

FOURTH WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

25 January 2003

1. My thoughts and prayers are with you, dear families of the Philippines and from throughout the world, as you gather in Manila for your Fourth World Meeting. With great affection I greet all of you in the name of the Lord!

On this occasion I also offer a prayerful greeting to all the families of the world which you represent: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (1 Tim 1:2).

I thank the Papal Legate, Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, for the kind words which he addressed to me on your behalf. To him and to the staff of the Pontifical Council for the Family I express my gratitude for the time and effort spent in preparing this Meeting. I am likewise grateful to Cardinal Jaime Sin, the Archbishop of Manila, who is generously hosting you during these days.

2. In the theological-pastoral session just concluded you discussed the theme: "The Christian Family: Good News for the Third Millennium". I chose these words with your World Meeting in mind, in order to highlight the sublime mission of the family. By embracing the Gospel and walking in its light, families are given the demanding responsibility of bearing witness to its message.

Dear Christian families, proclaim joyfully to the whole world the wonderful treasure which you, as domestic churches, possess! Christian couples, in your communion of life and love, in your mutual self-giving and in your generous openness to children, become, in Christ, the light of the world. The Lord asks you daily to be like a lamp which does not remain hidden, but is put "on a stand, and ... gives light to all in the house" (Mt 5:15).

3. Above all, be "good news" for the third millennium by remaining faithful to your vocation. Whether you were married recently or many years ago, the Sacrament of Matrimony continues to be your own special way of being disciples of Jesus, contributing to the spread of the Kingdom of God and growing in the holiness to which all Christians are called. As the Second Vatican Council noted, Christian couples, in the fulfilment of their marital and family responsibilities, "increasingly advance their own perfection and their mutual sanctification" (Gaudium et Spes, 48).

Accept fully and without reserve the love which, in the Sacrament of Matrimony, God first gave to you, and through which he enables you to love others in turn (cf. 1 Jn 4:19). Stand firm in the one conviction which can give meaning, strength and joy to your life: Christ's love will never abandon you, his covenant of peace with you will never fail (cf. Is 54:10). God's gifts and call are irrevocable (cf. Rom 11:29). He has written your name on the palm of his hand (cf. Is 49:16).

4. The grace which you received in marriage remains with you through the years. Its source is in the pierced heart of the Redeemer, who sacrificed himself on the altar of the Cross for the sake of the Church, his Spouse, accepting death for the salvation of the world.

This grace remains ever close to that source: it is the grace of a self-sacrificing love, a love which both gives and forgives. It is the grace of a selfless love which forgets the hurt it has suffered, a love faithful unto death, a love bursting with new life. It is the grace of a generous love, which believes all things, bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things, a love which has no end, a love which is greater than all else (cf. 1 Cor 13:7-8).

Such a love is not always easy. Daily life is full of pitfalls, tensions, suffering and even fatigue. But on this journey you are not alone. Jesus is always present at your side, just as he was for the newlyweds at Cana in Galilee during a moment of difficulty. The Second Vatican Council reminds us that the Saviour remains close to Christian couples and offers them help, so that, just as he loved the Church and gave himself up for her, they too might always love each other faithfully and with constant mutual concern (cf. Gaudium et Spes, 48).

5. Christian couples, be "good news for the third millennium" by bearing convincing and consistent witness to the truth about the family.

The family founded on marriage is a patrimony of humanity, a great good of priceless value, necessary for the life, development and the future of peoples. According to the plan of creation established in the beginning (cf. Mt 19: 4.8), the family is the setting in which the human person, made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26), is conceived and born, grows and matures. The family, as the primary school in which the human person is formed (cf. Familiaris Consortio, 19-27), is indispensable for a true "human ecology" (Centesimus Annus, 39).

I am grateful for the testimonies which you have given this evening, and which I have carefully followed. They bring to mind my own experiences as a priest, as Archbishop of Krakow and in the nearly twenty-five years of my papacy. As I have often said, the future of humanity passes by way of the family (cf. Familiaris Consortio, 86).

I urge you, dear Christian families, to show by your daily lives that despite numerous difficulties and obstacles marriage is able to be fully lived out as a meaningful experience and as "good news" for the men and women of today. Be leaders in the Church and in the world: this is a responsibility flowing from your celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony, from your being a domestic church, and from the marital mission which is yours as the primary cells of society (cf. Apostolicam Actuositatem, 11).

6. Finally, dear Christian couples, if you wish to be "good news for the third millennium", do not forget that family prayer is a sure way to remain united in a way of life in harmony with God's will.

When I proclaimed the Year of the Rosary several months ago, I recommended this Marian devotion as a prayer of the family and for the family. By reciting the Rosary, families "place Jesus at the centre, they share his joys and sorrows, they place their needs and their plans in his hands, they draw from him the hope and the strength to go on" (Rosarium Virginis Mariae, 42).

I entrust all of you to Mary, Queen of the Family; may she accompany and sustain your life as families. I am also pleased to announce that the Fourth World Meeting of Families will be held in Valencia, Spain, in 2006.

As I now impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing, I leave you with a final charge: with God's help, make the Gospel the guiding principle of your families, and make your families a page of the Gospel written for our time!