

(English translation)

Rome, 3 May 1981

Chiara at the FamilyFest:
“The family and love”

Dearest everyone, sisters and brothers gathered here in the name of Jesus from every continent of the world, may the fullness of joy be with you all because He is in our midst!

Today we will be dealing with one of the most controversial topics we face at this moment in history; one of the most vital, disquieting topics of our times: the family.

But what is the family?

Sociologists, moralists, educators, politicians and psychologists could give a wide variety of definitions. I am convinced, however, that all of you are interested, above all, in one idea regarding the family: God's idea.

What is the family for God?

Today, during this gathering, we shall attempt to give an answer to this question especially. For the moment, let us limit ourselves to making a simple observation.

In the act of creation, he moulded a family. When he became man, he became part of a family. When Jesus began his mission, and manifested his glory, he was celebrating the formation of a new family.

This alone would suffice to make us understand what the family is for God.

But what is the family like today?

We all know the answer. The influence of harmful theories, the decline of traditional moral values, theoretical and concrete materialism, and the hedonistic mentality favoured by a consumer society have led, and continue to lead, a head-on attack against the family.

Above all, the libertarian and individualistic culture has rendered the very idea of the indissolubility of marriage meaningless, and marriage is reduced to a mere “private fact” free of all responsibility and commitment towards society.

We know how certain alarmist propaganda concerning over-population has led to a selfish and materialistic interpretation of the problem of “responsible parenthood” (which is, in itself, an important and serious matter). As a result, affluent societies, at this point, are tending towards a “zero growth rate” or even to a decrease in births as compared to deaths. And to have more than one child, or two at the most, is becoming out of the ordinary.

We are also deeply distressed by the fact that the legislation of many nations tends to foster this decadent tendency with laws that contribute towards weakening the stability of the family. Thus, we have divorce easily obtained, widely granted legal abortion, euthanasia, contraception, male and female sterilization, inadequate economic aid for workers with large families, and so on.

Every day we can see how the communications media, especially television, stage, screen, advertising and the press often present the relationship between a man and a woman as one where the self donation characteristic of love is substituted by a momentary possession of the other, where the physical relationship is reduced to an “erotic game.”

And the very idea of “sin” in this field has lost all meaning.

Among the young people the idea has penetrated that marriage is something that belongs to the past, and that only a free, common-law relationship between man and woman has sense: a relationship, therefore, which lasts for as long as they feel like it, and is interrupted if their feelings for one another change.

We know how this transitory nature of the life of the couple, causing insecure relationships, leads many to despair after various experiences of this kind. And the suicide rate is very high among the young.

In this context, children find themselves without the natural support of their parents, and they grow up in a climate of uncertain and precarious relationships. This leads to desperation, to a lack of confidence in life, to psychological insecurity, to drugs, and violence.

Furthermore, this mentality leads young people who are still of the idea of forming a stable family, to consider pre-marital relationships as normal practice.

And, in this degenerated situation of the family, the elderly are alienated and no longer find their rightful place.

Lastly, women, who are seeking a new identity with respect to the past, due to their need – in itself positive – of fulfilling themselves also outside the family, by working, by having a profession, by being active in society, are sometimes led to undervalue their role as wives and mothers.

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The family is nothing other than an intertwining of relationships, a repository, a mystery of love: nuptial love, maternal love, paternal love, filial love, fraternal love, love of a grandmother for her grandchildren, the love of the children for their grandfather, for their aunts, for their cousins.... Nothing else constitutes a family, binds it together, makes it be, but love. And if the family has failed in the world, it is because love has diminished. Where love dies out, the family disintegrates.

This is why our families must go to the source of Love.

Only God who is Love knows what the family is; he is the architect who planned it as the masterpiece of love, the sign, symbol, prototype of all his other designs.

If he fashioned the family, moulding it with his love, he will also be able to make the family sound again through love.

We know that we are being true to our nature as human beings if we behave according to what we are: persons created in the image of God; that is to say, if we remain in communion with God, if we understand our position as the “you” of God.

Similarly, the love that unites a family is truly love if it remains in, nourishes and sustains itself, is measured on, and communicates with the love that is in God, with that love which is the gift of God.

This is why the Church recommends frequent participation in the life of the sacraments, which bring grace and enrich us with supernatural love. She also invites families to pray together and participate in the liturgy, to nourish themselves on the Word of God, to take advantage of the traditional and contemporary devotions, particularly those associated with the Blessed Virgin which are rich sources of growth in the life of grace.

When this love is enkindled and alive in the hearts of those who make up the family, impossible problems do not arise, insurmountable obstacles do not present themselves, irremediable failures do not occur. The family returns once again to being beautiful, united and healthy as God intended it to be.

In our day families need a powerful dose of that love. And this is the meaning behind the title of our meeting today: “The family and love.”

Our Movement must lead the family, all the families it meets to this decision: to revitalize the love that is innate in every family with that love which is a pure gift of God. In this way, Love will renew love.

If this happens, since “God makes all things work together for the good of those who love him” (Rom 8:28), the difficulties that today afflict the family in the world, will bear fruit. A new kind of family will be born, ready to meet the needs of our times, the kind of family that the signs of the times foretell.

This love that comes from above will contribute to making the kind of family that is clothed in its own egoism – the kind of family that in our times is contested – more open to the world.

This love will be the best means for re-evaluating the role of women, giving them their true place in society.

This strong love will create an increasing awareness on the part of many men of their responsibility to take a more active part in the life of the family sharing with their wives every aspect of family life on a level of equality.

This love will strengthen all the good that, despite everything, is emerging today in the family: like a greater desire for sincerity and openness, and greater simplicity, easier communication and fewer complexes in the relationships between boys and girls, who nowadays usually grow up together from early childhood.

The love of God in everyone's heart will lead to a true rediscovery of human corporality. No longer will it be considered maliciously, but rather seen with all its positive aspects as part of human nature.

This love will also accelerate that process already underway which makes us hope that the eroticism promoted by our times will be rejected as such and dimensioned in favour of other interests – such as social, political or cultural.

And only the love that comes from God will be able to offer a true and reliable measure for determining responsible parenthood.

In our modern world, notwithstanding all the negative elements, we are going through a period of searching and deep transformation. It's impossible to think of turning back. Anyone who has true values to propose can influence people in many ways. There are those who offer models of united families with authentic rather than oppressive relationships, families who are open towards the society that surrounds them, who make enlightened choices in favour of life, of children, who heal lacerated relationships between generations, and rediscover the role of the elderly.

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It seems to me that if we want to give back to the family its true countenance and restore its splendour, then besides the talks, the admonishments, the directives, and the presentation of experiences, great value should be given to the luminous and universal example that eternal Wisdom has invented: the family of Nazareth.

All the families who are now, or ever will be, in the world, can look to this family as a model and prototype. Not only the families as such, but each member of every family can be inspired by this family of Nazareth to know what attitudes to assume, what relationships to foster, what virtues to improve.

Every man on earth who is a husband and father will always be able to find in Joseph Mary's husband and the foster father of Jesus – a light, a stimulus, a source of inspiration.

From Joseph he will learn fidelity at all costs, heroic chastity, strength, quiet diligence, respect, veneration, protection for the mother of his children, and a participation in the family cares.

And every woman who is a wife and mother will be able to discover in Mary the person she is called to be, her equality to man, her own identity. In Mary, as Joseph's wife, she will see her own desire to share a leading role completely fulfilled. From Mary she will understand how to go beyond the family circle in order to share the rich qualities that are hers to benefit many: her capacity for self-sacrifice, her interior life which makes her confident, her inclination to the religious aspect of life characteristic of women, and her innate need to elevate herself and others onto a higher plane, with her presence, speaking of innocence, beauty and purity.

Analogously, children will find in Jesus, the son of the family of Nazareth, resolved in marvellous unity, the two conflicting tendencies that may disturb them: on the one hand, the need to assert themselves as a generation called to open a new chapter in history and, on the other, the desire to find protection in the security of their family, in love and obedience.

Yes, the Holy Family is the masterpiece of human coexistence – which mirrors the life of the Trinity where love makes God one. May this family stand before us today, together with us, to guide this day for the good of the family in the world and in the Church, and for the glory of God.