



The Holy See

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HOLY MASS FOR FAMILIES

HOMILY OF THE POPE JOHN PAUL II

Cebu City (Philippines)

Thursday, 19 February 1981

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. Finding myself in this important city known as the cradle of Christianity in the Philippines, I want to express my deep joy and profound thanksgiving to the Lord of history. The thought that for 450 years the light of the Gospel has shone with undimmed brightness in this land and on its people is cause for great rejoicing. Four and a half centuries of fruitful interaction between the local culture and the Christian message have resulted in this harmonious blending called "Filipino Christian culture".

Any Christian coming here from any part of the world finds himself at home among people sharing the same aspirations and the same hope that are centered in Jesus Christ. Praised be the Name of Jesus for what his love has wrought !

God's providence in the Philippines has been truly wonderful. The Christianization that took place in the sixteenth century was not something merely accidental. Divine grace was at work when the people of this region had their first contact with the image of the Santo Niño. It is an important historical fact, rich in religious meaning, that on January 1, 1571 the village kingdom of Sugbu was renamed the " Villa del Santo Niño", and thus the first city of the Philippines was placed under the patronage of the Child Jesus.

2. Divine providence has made it possible for us to be together here today, in order to offer a *Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to our Father in heaven* for the four and a half centuries of Christianity in this country. The whole Church thanks God that the people who " were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ"[1]. She thanks God for the four hundred and fifty years that his Name has been glorified here, that true worship has been offered to him, that the Blessed Virgin Mary has been devoutly and lovingly venerated, and that millions of people have been reborn in Christ. The unforgettable ceremonies held yesterday in Manila honoring the Filipino Protomartyr, Blessed Lorenzo Ruiz, forcefully illustrate that the Christian faith has taken deep root in the Filipino soul.

In a particular way the Church thanks God that the tiny Christian community of Sugbu, under the patronage of the Infant Jesus, has now become a flourishing archdiocese of two million people, almost all of whom are Catholics, with an active and zealous clergy, both diocesan and religious, with dedicated men and women religious, and with an encouraging number of seminarians. I am also deeply gratified to know that there are numerous Catholic institutions and organizations and movements of the laity.

It can truly be said that growth in faith and Christian living has been until now a constant feature of the Church in Cebu as well as in the whole of the Philippines. The glorious past gives great hope for the future. The harmonious relationship, under the leadership of the Cardinal Archbishop, the Coadjutor Archbishop and the Auxiliary Bishop, between the hierarchy and the diocesan and religious clergy; the deep commitment to evangelization by priests, religious and laity; the existence of a solid ecclesial sense and the profound religiosity of the people—all this constitutes great spiritual force for the building up of a dynamic Church in Cebu.

3. Beloved and sisters in Christ, the centuries-old veneration of the Santo Niño here in Cebu prompts me to speak to you today about the family. The Infant Jesus himself was born of the Virgin Mary and lived in a family, and it was in the family of Nazareth that he began the mission which the Father had entrusted to him. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given"[2]. In him a new era dawned, in him the world was re-created, in him a new life was offered to humanity, a life redeemed by and in Christ.

Because the Creator wills that life should take its origin from the love of a man and a woman joined in a covenant of sharing in marriage, and because Christ elevated this union of spouses to the dignity of sacrament, we must look at the family, at its nature and mission, in the bright light of our Christian faith. With legitimate pride one can state that whatever the Church teaches today on marriage and the family has been her constant teaching in fidelity to Christ.

The Catholic Church has consistently taught—and I repeat here with the conviction that springs from my office as chief Pastor and Teacher—that *marriage was established by God*; that marriage is a covenant of love between one man and one woman ; that the bond uniting husband and wife

is by God's will indissoluble; that marriage between Christians is a sacrament symbolizing the union of Christ and his Church ; and that marriage must be open to the transmission of human life.

4. When Jesus was going about, teaching and healing, he was one day confronted by some Pharisees who wanted to test him about marriage. Jesus answered, clearly and firmly, by reaffirming what Scripture had said : "From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder"[3].

By making them male and female God established the complementarity of the sexes, for a man leaves his father and mother in order to be joined to his wife in that union of love that permeates all levels of human existence. This union of love enables man and woman to grow together and to care properly for their children. The union that makes them one cannot be broken by any human authority ; it is permanently at the service of the children and of the spouses themselves. Thus the love between a man and a woman in marriage is a love that is both faithful and fruitful. It is a holy love, *sacramentally symbolizing the union of love between Christ and the Church*, as Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians : "This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church"[4].

5. For these reasons, the Church will never dilute or change her teaching on marriage and the family.

For these reasons, the Church rejects any attempt through the practice of polygamy to destroy *the unity of marriage*, and any attempt through divorce to destroy the marriage bond.

For these reasons also the Church states clearly that marriage should be open to the transmission of human life. God willed the loving union of husband and wife to be the source of new life. He wishes to share, as it were, his creative power with husbands and wives, endowing them with procreative power. God desires that this tremendous power to procreate a new human life should be willingly and lovingly accepted by the couple when they freely choose to marry. Parenthood has a dignity all of its own, guaranteed by God himself. On my part I owe it to my Apostolic Office to reaffirm as clearly and as strongly as possible what the Church of Christ teaches in this respect, and to reiterate vigorously her rejection of artificial contraception and abortion.

6. Yes, from the moment of conception and through all subsequent stages, *all human life is sacred*, for it is created in the image and likeness of God. Human life is precious because it is a gift of God, whose love knows no limit ; and when God gives life, it is forever. Whoever attempts to destroy human life in the womb of the mother, not only violates the sacredness of a living, growing and developing human being, and thus opposes God, but also attacks society by undermining respect for all human life.

I want to repeat here what I stated when visiting my homeland : "If a person's right to life is violated at the moment in which he is first conceived in his mother's womb, an indirect blow is struck also at the whole moral order, which serves to ensure the inviolable goods of man. Among those goods, life occupies the first place. The Church defends the right to life, not only in regard to the majesty of the Creator, who is the first Giver of this life, but also in respect of the essential good of the human person"[5].

7. When the Church holds up before you the ideals of Christian marriage and the Christian family, when she insists that the love of husband and wife and the love of parents should be marked by generosity, she knows that there are many factors today that threaten family life and tempt the human heart. The selfish pursuit of pleasure, sexual permissiveness and the fear of a permanent commitment are destructive forces. As a good mother, the Church stands by her children in difficult times ; she stands by the couples who experience difficulties in abiding by her teachings. With love and with an understanding of human weakness, but also with an understanding of *the power of Christ's grace* in individual human hearts, the Church constantly challenges her children.

She challenges them to be conscious of the dignity of their Baptism and of the gift of sacramental grace that they have been given precisely in order that they might be able to reflect Christ's sacrificial love in their lives develop their own love in a faithful and indissoluble union, and respond with generosity to the gift of parenthood.

As the Second Vatican Council declared : "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church. Thus this love can lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and can aid and strengthen them in the sublime role of being a father or a mother"[6].

To all of you Christian couples—spouses and parents—I offer the invitation : walk with Christ ! It is he who reveals to you the dignity of the covenant you have made ; it is he who gives immense value to your conjugal love ; it is he, Jesus Christ, who can accomplish in you immeasurably more than you can ask or imagine[7].

8. In a Christian community, everyone has a responsibility for families. Programs that focus on the family and on the dignity of marriage are of great importance : programs to prepare those who are getting married, and programs for those who are already married. In regard to their children parents have an irreplaceable role to play, not only as the first educators in the faith and as models of virtue, but also as examples of faithful conjugal love. In the community of love and trust that each family ought to be, parents and children can be *evangelized and at the same time instruments of evangelization*.

Sincere respect for life and human dignity, unselfish charity and the sense of duty and justice, rooted firmly in the Gospel, comes from a family where wholesome relations between parents and

children prevail, and where each member of the family tries to be a servant to each other. A family where prayer, loving support and formation in the faith are of constant concern will bring untold benefits not only to the members of the family themselves, but also to the Church and to society.

9. I am most happy to know that all over the Philippines *the Family Apostolate* has received enthusiastic endorsement and support. I wish to praise the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines for having declared the present decade, 1981 to 1990, "The Decade of the Family" and for having prepared a comprehensive pastoral program for this purpose.

I commend most heartily the different organizations and movements, which, in close collaboration with the hierarchy, devote their zealous efforts to the family. I encourage all Catholic educators, but especially parents themselves, to devote great attention to the proper formation of the young in regard to human sexuality, placing in proper perspective the purpose of the Creator from the beginning, the redemptive power of Christ, and the influence of a true sacramental life. The delicate responsibility for sex education belongs principally to the families, where an atmosphere of loving reverence will be conducive to a fully human and Christian understanding of the meaning of love and life.

10. And so, my brothers and sisters in Christ, my friends of Cebu City and the surrounding areas, I am taking leave of you. This has been a memorable time for me : to be with you, to share with you the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Christian family, and to experience and reciprocate your love in the midst of God's family—the Church. May the Santo Niño bless you. May Mary the Mother of Jesus and Saint Joseph her spouse assist you and all the families in the Philippines to reflect the holiness and joy and love of the *Holy Family of Nazareth*.

Pagpalain kayo nang Poong Maykapal ! (May Almighty God bless you !)

[1] *Eph* 2:12-13.

[2] *Is* 9:6.

[3] *Mk* 10:6-9.

[4] *Eph* 5:33.

[5] June 8, 1979.

[6] *Gaudium et Spes*, 48.

[7] Cf. *Eph* 3:21.

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