



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY**

Saturday, 20 November 2004

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters*

1. I am pleased to receive you on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family. I address my cordial greeting to you all. In particular, I greet Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, whom I thank for the sentiments he has expressed.

I know that the Dicastery is working hard to spread the "Gospel of the family". The expression is an appropriate one, for to proclaim the "wonderful news" of the family that is rooted in the Heart of God the Creator is a noble and crucial mission. The family founded on marriage is an irreplaceable natural institution and a fundamental element of the common good of every society.

2. Those who destroy this fundamental fabric of human coexistence by failing to respect its identity or distorting its tasks injure society deeply and often cause irreparable damage. You rightly intend, therefore, to reflect on various national and international aspects that affect the family. In this context too the Church cannot disregard the norm pronounced by the Apostle Paul: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5: 29).

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, I already gave prominence to "the unique place that, in this field, belongs to the mission of married couples and Christian families by virtue of the grace received in the sacrament", and I recalled that this mission must be "placed at the service of the building up of the Church" and "the establishing of the Kingdom of God in history" (n. 71). This mission has lost none of its timeliness; on the contrary, it has become exceptionally urgent.

3. Coming to the main theme of your Plenary Meeting, "*The mission of mature and experienced couples in regard to engaged couples and young married couples*", I would like to encourage you to renew your commitment to young families. As I said in *Familiaris Consortio*, "in her pastoral care of young families, the Church must also pay special attention to helping them to live married love responsibly in relationship with its demands of communion and service to life. She must likewise help them to harmonize the intimacy of home life with the generous shared work of building up the Church and society" (n. 69).

Moreover, in that Document I pointed out that young families, "finding themselves in a context of new values and responsibilities, are more vulnerable, especially in the first years of marriage, to possible difficulties, such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children" (n. 69). I therefore urged young couples to accept warmly and evaluate intelligently the discreet, delicate and generous help of other couples who have had a long experience of marriage and the family.

4. In this regard, I am pleased to point out the increasing presence throughout the world of pro-family and pro-life movements. Their dynamism, placed at the service of those setting out on the path of recently contracted marriage, guarantees valuable assistance in inspiring the appropriate response to the riches of the vocation to which the Lord is calling them.

Ten years ago, in my *Letter to Families*, I stressed how important the rich experience of other families can be, especially when the "we" of the parents, of husband and wife, develops in the "we" of the family with the most precious gift of children (cf. n. 16). It is in this way that the domestic Church, the sanctuary of life and the true pillar of humanity's future, is built.

5. To conclude, my thoughts go to the Fifth World Meeting of Families, which will take place in 2006 in Valencia, Spain. I know that your Pontifical Council is preparing that event jointly with the Archdiocese of Valencia. I greet Archbishop Agustín García-Gasco who is present here, and send a warm greeting to the beloved Land of Spain that will have the honour of hosting this event.

As I invoke continuous divine assistance upon your work, I entrust you to the special intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth and bless you with all my heart.