

VATICAN CITY, JUN 7, 2005 (VIS) - Last evening at St. John Lateran Basilica, Pope Benedict XVI inaugurated the ecclesial congress promoted by the diocese of Rome on the theme "The Family and the Christian Community: Formation of the Person and Transmission of the Faith."

The Pope offered some reflections on "the meaning of marriage and the family in the plan of God, Creator and Savior."

The Anthropological Foundation of the Family:

He starts by saying that "the human being has been created in the image and likeness of God and God Himself is Love. Thus, the vocation to love is what makes man the authentic image of God. ... From this basic link between God and man comes another: the indissoluble link between spirit and body."

"The totality of man," he continues, "includes the dimension of time and man's 'yes' ... means 'always', it is the space of fidelity. Only within it can one grow in faith." He adds that "the greatest expression of freedom ... is the capacity to choose a definitive gift in which freedom, giving of itself, fully finds itself. Concretely, the personal and reciprocal 'yes' between a man and a woman ... is destined to the gift of a new life" and it is also a "public 'yes' with which the spouses take on the public responsibility of fidelity."

Benedict XVI underscored that "the various forms of dissolving marriages today, as well as the free unions and the 'trial marriages', including pseudo-marriage between people of the same sex, are, rather, expressions of an anarchical freedom, which passes itself off, wrongly, for a true liberation of man. Such pseudo-freedom is based on making the body banal, which inevitably includes making man banal."

Marriage and the Family in the History of Salvation

The Pope recalled that "biblical revelation, in fact, is above all the expression of a story of love, the story of the covenant of God with man; therefore the story of the love and union between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage was able to be assumed by God as a symbol of the history of salvation."

"In the same way that the Incarnation of the Son of God reveals its true meaning in the cross, authentic human love is the giving of oneself and cannot exist if a person wishes to rid himself of the cross."

The Holy Father underscored several negative tendencies that are in opposition to "the profound link between God and man, between God's love and human love. ...The depreciation of human love, the suppression of the authentic capacity to love is revealed, in fact, in our times as the most adept and efficacious arm to remove God from man, to distance Him from man's gaze and from his heart."

Children

"Even in generating children marriage reflects its divine model, the love of God for man. In man and woman, paternity and maternity, as the body and as love, do not let themselves be limited to the biological: life is given entirely only when, with birth, love and the sense that make it possible to say yes to this life are also given. Precisely in this way does it become clear how contrary to human love, to the profound vocation of a man and a woman, it is when the union is closed to the gift of life, or worse yet, suppresses or manipulates unborn life. ... For this reason the building of every single Christian family is placed within the larger context of the great family of the Church, which sustains it and bears it within itself."

The Family and the Church

"Benedict XVI affirmed that "from all this comes an evident consequence: the family and the Church, concretely the parishes and other forms of ecclesial communities, are called to the closest collaboration in that basic duty which comprises, in an inseparable fashion, the formation of the person and the transmission of the faith."

The Threat of Relativism

"Today an especially insidious obstacle to the work of education is the massive presence, in our society and culture, of a relativism which, while recognizing nothing as definitive, establishes as a final measure only one's 'I' with one's own desires and which, under the appearance of freedom, becomes for each person a prison. Within such a relativistic horizon it is not possible therefore to have a true education: without the light of truth, sooner or later every person is in fact condemned to doubt the goodness of his own life and the relations that comprise it, to doubt the validity of his commitment to build, with others, something in common. It is therefore clear that not only must we seek to overcome relativism in our work of forming people, but we are also called to fight its predominant place in society and culture."

Priesthood and the Consecrated Life

The Holy Father concluded by pointing to the need to pray for many vocations to the priesthood and to consecrated life and to pray that priests and religious "give witness to the joy of having been called by the Lord."