



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO BANGLADESH, SINGAPORE, FIJI ISLANDS,
NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND SEYCHELLES

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Perth (Australia), 30 November 1986

“The time” has come: you must wake up now: our salvation is even nearer than it was . . .”

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. With this solemn words the Liturgy of this First Sunday of Advent leads the whole Church into a time of expectation and preparation. It is a time in which each Christian community relives the sense of expectation which the Prophets aroused in the people of Israel, as they looked forward in hope to the fulfilment of the promise: "A young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel". - which means "God with us". It is a time of preparation for the coming of a child, the "Prince of Peace": the infant of Bethlehem, who is at the same time the Son of God, the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity.

My visit to you here in Western Australia thus coincides with the preparation for Christmas, which is a special day for families in Australia and in many other parts of the world

The family in God's plan for humanity and for the Church is the theme of this Eucharistic celebration. The Son of God, in becoming man, began that special family which the Church venerates as the Holy Family of Nazareth: Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

2. I greet you, the families of Perth and of Western Australia. I greet you, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, grandparents, and all you who have the welfare of the family at heart. I greet you, Archbishop Foley and Archbishop Goody, the other bishops, the priests, religious and laity: each person present here, as well as those who are spiritually united

with us in the offering of Christ's Body and Blood in the Sacrifice of the Mass. I greet the representatives of the State Government, the civic officials, the representatives of every public body and ethnic group. I salute the members of the other Christian Churches and Communions in the love and hope that we share in the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. "The family is the domestic church". The meaning of this traditional Christian idea is that the home is the Church in miniature. The Church is the sacrament of God's love. She is a communion of faith and life. She is a mother and teacher. She is at the service of the whole human family as it goes forward towards its ultimate destiny. In the same way the family is a community of life and love. It educates and leads its members to their full human maturity and it serves the good of all along the road of life. The family is the "first and vital cell of society". In its own way it is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church. The future of the world and of the Church, therefore, passes through the family.

It is not surprising that the Church has given much thought and attention in recent times to questions affecting family life and marriage. Nor is it surprising that governments and public organizations are constantly involved in matters which directly or indirectly affect the institutional well-being of marriage and the family. And it is everyone's experience that healthy relationships in marriage and the family are of the greatest importance in the development and well-being of the human person.

4. The economic, social and cultural transformations taking place in our world are having an enormous effect on how people look upon marriage and the family. As a result many couples are unsure of the meaning of their relationship, and this causes them much turmoil and suffering. On the other hand, many other couples are stronger because, having overcome modern pressures, they exercise more fully that special love and responsibility of the marriage covenant which make them see children as God's special gift to the and to society. As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live.

With regard to the family, society urgently needs "to recover an awareness of the primacy of moral values, which are the values of the human person as such", thus "recapturing the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values". Australia, a nation of so much hope and opportunity, needs to know how to safeguard the family and the stability of married love if there is to be true peace and justice in the land.

5. The Church in Australia and everywhere has a specific task: to explain and to promote God's plan for marriage and the family, and to help couples and families to live according to that plan. The Church reaches out to all families: in the first place to those Christian families striving to be ever more faithful to God's plan. She tries to strengthen and accompany them on the path of growth. But she also reaches out, with the compassion of the Heart of Jesus, to those families that are in difficult or irregular situations.

The Church cannot say that what is bad is good, nor can she call valid what is invalid. She cannot fail to proclaim Christ's teaching, even when this teaching is difficult to accept. She knows too that she is sent to heal, to reconcile, to call to conversion, to find what was lost. Hence it is with great love and patience that the Church tries to help all those who experience difficulty in meeting the demands of Christian married love and family life.

The charity of Christ can only be realized in the truth: in the truth about life and love and responsibility. The Church has to proclaim Christ: the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and in so doing she has to teach the values and principles which correspond to man's calling to "newness" of life in Christ. The Church is sometimes misunderstood and considered lacking in compassion because she upholds God's creative plan for marriage and the family: his plan for human love and the transmission of life. The Church is always the true and faithful friend of the human person on the pilgrimage of life. She knows that by upholding the moral law she contributes to the establishment of a truly human civilization, and she constantly challenges people not to abdicate their personal responsibility with regard to ethical and moral imperatives.

6. "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord . . . that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths". With this invitation the Prophet Isaiah tells us how we must respond to God, and this response applies also to God's plan for marriage and the family. Couples are offered the grace and strength of the Sacrament of Marriage precisely so that they may walk in the paths of the Lord and follow his ways, observing the plan which Christ has confirmed and ratified for the family. This plan testifies to the way it was in the "beginning" - as God willed it in the beginning for the well-being and happiness of the family. In God's plan marriage requires:

- the faithful and permanent love of husband and wife;

- an indissoluble communion that "sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life project, what they have and what they are";

- a community of persons in which the love between husband and wife must be fully human, exclusive and open to new life.

Married love is strengthened by the Sacrament of Marriage so that it may be an ever more real and effective image of the unity which exists between Christ and the Church.

7. You know how much Christian courage you need in order to carry out God's commands in your lives and in your families. It is the courage to be willing every day to build up love - the kind of love of which Saint Paul says: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things . . . endures all things. Love never ends".

Can the Pope come to Australia and fail to ask Australian couples and families to reflect in their hearts how well they are living their Christian love? How seriously they are committed to upholding true family values? How appropriate are public policies for the defence of these values, and therefore for the promotion of the common good of the whole nation?

In a world that is becoming ever more sensitive to women's rights, what is to be said of the rights of women who want to be, or need to be full-time wives and mothers? Are they to be burdened by a taxation system that discriminates against women who choose not to leave the home in order to earn a separate income? Without infringing the freedom of anyone to seek fulfilment in employment and activities outside the home, should not the work of the homemaker too be properly appreciated and adequately supported. This is possible when women and men are treated with full respect for their personal dignity, for what they are more than for what they do.

8. Realizing the essential importance of family life for a just and healthy society, the Holy See has presented a Charter of the Rights of the Family based on the natural rights and values common to all humanity. It is addressed principally to Governments and international organizations, as a "model and point of reference for the drawing up of legislation and family policy, and guidance for action programmes".

Among the principles which the Church vigorously upholds in every circumstance there are the following, which I call to your attention:

- the inalienable right, of spouses to found a family and to decide on the spacing of births and the number of children to be born, taking into full consideration their duties towards themselves, their children already born, the family and society, in a just hierarchy of values and in accordance with the objective moral order . . .";
- all pressures brought to bear in limiting "the freedom of couples in deciding about children constitute a grave offence against human dignity and justice";
- "families have the right to be able to rely on an adequate family policy on the part of public authorities in the juridical, economic, social and fiscal domains, without any discrimination whatsoever ".

9. The moral order demands that the rule written into the processes of life by the Creator in the act of creation should be always and everywhere respected. The Church's well-known opposition to contraception and sterilization is not a position arbitrarily taken, nor is it based on a partial perspective of the human person. Rather it expresses her integral vision of the human person, who is gifted with a vocation that is not only natural and earthly but also supernatural and eternal. Moreover, the Church's understanding of the intrinsic value of human life as an irrevocable gift of God explains why the Second Vatican Council speaks of "the surpassing ministry of safeguarding

life" and considers abortion as an "unspeakable crime".

10. The place of children in Australian society and culture deserves consideration. I know that you love and respect your children. I know that in many ways your laws seek to provide for their welfare and protection. A society that loves its children is a healthy and dynamic society.

On their behalf I appeal to you parents. Children need parents who will provide them with a stable family environment. To know what real love is they need you to be united in your love for each other and for them. From you they seek companionship and guidance. From you, first and foremost, they must learn to distinguish right from wrong and to choose good over evil. I appeal to you: do not deprive your children of their rightful human and spiritual heritage. Teach them about God, and tell them about Jesus, about his love and his Gospel. Teach them to love God and respect his commandments in the sure knowledge that they are his children above all. Teach them to pray. Teach them to be mature and responsible human beings, and honest citizens of their country. This is a stupendous privilege, a grave duty, and a wonderful task that you have received from God. By the witness of your own Christian lives, you lead your children to take their rightful place in the Church of Christ.

11. And to you, children and young people, present here in such great numbers, what do I say? Love your parents; pray for them; thank God for them every day. If sometimes there are misunderstandings between you, if at times it is hard for you to obey them, remember these words of Saint Paul: "Do all that has to be done without complaining or arguing and then you will be innocent and genuine, perfect children of God . . . and you will shine in the world like stars ". Pray also for your brothers and sisters and for all the children of the world, especially those who are poor and hungry. Pray for those who do not know Jesus, for those who are alone and sad.

To all the young Catholics of Australia is entrusted the future of the Church in this land. The Church needs you. There is much for you to do in your parishes and local communities, in the service of the poor and disadvantaged, the sick and the old, in so many forms of voluntary service. Above all you must bring Christ to your friends. Your own generation is the field, rich for the harvest, to which Christ sends you. Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life for your generation, and for all generations to come. You are the Church's hope for a new era of evangelization and service. Be generous to others, be generous to Christ!

12. Dear parents and children, dear families of Western Australia: the Gospel of this First Sunday of Advent calls us to "watch", for "if the householder had known . . . he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into". This is the call that I repeat to you. Watch! Do not let the precious values of faithful married love and family life be taken away from you. Do not reject them, or think that there is some other better prospect for happiness and human fulfillment.

The Gospel call to "watch" also means building the family on a sense of responsibility. Genuine

love is always responsible love. Husbands and wives truly love each other when they are responsible before God and carry out his plan for human love and human life; when they answer to each other and are responsible for each other. Responsible parenthood involves not only bringing children into the world, but also taking part personally and responsibly in their upbringing and education. True love in the family is for ever!

Finally, in striving to be perfect in love let us remember the words of Saint Paul: "Cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light . . . put on the Lord Jesus Christ".

Dear families of Australia: This is your vocation and your happiness today and for ever: to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his light. Amen.

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