

HOLY FAMILY RADIATES EXAMPLE OF TRUE LOVE

Pope John Paul II

The Holy Family of Nazareth "radiates genuine love and charity, not only creating an eloquent example for all families, but also offering the guarantee that such love can be achieved in every family unit", the Holy Father said on Sunday, 31 December, the Feast of the Holy Family, before praying the Angelus. Here is a translation of his reflection, which was given in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters

1. Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family, which this year coincides with the last day of the year. Today's liturgy relates the invitation the angel addressed twice to Joseph: "Rise, take the child and his mother, and <flee to Egypt> ... for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (Mt 2:13); and after Herod's death: "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go <to the land of Israel"> (Mt 2:19). In this account we can perceive two decisive moments for the Holy Family: first, in Bethlehem, when King Herod wants to kill the Child because he sees him as a rival to the throne, and in Egypt, when the danger has passed, the Holy Family can return to Nazareth from their exile. First of all, we observe <God's fatherly care>—the divine solicitude of the Father for the Incarnate Son — and, almost as a reflection of it Joseph's human concern. Beside him we perceive Mary's silent, anxious presence. In her heart she is meditating on God's concern and Joseph's prompt obedience. We call this solicitude of God Divine Providence, while human concern could be defined "human providence". It is in virtue of this "providence" that those who are parents endeavour to avoid every kind of evil and to provide their children and family with every possible good.

2. The concern of mothers and fathers should bring out in children and families sincere gratitude, a sentiment which is also a commandment: "Honour your father and your mother". I wished to recall this commandment in my <Letter to Families> (cf. n. 15), and I explained that although it is addressed to children, indirectly it concerns their parents as well. If the commandment tells the children: "<Honour>!", it also tells the parents: "<Seek to deserve the honour>!" The dimension of family life, established by the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, must be remembered constantly. The family, which, by its very nature and vocation, is an <environment of life and love>, is frequently subjected to painful threats of every kind. With the family and in the family, the life of the individual and of society is threatened.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, let us look to the Holy Family of Nazareth as an example for all Christian and human families. It radiates genuine love and charity, not only creating an eloquent example for all families, but also offering the guarantee that such love can be achieved in every family unit. May those who are engaged to be married be inspired by the Holy Family in their preparation for matrimony; may spouses look to it as they build their domestic community. May faith grow and may love, harmony, solidarity, mutual respect and openness to life reign in every home.

May Mary, <Queen of the family>, a title by which we can henceforth call upon her in the Litany of Loreto, help the families of believers to respond ever faithfully to their vocation so as to be true "domestic churches".

After praying the Angelus, the Holy Father said: I address a cordial greeting to all, inviting you to live these last hours of the closing year in a spirit of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, the source of all good. In particular, I greet those who are taking part in the procession of the Magi, who after paying homage to the image of the Baby Jesus at Aracaeli, are now going to venerate the one kept in Giulianello di Cori, near Latina. May every believer relive the experience of the holy Magi, and be guided always on the journey of life by the light of faith. The Holy Father then spoke a few words of greeting extemporaneously: I repeat to all: on this last day of 1995, I wish you a Happy New Year, a happy 1996, which will begin at midnight today. Praised be Jesus Christ! To a group of the faithful who were singing, the Pope said: They are trying to sing in Polish but they are not Polish. Let us hope for the best! Goodbye until tomorrow, please God!