



The Holy See

PILGRIMAGE

OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

TO THE HOLY LAND

(8-15 MAY 2009) HOLY MASS HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Mount of Precipice - Nazareth

Thursday, 14 May 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“May the peace of the Risen Christ reign in your hearts, for as members of the one body you have been called to that peace!” (Col 3:15). With these words of the Apostle Paul, I greet all of you with affection in the Lord. I rejoice to have come to Nazareth, the place blessed by the mystery of the Annunciation, the place which witnessed the hidden years of Christ’s growth in wisdom, age and grace (cf. Lk 2:52). I thank Archbishop Elias Chacour for his kind words of welcome, and I embrace with the sign of peace my brother Bishops, the priests and religious, and all the faithful of Galilee, who, in the diversity of their rites and traditions, give expression to the universality of Christ’s Church. In a special way I wish to thank all those who have helped to make this celebration possible, particularly those involved in the planning and construction of this new theatre with its splendid panorama of the city.

Here in the home town of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, we have gathered to mark the conclusion of the Year of the Family celebrated by the Church in the Holy Land. As a sign of hope for the future I will bless the first stone of an International Center for the Family to be built in Nazareth. Let us pray that the Center will promote strong family life in this region, offer support and assistance to families everywhere, and encourage them in their irreplaceable mission to society.

This stage of my pilgrimage, I am confident, will draw the whole Church’s attention to this town of Nazareth. All of us need, [as Pope Paul VI said here](#), to return to Nazareth, to contemplate ever anew the silence and love of the Holy Family, the model of all Christian family life. Here, in the example of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, we come to appreciate even more fully the sacredness of the

family, which in God's plan is based on the lifelong fidelity of a man and a woman consecrated by the marriage covenant and accepting of God's gift of new life. How much the men and women of our time need to reappropriate this fundamental truth, which stands at the foundation of society, and how important is the witness of married couples for the formation of sound consciences and the building of a civilization of love!

In today's first reading, drawn from the book of Sirach (3:3-7, 14-17), the word of God presents the family as the first school of wisdom, a school which trains its members in the practice of those virtues which make for authentic happiness and lasting fulfilment. In God's plan for the family, the love of husband and wife bears fruit in new life, and finds daily expression in the loving efforts of parents to ensure an integral human and spiritual formation for their children. In the family each person, whether the smallest child or the oldest relative, is valued for himself or herself, and not seen simply as a means to some other end. Here we begin to glimpse something of the essential role of the family as the first building-block of a well-ordered and welcoming society. We also come to appreciate, within the wider community, the duty of the State to support families in their mission of education, to protect the institution of the family and its inherent rights, and to ensure that all families can live and flourish in conditions of dignity.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Colossians, speaks instinctively of the family when he wishes to illustrate the virtues which build up the "one body" which is the Church. As "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved", we are called to live in harmony and peace with one another, showing above all forbearance and forgiveness, with love as the highest bond of perfection (cf. Col 3:12-14). Just as in the marriage covenant, the love of man and woman is raised by grace to become a sharing in, and an expression of, the love of Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:32), so too the family, grounded in that love, is called to be a "domestic church", a place of faith, of prayer and of loving concern for the true and enduring good of each of its members.

As we reflect on these realities here, in the town of the Annunciation, our thoughts naturally turn to Mary, "full of grace", the mother of the Holy Family and our Mother. Nazareth reminds us of our need to acknowledge and respect the God-given dignity and proper role of women, as well as their particular charisms and talents. Whether as mothers in families, as a vital presence in the work force and the institutions of society, or in the particular vocation of following our Lord by the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, women have an indispensable role in creating that "human ecology" (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 39) which our world, and this land, so urgently needs: a milieu in which children learn to love and to cherish others, to be honest and respectful to all, to practice the virtues of mercy and forgiveness.

Here too, we think of Saint Joseph, the just man whom God wished to place over his household. From Joseph's strong and fatherly example Jesus learned the virtues of a manly piety, fidelity to one's word, integrity and hard work. In the carpenter of Nazareth he saw how authority placed at the service of love is infinitely more fruitful than the power which seeks to dominate. How much

our world needs the example, guidance and quiet strength of men like Joseph!

Finally, in contemplating the Holy Family of Nazareth, we turn to the child Jesus, who in the home of Mary and Joseph grew in wisdom and understanding, until the day he began his public ministry. Here I would simply like to leave a particular thought with the young people here. The Second Vatican Council teaches that children have a special role to play in the growth of their parents in holiness (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 48). I urge you to reflect on this, and to let the example of Jesus guide you, not only in showing respect for your parents, but also helping them to discover more fully the love which gives our lives their deepest meaning. In the Holy Family of Nazareth, it was Jesus who taught Mary and Joseph something of the greatness of the love of God his heavenly Father, the ultimate source of all love, the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name (cf. Eph 3:14-15).

Dear friends, in the Opening Prayer of today's Mass we asked the Father to "help us to live as the Holy Family, united in respect and love". Let us reaffirm here our commitment to be a leaven of respect and love in the world around us. This Mount of the Precipice reminds us, as it has generations of pilgrims, that our Lord's message was at times a source of contradiction and conflict with his hearers. Sadly, as the world knows, Nazareth has experienced tensions in recent years which have harmed relations between its Christian and Muslim communities. I urge people of good will in both communities to repair the damage that has been done, and in fidelity to our common belief in one God, the Father of the human family, to work to build bridges and find the way to a peaceful coexistence. Let everyone reject the destructive power of hatred and prejudice, which kills men's souls before it kills their bodies!

Allow me to conclude with a word of gratitude and praise for all those who strive to bring God's love to the children of this town, and to educate new generations in the ways of peace. I think in a special way of the local Churches, particularly in their schools and charitable institutions, to break down walls and to be a seedbed of encounter, dialogue, reconciliation and solidarity. I encourage the dedicated priests, religious, catechists and teachers, together with parents and all concerned for the good of our children, to persevere in bearing witness to the Gospel, to be confident in the triumph of goodness and truth, and to trust that God will give growth to every initiative which aims at the extension of his Kingdom of holiness, solidarity, justice and peace. At the same time I acknowledge with gratitude the solidarity which so many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world show towards the faithful of the Holy Land by supporting the praiseworthy programs and activities of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

"Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). May our Lady of the Annunciation, who courageously opened her heart to God's mysterious plan, and became the Mother of all believers, guide and sustain us by her prayers. May she obtain for us and our families the grace to open our ears to that word of the Lord which has the power to build us up (cf. Acts 20:32), to inspire courageous decisions, and to guide our feet into the path of peace!

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