

## The Synod of Bishops on the Family (1982)

### **God's plan for marriage and the family**

God's eternal plan (cf. Eph I, 3ff.) is that all men and women should participate and share in the divine life and being (cf. Jn 1, 3; II Pt 1, 4). The Father summons people to realise this plan, in union with their fellow human beings, thus forming the People of God (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9).

In a special way the family is called to carry out this divine plan. It is, as it were, the first cell of the Church, helping its members to become agents of the history of salvation and living signs of God's loving plan for the world.

God created us in his own image (cf. Gn 1, 26) and he gave us the mission to increase and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it (cf. Gn 1, 28). To carry out this plan man and woman are joined in an intimate union of love for the service of life, God calls spouses to participate in his creative power by handing on the gift of life.

In the fullness of time, the Son of Man, born of woman (Gal 4, 4) enriched marriage with his saving grace, elevating it to the level of a sacrament and causing it to share in the covenant of his redemptive love, sealed with his blood. Christ's love and gift to the Church and those of the Church become the model of the mutual love and self-giving of man and woman (cf. Eph 5, 22-32). The sacramental grace of matrimony is a source of joy and strength to the spouses. As ministers of this sacrament, they truly act in the person of Christ himself and bring about their mutual sanctification. Spouses must be conscious of this grace and of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Each day, dear brothers and sisters, you must hear Christ saying to you: "If only you recognised God's gift" (cf. Jn 4, 10).

This divine plan shows us why the Church believes and teaches that the covenant of love and self-giving between two people joined in sacramental marriage must be permanent and indissoluble. It is a covenant of love and life. The transmission of life is inseparable from the conjugal union. The conjugal act itself, as the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (9 and 11) tells us, must be fully human, total, exclusive and open to new life.

God's plan for marriage and the family can only be fully understood, accepted and lived by persons who have experienced conversion of heart, that radical turning of the self to God by which one puts off the "old" self and puts on the "new". All are called to conversion and sanctity. We must all come to the knowledge and love of the Lord and experience him in our lives, rejoicing in his love and mercy, his patience, compassion, and forgiveness, and loving one another as he loves us. Husbands and wives, parents and children, are instruments and ministers of Christ's fidelity and love in their mutual relationships. It is this which makes Christian marriage and family life authentic signs of God's love for us and of Christ's love for the Church.