



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MONS. FRANCIS J. DUNN
AUXILIARY BISHOP OF DUBUQUE***

*To my Venerable Brother Francis J. Dunn
Auxiliary Bishop of Dubuque*

I am indeed happy to have this opportunity to send my greetings to all those taking part in the United States National Convention of "Worldwide Marriage Encounter" which is meeting in Tampa, Florida.

The Second Vatican Council made a special appeal to families to share their spiritual riches with others in order that "the Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and as a participation in that covenant, will manifest to all people the Savior's living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church".

In fact, the Christian concept of matrimony is essentially linked with the mystery and the mission of the Church. Only when matrimony, and the mission of married people, is considered in the light of Christ's love for the Church can one properly understand the truth about marriage and the family.

I appreciate what Worldwide Marriage Encounter, together with other apostolic movements, has done in recent years to inspire married couples with a true Christian vision of their vocation to marriage and family life.

It is especially important today, when speaking to married couples and in particular to young people, to recall that their vocation must give concrete expression to the demands of the truth in daily life. As I said in my Apostolic Letter to the youth of the World, "The materialistic and consumeristic civilization is penetrating this whole wonderful complex of conjugal and paternal and maternal love, and stripping it of that profoundly human content which from the beginning was also permeated by a divine mark and reflection. Dear young friends! Do not allow this treasure to be

taken away from you! Do not inscribe in the plan of your life a deformed, impoverished and falsified content: love 'rejoices in the truth'. Seek out this truth where it is really to be found! If necessary, be resolved to go against the current of popular opinion and propaganda slogans! Do not be afraid of the love that places clear demands on people. These demands - as you find them in the constant teaching of the Church - are precisely capable of making your love a true love".

Saint Paul constantly reminds us in concrete terms of the precise demands that are required of "those who live according to the spirit" and who "follow the way of love". These demands involve putting to death "whatever in your nature is rooted in earth", and taking no part in "vain deeds done in darkness". We have to set our hearts on "what pertains to higher realms" and "discern the will of the Lord" .

The Apostle's appeal to "keep careful watch over your conduct" and to "make the most of the present opportunity" has an immediate relevance for Christians today. For an essential element of the vocation to holiness on the part of married couples must be precisely an ethic of conjugal and family life. As I stated in my Apostolic Exhortation regarding the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, "Married people too are called upon to progress unceasingly in their moral life, with the support of a sincere and active desire to gain ever better knowledge of the values enshrined and fostered by the law of God".

This law of God is not alien to the human person; rather it responds to our deepest needs and desires, as these have been created by God. It is a law "which places itself at the service of a person's full humanity with the delicate and binding love whereby God himself inspires, sustains and guides every creature towards its happiness".

Such a programme for a "spirituality" and an ethic of family life will require a daily asceticism which embraces every aspect of married life. I would hope that "Worldwide Marriage Encounter" will assist married couples in responding with ever greater fidelity and generosity to this evangelical call through your reflections, dialogues, study and publications. In particular I recommend this task to your prayers, as individuals and as families. For indeed one of the fundamental principles of conjugal and family spirituality is that "the family's actual participation in the Church's life and mission is in direct proportion to the fidelity and intensity of the prayer with which it is united with the fruitful vine that is Christ the Lord".

Be assured of my own prayers for all of you. May Christ, the Good Shepherd, bless your homes with harmony and peace and fill your hearts with joy. To all those present at the Convention and to all associated with you I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, May 28, 1986.

JOHN PAUL II

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