

The Celebration of the Great Jubilee

JUBILEE OF FAMILIES

15 October 2000

1. *"May the Lord, the source of life, bless us"*. The invocation we repeated in the Responsorial Psalm, dear brothers and sisters, sums up well the daily prayer of every Christian family, and today, during this Eucharistic celebration of the Jubilee, it vividly expresses the meaning of our gathering.

You have come here not only *as individuals* but *as families*. You have come to Rome from every part of the world, bringing with you the deep conviction that the family is a great gift of God, an original gift, marked by his blessing. So it is indeed. From the dawn of creation, God has looked upon the family and blessed it. God created man and woman in his image and gave them a specific task for the growth of the human family: *"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth' "* (Gn 1: 28).

Your Jubilee, dear families, is a song of praise for this original blessing. It came upon you, Christian spouses, when, in celebrating your wedding, you pledged everlasting love to each other in God's sight. It will be received today by the eight couples from various parts of the world who have come to celebrate their wedding in the solemn setting of this Jubilee rite.

Yes, *may the Lord, the source of life, bless you!* Open yourselves to the ever new flow of this blessing. It brings with it a creative and regenerative power that can banish all weariness and assure lasting freshness to your gift.

2. This original blessing is linked to a precise plan of God, which his word has just recalled: *"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him"* (Gn 2: 18). So it is that in the Book of Genesis the sacred author describes *the fundamental requirement* on which the marital union of man and woman and, with it, the life of the family that flows from it, is based. It is *a requirement of communion*. Human beings were not made for solitude; they bear within themselves a relational vocation, rooted in their spiritual nature. Because of this vocation, they grow to the extent that they enter into relationships with others, fully discovering themselves only in "a sincere giving of self" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 24).

Purely functional relationships are not enough for human beings. They need *interpersonal relationships* that are rich in inner depth, gratuitousness and self-sacrifice. Fundamental among these are the relationships created in the family: between husband and wife, and between them and their children. The whole great network of human relationships flows from and is continuously reborn from that relationship by which a man and a woman recognize that they are made for one another and decide to join their individual lives in a single project of life: *"Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh"* (Gn 2: 24).

3. *One flesh!* How can we not see the power of this expression? The biblical term "flesh" calls to mind not only man's bodily nature, but *his overall identity as body and spirit*. What the spouses achieve is not only a joining of bodies, but a true union of their persons. A union which is so deep that it in some way makes them *a reflection of the "We" of the three divine Persons* in history (cf. *Letter to Families*, n. 8).

Thus we can understand how much is at stake in Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees in Mark's Gospel, proclaimed a few moments ago. Those who were speaking with Jesus considered this a problem of interpretation of the Mosaic law, which permitted a man to put his wife away, leading to debates on the reasons that could justify it. Jesus rises totally above this legalistic view, going *to the heart of God's plan*. In the law of Moses he sees a concession to their *"skelerokardia"*, their "hardness of heart". But it is to this hardness that Jesus is not resigned. And how could he be, having come precisely to dispel it and to offer to man, with Redemption, the strength to overcome the resistance due to sin? He is not afraid to remind them of the original plan: *"From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female' "*(Mk 10: 6).

4. *From the beginning!* Only he, Jesus, knows the Father "from the beginning" and also knows man "from the beginning". He both reveals the Father and reveals man to himself (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). For this reason, following in his footsteps, the Church has the task of bearing witness in history to this original plan and of showing its truth and feasibility.

In doing so she does not hide the difficulties and tragedies which concrete historical experience records in the life of families. But she also knows that God's will, wholeheartedly accepted and fulfilled, is not a chain that enslaves, but *the condition for a true freedom which achieves its fullness in love*. The Church also knows—and our daily experience confirms it—that when this original plan is obscured in consciences, incalculable harm is done to society.

Certainly, there are difficulties. But Jesus provided married couples with sufficient means of grace to overcome them. By his will marriage has acquired, in the baptized, *the value and power of a sacramental sign*, which strengthens its characteristics and prerogatives. For in sacramental marriage the spouses—as the young couples whose marriages I will bless will shortly be doing—commit themselves to expressing to each other and to bearing witness before the world to the *powerful and indissoluble love with which Christ loves the Church*. It is a "great mystery", as the Apostle Paul calls it (cf. *Eph* 5: 32).

5. *"May the Lord, the source of life, bless you!"*. God's blessing is at the origin not only of marital communion, but also *of a responsible and generous openness to life*. Children really are the "springtime of the family and society", as the motto of your Jubilee says. It is in children that marriage blossoms: they crown that total partnership of life ("*totius vitae consortium*": CIC, can. 1055, 1), which makes husband and wife "one flesh"; this is true both of the children born from the *natural relationship* of the spouses and those desired through *adoption*. Children are not an "accessory" to the project of married life. They are not an "*option*", but a "supreme gift" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 50), inscribed in the very structure of the conjugal union. The Church, as you know, teaches an *ethic of respect for this fundamental structure* in both its unitive and procreative meaning. In all this, it expresses the proper regard for God's plan, sketching an image of conjugal relations that are marked by mutual and unreserved acceptance. Above all, it addresses the right of children to be born and to grow in a context of fully human love. In conforming to the word of God, families thus become a school of humanization and true solidarity.

6. Parents and children are called to this task, but, as I already wrote in 1994 for the Year of the Family, *"the 'we' of the parents, of husband and wife, develops into the 'we' of the family, which is grafted on to earlier generations and is open to gradual expansion"* (*Letter to Families*, n. 16). When roles are respected, so that the relationship between husband and wife and between parents and children develops fully and peacefully, it is natural for *other relatives* such as grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, *also* to become significant and important. In these relationships marked by sincere affection and mutual help, the family often plays a truly irreplaceable role, so that persons in difficulty, unmarried people, widows, widowers and orphans can find a place that is warm and welcoming. *The family cannot be closed in on itself*. The affectionate relationship with relatives is an initial sphere of that necessary openness which orients families to all of society.

7. So dear Christian families, welcome *the Jubilee grace* which is being poured out abundantly in this Eucharist. Welcome it by taking *the family of Nazareth* as your example: although called to an incomparable mission, it *traveled the same path as you do*, amid joys and sufferings, prayer and work, hopes and distressing trials, while always rooted in fidelity to God's will. May your families continue to grow as true "domestic churches", offering praise to God every day and spreading a beneficial and regenerating flow of love throughout society.

"May the Lord, the source of life, bless us". May this Jubilee of Families be a great moment of grace for all of you who are celebrating it. May it also be an invitation for society to reflect on the meaning and value of this great gift which is the family, built according to God's heart.

May Mary, "Queen of the Family", always accompany you with her motherly hand.