



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 FAMILIES
GATHERED IN THE MARACANÃ STADIUM**

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

4 October 1997

1. Dear families who have gathered here in Rio de Janeiro, who come from all peoples and all nations!

Beloved families of the whole world, who are following this meeting on radio and television! I greet you all with special affection and bless you.

I thank you very much for this warm expression of faith and joy that you have wanted to offer us today to help us reflect on the fact that the family is truly a gift and a commitment for the individual and for life, as well as the hope of humanity. Art has also been used as a way to serve the message of committed love and life, a marvellous gift of God. You have enabled us to share in what the Lord, the author of marriage and the Lord of life, has accomplished in you, and you have also borne witness to what you have achieved with his grace. Is it not true that the Lord, in the most varied situations, even amid suffering and difficulties, has always accompanied you? Yes! The Lord of the Covenant, who came to seek you and found you, has always accompanied you on your way. God our Lord, the Author of marriage, has *made* you *one* and has filled you abundantly with the riches of his love for your own happiness.

I would like to repeat here, in a short summary, what you have reflected on, after an intense catechetical preparation in conformity with the Church's Magisterium, in your *Family Assemblies*, Dioceses, parishes, movements and associations. It was certainly a wonderful preparation, whose fruits you have brought here today for the benefit and joy of all.

2. The family is the patrimony of humanity because it is through the family, in accordance with God's plan, that man's presence on earth must continue. In Christian families, based on the sacrament of marriage, faith gives us a marvellous glimpse of the face of Christ, the splendour of truth which fills with light and joy homes whose life is inspired by the Gospel.

Unfortunately, today a false message of happiness is spreading throughout the world, which is impossible and inconsistent, and brings with it loneliness and sorrow. Happiness is not achieved by taking the way of freedom without truth, because this is the way of irresponsible selfishness, which divides and disrupts the family and society.

It is not true that married couples, as though slaves condemned to their own weakness, cannot be faithful to their total gift of self until death! May the Lord, who calls you to live in the unity of "one flesh", a unity of body and soul, a unity of *the whole of life*, give you the strength for a fidelity which ennobles you and ensures that your union will not run the risk of betrayal, which robs it of dignity and happiness and brings division and sorrow to the home, the chief victims of which are the children. The best protection for the family is fidelity, which is a gift of the faithful and merciful God, in a love redeemed by him.

3. Here I would like once again to utter *a cry of hope and freedom!*

Families of Latin America and of the whole world: do not let yourselves be seduced by that false message which degrades peoples, attacks the best traditions and values and brings great suffering and unhappiness to your children. The cause of the family confers dignity upon the world and liberates it in the authentic truth of the human being, of the mystery of life, the gift of God, and of man and woman, images of God. You must fight for this cause to ensure your happiness and the future of the human family.

This afternoon, when families from all parts of the world are taking one another by the hand, as if to form an immense chain of love and fidelity, I address an invitation to everyone who is striving to build a new society in which the civilization of love prevails: *defend* your families as a precious and irreplaceable gift — a precious and irreplaceable gift. *Protect them with just laws* that fight poverty and the scourge of unemployment and, at the same time, allow parents to fulfil their role. How can young people start a family if they do not have the means to support it? Poverty is destroying the family, preventing access to culture and to basic education, corrupting morals and undermining the health of young people and adults. *Help them! Help them!* Your future is at stake!

In modern history there are many social phenomena that invite us to examine our consciences regarding the family. In many cases it must be recognized with shame that errors and mistakes have been made. How can we fail to denounce that behaviour, motivated by lack of restraint and responsibility, which tends to treat human beings as mere objects or instruments of fleeting and empty pleasure? How is it possible not to react to the lack of respect, to pornography and to every kind of exploitation, for which it is often children who pay the highest price?

Societies indifferent to children are inhuman and irresponsible. Homes which do not provide a complete education for their own children, or which abandon them, are committing a very serious injustice for which they will have to give an account before the judgement seat of God. I know that many families are sometimes victims of situations that are more than they can handle. In this case, it is necessary to appeal to the solidarity of all, because children end up suffering every form of misery: economic poverty, and above all moral poverty, which causes the phenomenon to which I referred in my *Letter to Families*: there are many orphans of living parents! (cf. n. 14).

As the Cardinal President of the Pontifical Council for the Family recalled, to serve as a symbol of an effective charity and the result of the First World Meeting with Families in Rome, a "*Child City*" has been set up in Rwanda, built with the help of many people and a few generous institutions, and another is being built in Salvador da Bahia, in the marshes I visited and where I addressed an appeal for hope and human advancement during my first Apostolic Visit to Brazil in July 1980. This effort brings a message and an invitation with it which I address to everyone, through you, families of the whole world: *welcome* your children with responsible love; *protect them* as a gift of God, from the moment of conception when human life is born in the mother's womb, so that the *abominable crime of abortion*, the shame of humanity, does not condemn the unborn to the most unjust of executions: that of the most innocent human beings! How many times have we heard from the lips of Mother Teresa of Calcutta this proclamation about the priceless value of life beginning in the mother's womb, and against any act that destroys life? We all heard it during the Testimonies at the First Meeting in Rome. Death has silenced those lips. But Mother Teresa's message on behalf of life continues to be more vibrant and convincing than ever.

4. In this stadium, which because of the play of lights looks like the stained-glass windows of an immense cathedral, today's celebration wants to call everyone to make a great and noble commitment, for which we ask almighty God for help.

For *families*, that united in Christ's love, pastorally organized, actively present in society, committed to the mission of humanization, liberation and the building of a world according to Christ's heart, they may truly be the *hope of humanity*.

For *children*, that they may grow up like Jesus, at the home in Nazareth. The seed of the new humanity sleeps in the womb of mothers. The future, the next millennium, tomorrow, which is in God's hands, shines in children's faces.

For *young people*, that they may commit themselves with great enthusiasm to preparing for their future families, teaching themselves true love which is openness to others, the ability to listen and to respond, the commitment to generous self-giving, even at the cost of personal sacrifice, and willingness to show mutual understanding and forgiveness to young people!

Yesterday, while speaking at the Riocentre, I thanked Rio de Janeiro for giving me a great inspiration. Here a divine architecture and a human architecture marvellously harmonize, giving me an inspiration, an inspiration for marvellously harmonizing families in the divine plan and in the human plan. These two architectures, divine and human, harmonize. And how do they harmonize? These two words seem right and necessary: love and responsibility. I reached this conclusion 50 years ago ... yes, 50 years ago: love and responsibility. This seems to be a true principle for harmonizing the two architectures — the divine and the human — of marriage and the family.

5. Families of the whole world, I would like to end by renewing my appeal: *Be living witnesses to Christ, who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life"* (cf. *Letter to Families*, n. 23)! Let hearts welcome the fruit of this Pastoral Theology Congress which has just ended! May the grace and peace of God, our Father, and of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all (cf. 2 Cor 1:2).

Mary Queen of the Family,
Seat of Wisdom, Handmaid of the Lord,
pray for us. Amen.

Pray for us, pray for young people,
pray for families.

After a song was sung in Swahili, the Holy Father said:

Now our happiness is more complete. We are happier with Swahili.

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