



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEETING OF THE ADOPTIVE FAMILIES
ORGANIZED BY THE MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY**

Tuesday, 5 September 2000

Dear Cardinal Laghi,

Dear Missionaries of Charity,

Parents and children of adoptive families,

Friends and collaborators of the Work of Mother Teresa of Calcutta,

1. I am pleased to meet you in such numbers and I thank Sr Mary Simon for her kind words expressing your sentiments.

You have wished to celebrate your Jubilee on the third anniversary of Mother Teresa's death. It is a very significant way of expressing your desire to follow Christ in the footsteps of this remarkable daughter of the Church, who devoted her whole life to charity. How can we forget her? As the years pass, her memory remains more vivid than ever. We remember her with her smile, her deep gaze, her rosary. It seems that we still see her traveling the world in search of the poorest of the poor, ever ready to open new areas of charity, welcoming to everyone like a true mother.

2. *It is not unusual to call a religious "mother".* But this name had special intensity for Mother Teresa. A mother is recognized by her ability to give herself. Seeing Mother Teresa's manner, attitudes, way of being, helps us understand what it meant to her, beyond the purely physical dimension, to be a mother; it helped her to go to the *spiritual root of motherhood*.

We certainly know what her secret was: she was filled with Christ, and therefore looked at everyone with the eyes and heart of Christ. She had taken seriously his words: "I was hungry and you gave me food ..." (*Mt 25: 35*). She therefore had no trouble in "adopting" her poor as children.

Her love was concrete and enterprising: it spurred her to go where few had the courage to go, wherever poverty was so great as to be frightening.

It is not surprising that the people of our time were fascinated by her. She incarnated that love which Jesus indicated as the distinctive mark of his disciples: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (*Jn 13: 35*).

3. Among the works that flowed from Mother Teresa's heart, one of the most important is the *adoption movement*. For this reason so many adoptive families are here today.

I greet you with affection, dear parents and children! I am pleased with this meeting, which allows me to reflect with you on the path you are taking. To adopt a child is a great *work of love*. When it is done, much is given, but much is also received. It is a true exchange of gifts.

In this area, unfortunately, our time knows many contradictions. Despite the numerous children who, because of the death or inability of their parents, are left without a family, there are so many couples who decide to have no children for often selfish reasons. Others let themselves be discouraged by economic, social or bureaucratic difficulties. Still others, in the desire to have their "own" child at any cost, go far beyond the legitimate help which medical science can offer procreation, even having recourse to morally reprehensible practices. Regarding these tendencies, it must be said that the norms of moral law are more than mere abstract principles, but safeguard the true good of man, and in this case, the good of the child with respect to the interests of his parents.

As an alternative to these questionable means, the existence of so many children without families suggests *adoption as a concrete way of love*. Families like yours are here to say that this is a possible and beautiful way, despite its difficulties; a way, moreover, which is even more feasible than in the past, in this era of globalization which shortens all distances.

4. Adopting children, regarding and treating them as one's own children, means recognizing that the relationship between parents and children is not measured only by genetic standards. Procreative love is first and foremost *a gift of self*. There is a form of "procreation" which occurs through acceptance, concern and devotion. The resulting relationship is so intimate and enduring that it is in no way inferior to one based on a biological connection. When this is also juridically protected, as it is in adoption, in a family united by the stable bond of marriage, it assures the child that peaceful atmosphere and that *paternal and maternal* love which he needs for his full human development.

This is precisely what your experience shows. Your decision and commitment are an invitation to society as a whole to be courageous and generous, so that this gift may be more and more esteemed, encouraged and legally supported.

5. I thank you for your witness! As we celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of Christ's birth in this Great Jubilee, let us also remember that *every person who comes into the world*, in whatever condition, *bears the sign of God's love*. Christ was born and gave his life for every child in the world. There is no child, then, who does not belong to him.

"Let the children come to me" (*Mk 10: 14*). Mother Teresa echoed these words in a way when she said to mothers tempted by abortion: "Give me your children". Following in her footsteps, you have put yourselves with Christ *on the side of children*. May the Lord fill you with every consolation and sustain you in the difficulties of your journey.

I embrace you all and bless you in his name.

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