



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE
OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE**

Consistory Hall

Thursday, 15 May 2008

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. I greet in particular Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, President, whom I thank for the words with which he introduced our Meeting, illustrating the various facets of the interesting topic you have addressed in these days. I also greet Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, Secretary, the Undersecretary, the Officials and the Experts, the Members and the Consultors, I address a cordial thought of gratitude to all for the work achieved and for their dedication in putting into practice what has been discussed and planned in these days for the good of all families.

During my recent [Visit to the United States of America](#), I was able to encourage that great Country to continue in its commitment to welcoming the brothers and sisters who arrive there, usually from poor countries. I pointed out in particular the serious problem of family reunion, a subject I had already treated in my [Message for the 93rd World Day of Migrants and Refugees](#), dedicated precisely to the theme. I wish to recall here that on various occasions I have presented the icon of the Holy Family as a model for migrant families, referring to the image presented by my Venerable Predecessor, Pope Pius XII, in the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia*, which constitutes the *magna carta* of the pastoral care of migrants (cf. AAS 44, 1952, p. 649; *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, n. 20; *ORE*, 26 May 2004, p. I). Moreover, in his Messages of 1980, 1986 and 1993, my Venerable Predecessor John Paul II intended to stress that ecclesial commitment is not only in

favour of the individual migrant but also of his family, a community of love and a factor of integration.

First of all, I am pleased to reaffirm that the Church's concern for migrant families in no way diminishes her pastoral involvement with those on the move. Indeed, this commitment to preserving unity of vision and action between the two "wings" (migration and vagrancy) can help one understand the magnitude of the phenomenon, and at the same time be an incentive to all for a specific pastoral approach, encouraged by the Supreme Pontiffs and hoped for by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (cf. *Christus Dominus*, n. 18), and appropriately upheld by documents drafted by your Pontifical Council as well as by Congresses and Meetings. One must not forget that the family, even the migrant family and the itinerant family, constitutes the original cell of society which must not be destroyed but rather defended with courage and patience. It represents the community in which from infancy the child has been taught to worship and love God, learning the grammar of human and moral values and learning to make good use of freedom in the truth. Unfortunately, in many situations it is difficult for this to happen, especially in the case of those who are caught up in the phenomenon of human mobility.

Furthermore, in its action of welcome and dialogue with migrants and itinerant people, the Christian community has as a constant reference point, the Person of Christ our Lord. He has bequeathed to his disciples a golden rule to abide by in one's own life: the new commandment of love. Through the Gospel and the Sacraments, especially the Most Holy Eucharist, Christ continues to transmit to the Church the Love that he lived, even to death and death on a Cross. It is very significant, in this regard, that the Liturgy provides for the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage in the heart of the Eucharistic celebration. This points to the profound bond that unites the two Sacraments. The spouses, in their daily life, must draw inspiration for their behaviour from the example of Christ who "loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5: 25): this supreme act of love is represented in every Eucharistic celebration. It will thus be appropriate for the pastoral care of the family to stress this important sacramental fact as its fundamental reference point. Those who attend Mass - and it is also necessary to make the celebration of it easier for migrants and itinerant people - find in the Eucharist a very strong reference to their own family, to their own marriage, and are encouraged to live their situation in the perspective of faith, seeking in divine grace the necessary strength to succeed.

Lastly, it escapes no one that in today's globalized world human mobility represents an important frontier for the new evangelization. I encourage you, therefore, to persevere in your pastoral task with renewed zeal while, for my part, I assure you of my spiritual closeness. I accompany you with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will make your every initiative fruitful. To this end I invoke the maternal protection of Mary Most Holy, Our Lady of the Way, so that she may help every man and every woman to know her Son Jesus Christ and to receive from him the gift of salvation. With this hope, I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and your loved ones, as well as to all the migrants and itinerant people in this vast world and to their families.

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