

The Family and Mary

On the occasion of the Holy Year of Jubilee for the families, John Paul II consecrated and entrusted the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It was also the day of the Annunciation. The coincidence of events is certainly not by chance. In fact, there are deep relationships between Mary and the family, at least for the fact that both are great experts in love.

Mary got to know the family in her heart, already simply on the natural level, in her various aspects as daughter, fiancée, wife, mother though always a virgin, and widow. The family is the kingdom of love. Filial, matrimonial, maternal, paternal and fraternal love is born, grows and develops in the family.

Mary, the mother of beautiful Love, also amply experienced supernatural love. She was born full of grace; she was overshadowed by Love in person, the Holy Spirit, when the Word became flesh in her womb. Then, she was also endowed by his flames at Pentecost when she became fully the spiritual mother of all of us Christians. And because of each of these births, she is model, type, form of the Church. The family, the birthplace of those who, once they are baptized, are children of God, was made holy by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, through the great sacrament of marriage, and it became a miniature version and the heart of the Church.

When the Pope read the act of consecration of the world to Mary he began with these words: «The family is the heart of the Church. From this heart, an act of special entrustment to the heart of the Mother of Jesus is lifted up today.» Thus from heart to heart, in this intense communion that was created with the Eucharistic celebration arose almost a cry filled with concern from the heart of the universal Father for the needs of humanity. This cry was the prayer of consecration to the Virgin Mary, so that She may take special care of the human family.

The Pope was there, kneeling in front of the white image of Our Lady of Fatima.

In that moment the thought of many of us present went back to May 13, 1981, the day of the assassination attempt. It was that precise day that the Holy Father had chosen to announce to the whole Church about the Pontifical Council for the Family.

St. Peter's Square was packed to the very brim. Next to him before Our Lady of Fatima, like a flower that blossomed from his suffering and blood, there were symbolically gathered all the families of the Church, sign of all the families of the world.

At the moment of the world's consecration to Mary, the Holy Father, as the supreme Pastor, could therefore count not only on the communion of all the Pastors of the Church, «constituting a body and a college,» but also on the full adhesion of the children of the Church, represented by many families of many countries.

We all know how much John Paul II, in his tireless dedication for the service of the Church, returns to the theme of the family. He places in the family the hopes of humanity and he entrusts life's destiny to it.

In John Paul II's typical charism of spiritual paternity, manifested even in his theatrical works, like that precious play Radiation of Fatherhood, featured in the Paul VI Hall before the author himself on the same day of the Jubilee of the families, he feels the threats of evil and the hopes of the good that pass through that heart of the Church which is the family. And now also on this solemn day, entrusting the world to the Mother of God, he did not stop praying that humanity be freed from some evils that strike the family; praying among other things in this way: «Deliver us from sins against human life from its very

beginning!»

And in the prayer with which he concluded his homily – prayer which he composed for the 1980 Synod that had the family as its theme of study – he asked this grace: «May the love enhanced by the grace of the sacrament of marriage be stronger than any weakness and any crisis that our families sometimes experience.»

All these meaningful coincidences and expressions truly allow us to gather a special reference to the family in the Pope's act of entrusting them to Mary. He entrusted all the families of the world, especially the families of those «peoples who for their situation are a special object of your love and concern.» This is to consecrate and entrust that heart and soul of life, which is the family, to the merciful love of God; to open this fundamental cell of humanity to the supernatural gift of God's love that redeems and sanctifies, that forgives and raises the family and marriage love to its dignity. Moreover, this is to implore from God the freedom from all dangers and sins that threaten the family.

The profound meaning of this consecration has to bring all Christian families to live – with the help and example of Mary – the luminous and fascinating plan of God on the family in all its expressions: marriage love, according to the divine plan, sign of Christ's love for the Church up to the total gift of self; paternity and maternity, as the participation to the fecund love of the Creator; peace and harmony in overcoming all the tensions and difficulties as fruit of an always alive and tireless charity intent on keeping the spiritual presence of Christ in the family and, with Him, the unity of thought and action; an openness of communion and service towards other families.

Speaking to the New Families of the Focolare Movement, the Pope outlined and defined the ideal image of the family as domestic Church in this way: «With your whole life, with your common existence, with your lifestyle, you build up the Church in her smallest and at the same time fundamental dimension: the "Ecclesiola"!»¹

Now if this domestic Church – this «Ecclesiola» – must be the «heart of the Church,» as the Pope also said, the family must aim at reflecting the attitude of Most Holy Mary who is now consecrated; by being like Mary transparency of the will of God. The family must take as its own the simple but absolute donation of itself to the divine level, which is always a level of redemption and salvation. The gesture of the Holy Father is in fact an invitation to all the families to be particularly consecrated to Mary, entrusting to Her all the concerns and joys of family life and to keep Her as the reference point for a common commitment of evangelical life.

In this way, the message of Fatima that recalls everyone to conversion and faithfulness to the Gospel, becomes the answer of the consecration of the family, a commitment of renewal so that the face of the Church may shine more. In the Christian family the Church is the «family of God» a welcoming dwelling place for all the lost children who are called back to the house of the Father and invited to enter through the maternal heart of the Mother of Jesus.

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¹ English translation taken from L'Osservatore Romano, May 11, 1981.