



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE TENTH NATIONAL CONGRESS OF API-COLF

29 April 1979

Beloved Sisters in the Lord!

Great is my joy in being with you this evening! It was important that this meeting, with the Vicar of Christ should take place!

On the occasion of the tenth National Congress called by the Italian Professional Association of Family Collaborators, which will be held at Frascati in these days, you wanted this Audience to start your discussions on the subject: "Domestic work in the Italian economy and in the family".

Grateful for this devoted thought of yours, I bide you a hearty welcome and address a most affectionate greeting to you, and I greet in you, all your colleagues and friends, family collaborators in Italy and all over the world! I express my sincere thanks to the National Presidency of the Association together with the Roman Presidency for the opportunity of talking to you, to hear your problems as a group, your personal difficulties, your ideals, the aims you wish strive for.

Each of you represents hidden work that is necessary and indispensable; work of sacrifice, not exciting, which does not win applause and sometimes does not even have recognition and gratitude; the humble, repeated, monotonous and therefore heroic work of an innumerable host of mothers and young women, who with their daily labour contribute to the budget of so many families and solve so many difficult and delicate situations, helping distant parents or brothers in need.

And the Pope, who has known the hardships of life, is with you, understands you, esteems you, accompanies you in your aspirations and desires, and hopes with all his heart that the Congress at which your problems will be dealt with, will cause your rightful demands and your irrevocable responsibilities to emerge more and more. But you have come here, to the Father's house, also to have a particular exhortation from the Vicar of Christ and I, with simple familiarity, but with sincere affection, will say to you some words that can encourage you during the Congress and then also throughout your lives.

1. First of all I say to you with the concern of my apostolic ministry: let faith in Jesus Christ be of comfort to you!

There are so many fine human consolations in life, and progress has increased and perfected them, and we must know how to evaluate them and enjoy them in a rightful and holy way. But the supreme consolation is and must be, still and always, the presence of Jesus in our lives. Jesus, the Divine Redeemer, penetrated into human history, put himself at our side, to walk with us in every path of existence, to gather our confidences, to enlighten our thoughts, to purify our desires, to console our sadness.

It is particularly moving to meditate on the attitude of Jesus to woman. He showed himself to be bold and surprising for those times in which woman was considered in paganism an object of pleasure, of possession and of labour, and was subordinated and humiliated in Judaism.

Jesus always showed the greatest esteem and the greatest respect for woman, for every woman, and in particular he was sensitive to female suffering. Going beyond the religious and social barriers of the time, Jesus re-established woman in her full dignity as a human person before God and before men. How could we fail to recall his meetings with Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42), with the Samaritan women (Jn 4:1-42), with the widow of Naim (Lk 7:11-17), with the adulterous woman (Jn 8:3-9), with the woman who suffered from a haemorrhage (Mt 9:20-22), with the sinner at the house of Simon the Pharisee (Lk 7:36-50)? A mere enumeration of them stirs our hearts. And how could we fail to recall, above all, that Jesus willed to associate some women with the twelve (Lk 8:2-3). They accompanied him and served him, and were of comfort to him during the painful way to the Cross?

And after the resurrection Jesus appeared to the holy women and to Mary Magdalen, bidding her announce his Resurrection to the disciples (Mt 28:8).

Jesus, wishing to become incarnate and enter our human history, willed to have a Mother, Mary, and thus raised woman to the highest and most wonderful peak of dignity, the Mother of God Incarnate, Mary Immaculate, Our Lady of the Assumption, Queen of Heaven and of Earth. Therefore, you Christian women, like Mary Magdalen and the other women of the Gospel, must proclaim, testify that Christ really rose again, that he is our only true consolation! So look after your interior life, reserving every day a little oasis of time to meditate and pray.

2. Secondly I say to you: let your ideal be the dignity of woman and of her mission!

It is sad to see how woman has been so humiliated and ill-treated in the course of the centuries. Yet we must be convinced that the dignity of man, as of woman, is only found completely and exhaustively in Christ!

Speaking to Italian women in the immediate postwar period, my revered Predecessor Pius XII said: "In their personal dignity as children of God, man and woman are absolutely equal, as also with regard to the ultimate purpose of human life, which is eternal union with God in the happiness of heaven. It is the eternal glory of the Church that she highlighted and honoured this truth once more, freeing woman from a degrading slavery contrary to nature". And, going on to the particular, he added: "Woman has to contribute with man to the good of the "civitas", in which she is in dignity equal to him. Either sex must take the part that belongs to it according to its nature, characteristics, physical, intellectual and moral attitudes. Both have the right and the duty to cooperate for the total good of society. However it is clear that if man is by temperament more inclined to deal with exterior affairs, public activities, woman has, generally speaking, greater insight and finer tact to know and solve the delicate problems of domestic and family life, the basis of all social life; which does not prevent some women from showing great skill also in every field of public activity" (*Ad-dress*, 21 October 1945). Such was also the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the continual haunting Magisterium of Paul VI (cf. e.g. the interventions for the International Year of Woman—A.A.S. 67 [1975]; A.A.S. 68 [1976]). This doctrine, so clear and well-balanced, gives the cue to confirm also the value and dignity of domestic work.

Certainly, this work must be seen not as an implacable and inexorable imposition, a form of slavery, but as a free choice, responsible and willed, which completely fulfils woman in her personality and her requirements. Domestic work, in fact, is an essential part in the smooth running of society and has an enormous influence upon the community. It calls for continual and complete dedication, and therefore is a daily ascetical exercise, which calls for patience, self control, far-sightedness, creativity, spirit of adaptation, courage in unexpected occurrences; and it also collaborates to produce income and wealth, prosperity and economic value.

This gives rise also to the dignity of your work as family Collaborators: your commitment is not a humiliation, but a consecration! In fact, you collaborate directly in the smooth running of the family; and this is a great task, one would say almost a mission. For this, adequate preparation and maturity are necessary, in order to be competent in the various household activities, to rationalize work and get to know family psychology, to learn the so-called "pedagogy of fatigue" which makes it possible to organize one's services better, and also to exercise the necessary educating function. It is a whole world, extremely important and precious, that opens up to your eyes and to your responsibilities every day. I praise, therefore, all women engaged in domestic activity, and you, family Collaborators, who give your ability and your labour for the good of the home!

3. *Finally, I say to you: be sowers of goodness.*

After so many years of just demands and of increased respect for the person, you have seen your rights recognized; standards have been fixed for remuneration, accommodation, care and assistance in illness, social security, weekly and annual rest, rightful allowances, certificate of work, etc. Many things still remain to be done, many realities to be tackled; and you will study

them at your congress, especially for the defence of the rights and personality of collaborators coming from abroad. But I would like to urge you to work above all with love in the families in which you are engaged. We are living in difficult and complicated times. Grandiose phenomena, which cannot be eliminated, such as industrialization, urbanism, culturation, the internationalization of relations, social instability, intellectual affectation, have caused confusion in families; so you can bring with your presence serenity, peace, hope, joy, comfort, encouragement to good, especially where there are elderly, sick, and suffering persons, handicapped children, young people who have been led astray or are confused. There is no law which lays it down that you must smile! But you can make a gift of your smile; you can be the leaven of kindness in the family. Remember what St Paul wrote to the first Christians: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17). "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward" (Col 3:23-24). Love your work. Love the persons with whom you collaborate! From love and goodness there will spring also your joy and your satisfaction.

May you be assisted by St Zita, your heavenly Patroness, who was sanctified by serving humbly with loving and complete dedication.

May you be helped and comforted above all by Mary, who dedicated herself completely to care of the family, setting an example and teaching where true values are.

May my Apostolic Blessing be with you.

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