and its mission to the service of life. To find appropriate ways to continue effectively presenting the basic values of God's plan to the world, means being committed to safeguarding humanity's future.

5. In addition to shedding light on and reinforcing the Church's presence as leaven, light and salt

of the earth, so that human life is not destroyed, it is essential to give priority to pastoral programmes which promote the formation of fully Christian homes and increase in married couples the generosity to incarnate in their own lives the truths that the Church proposes for the human family.

The Christian concept of marriage and the family does not alter created reality but elevates the essential elements of the conjugal society: *the communion of the spouses who give birth to new lives*, educate them and integrate them into society, and *the communion of persons, as a strong bond* between family members.

6. Today in this Congress Centre — the Riocentre — I invoke the light and warmth of the Holy Spirit upon you, Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, representatives of the various Episcopal Conferences of the whole world and on the delegates to the Pastoral Theology Congress and their families. The Church turns to him, that he may pour out his sanctifying presence upon everyone and renew the Bride of Christ with missionary zeal so that all may be able to know Christ, true Son of God and true Son of man (cf. *Prayer for the First Year of Preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*). Tomorrow we will celebrate the *Act of Witness* in Maracanã Stadium, together with all of you who have brought here the immense riches, concerns and hopes of your Churches and your peoples, which will serve as a framework for the Sunday Eucharist on the Flamengo Embankment, where we will live the mystery of the living Bread come down from heaven, the Manna of families on their pilgrimage to God!

I hope that through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the fruits of our meeting may find hearts well disposed to accepting the lights of the Most High with a fresh missionary ardour, for a new evangelization of families and of all humanity. May the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, who is also the Spirit of Love, grant us all the blessing and the grace which I would like to impart to the sons and daughters of the Church and to the entire human family.

The Holy Father then spoke extemporaneously to those present:

This place, the city of Rio de Janeiro, gave me an inspiration, in constantly seeing this divine and, at the same time, human architecture. Now, the divine architecture predominates, is superior to the human, but we can also see that man is an architect, man is made in the image of God. This inspiration from architecture is important for families, because the family, as a domestic church, also has a divine and human architecture. The family needs this divine and human architecture in order to live, to endure, to find God in the home. This is my final reflection, suggested to me by architecture.

After the faithful had sung a hymn, the Holy Father said:

This hymn comes from 1980, the year of the first visit. The Pope was much younger then.

When he had imparted his Blessing the Pope added:

The Lord certainly wants to bless all the families of the world. I greet everyone present and everyone you represent. Until next time, until tomorrow. I will be back.

If God is Brazilian, the Pope is a "carioco" [an inhabitant of Rio de Janeiro] but in Porto Alegre they say that the Pope is a "gaucho", as they do in Bahia.

Goodbye, until next time, until tomorrow!

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