



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 29 December 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Last Sunday the liturgy held up to us the Holy Family of Nazareth, the model for every family that lets itself be guided by God's surprising action.

The Western world considers Christmas a family celebration. Being together and exchanging gifts emphasizes the strong desire for reciprocal communion and sheds light on the highest values of the family institution. This is shown by the communion of love between persons based on truth, on love, on the indissoluble fidelity of husband and wife and on openness to the gift of life. In the light of Christmas, the family sees its vocation as a community of shared plans, solidarity, forgiveness and faith, where individuals do not lose their identity, but contribute with their own specific gifts to the growth of all. This is what occurred in the Holy Family, presented by faith as the first model for families enlightened by Christ.

2. Let us pray that the Great Jubilee, which has just begun, will truly be an occasion of grace and redemption for all the families of the world. May the light of the Incarnation of the Word help them better to understand and live their original vocation, the plan that the God of life has for them, so that they may become living images of his love.

The Jubilee will thus give every family the opportunity for a time of conversion and mutual forgiveness. It will be a favourable period for strengthening the bonds of affection in every family and for bringing broken families together again. May every Christian family become more and more aware of its important mission in the Church and in the world! Today all families need special care, particularly the poorest and less tranquil; they need to be encouraged to welcome newborn

life, because every child that comes into the world is a gift and a hope for all.

3. In our time, when "as much as and perhaps more than any other institution, the family has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture", it is important that believers energetically reaffirm that "marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values". For this reason the Church never tires of offering "her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family" (*Familiaris consortio*, n. 1).

May the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 be an opportunity for all families to open their doors courageously to Christ, the one Redeemer of humanity. Indeed, it is Christ who is the newness surpassing all human expectations, the true criterion for evaluating all that happens in time and every effort to make life more human (cf. *Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 1).

With this knowledge, let us enter the House of Nazareth in spirit and ask the Holy Family to protect and bless the families of the world, so that they will be a "school for human enrichment" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 52).

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly greet the many English-speaking pilgrims and visitors at today's audience. I pray that Jesus, Mary and Joseph will be present in a special way in your families at this time, and that the Great Jubilee will be for all of you a joyful occasion of conversion and union with the Lord.