

## THEMES OF CHIARA LUBICH FAMILY AND LOVE

*Message of Chiara Lubich to the first Family fest, Rome, Palaeur, May 3, 1981*

My dear brothers and sisters gathered here from every continent of the world for this original kind of meeting, may the fullness of joy be with you all.

Today you will be dealing with one of the most controversial topics in this moment of history, one of the most tormenting and vital 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?

Here, today, we shall attempt to give an answer especially to this question. At the moment, we will limit ourselves to making simple observation.

In the act of creation, God molded a family. When he became man, he became a 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 in the mind of God.

But today, what is the family like today?

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

Above all, the anarchical and individualistic cultures has rendered the very idea of the indissolubility of matrimony meaningless, and marriage is reduced to a mere "private pact" 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, and important and serious matter). As a result affluent societies, at this point, are tending towards a "zero growth rate" or even to decreasing births as compared to deaths. And to have more than one child of two at the most is becoming out of ordinary.

We are also deeply distressed by the fact that the legislation of many nations tends to foster this decadent usage, with laws that contribute towards weakening the stability of the family: thus, easy divorce, widely granted legal abortion, euthanasia, contraception, male and female sterilization, unjust economic protection for workers with large families and so on.

Every day, we can see how the communications media, especially television, stage, screen, advertisements and printed matter often propose a model of man-woman relationships in which the donating quality 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.

We see young people conditioned by the idea that marriage is something that belongs to the past. For them only a free, common law relationship between man and woman has sense, a relationship which lasts for as long as sentiment unites them, only to be interrupted again with their feelings for one another change.

We know how this impermanence of the couple causes insecure relationships and many after various experiences of this kind, are led to despair, thus explaining the very high suicide rate among the youth.

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

Furthermore, this mentality leads young people who may still be intent on forming a stable family, to consider pre-marital relationships as normal practice.

And in this degenerated context 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 the in-itself-positive need of fulfilling themselves also outside of the family, by working, by having a profession, by a social life, are sometimes led to undervalue their role as wives and mothers.

These are the main negative aspects of the family of our day. This is also the picture of the family in the Christian world presented to the Bishop in the Synod on the family last October – a tragic picture which compelled the successors of the Apostles to stress repeatedly in their Message the need for family members to frequently turn to the sacrament of penance, the need for forgiveness.

My dear friends, this is also the picture as it presents itself to us today: a truly dramatic picture from a Christian point of view. And we would spontaneously want to ask: Who is to blame?

Perhaps it is true that the world is what the family has made it, but undoubtedly the contrary holds true as well – that the family is similar to the society that has engendered it.

The world of our day is often wallowing in the mud, and it’s unlikely that the family, which is immersed in it, can come out healthy. Thus the family is in dire needs of the extraordinary help of grace.

Our hearts would certainly want to have a different kind of situation and another kind of epoch in which Christian virtues might shine forth and the family be honored, praised and emulated.

But we must love our own times in which God has given us to live and we must make every effort to render the family and the world what they should be.

Undoubtedly, God has stirred up various Christian movements in our times that break up the diocesan pastoral programs for families and undoubtedly each one of these, approved by the Church, has its own charism with a precise focal point for healing the family situation.

And so spontaneously we ask ourselves: Where does the New Family Movement begin in bringing about his healing? Which remedy does it use and what source does it draw from?

There is no doubt: It is God who is Love. Because the family is nothing other than mechanism, a repository, a mystery of love: nuptial love, maternal 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, love has decreased. Where love dies out, the family crumbles.

This is the reason why our families must draw from the source of love. God who is Love knows what the family is: He is the Architect who planned it as the masterpiece of love, the sign, and symbol, model, of all his other designs.

If he fashioned the family, molding it with his love, he will also be able to heal the family with love.

We know that we are being true to our nature as human beings if we behave according to what we are: the image of God. Therefore of man remains in communion with God, if he understands his position as the "you" of God.

Similarly, the love that unites that family is truly love if it remains in, nourishes and sustains itself, is measured in 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 that 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 feed themselves on traditional and contemporary devotions, particularly those associated with the Blessed Virgin that 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, insuperable problems do not arise, nor insurmountable obstacles, nor irremediable failures. 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 intent: to revitalize the love that is inherent in every family with that love which is a pure gift of God. So that love may renew love.

If this happens, since all things cooperate towards good for those who love, even the travail of families in our day will bring as its fruit that new kind of family which our times demand, which the signs of the times pre-announce.

The love that comes from above will contribute to making the middle-class family, which in our times is contested as being closed in its own egoism, 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 the responsibility they have to take a more active part in the life of the family, to share with their wives every aspect of family life on a level of equality.

Love will consolidate all the good that in spite of everything else, is evident in the family in our times, like that need for sincerity, and clarity, a lesser degree of malice between girls and boys due to the now common practice of having them grow up together from early childhood. This also contributes to the clearing away of various forms of artificiality, incommunicability and previously existing complexes.

The love of God in hearts will lead to a true rediscovery of human corporality. No longer will it be considered with malice, but in 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 and re-dimensioned in favor of other interests, such as social, political or cultural ones.

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

In our modern world, not with understanding all the negative elements, we are going through a period of searching and deep transformation. It is impossible to think of turning back. Anyone who has true value to propose can influence people in many ways, such as 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 favor of life, of children, who heal lacerated relationships between generations, and rediscover that role of the elderly.

So today, my dear friends, we will speak of the family. We will deal with the family as a whole; we will take an in-depth look at the problems concerning the family, the parent-child relationship, the situation of orphans, of engaged couples, of widows and widowers, of the elderly; we will speak of adoptions, of the problem of abortion; we will look again at the vocation of our New Family Movement, its spirituality, its service to the local Church, relationships with non-Christians and non-believers; we will listen to wide variety of experiences; we will review the doctrine of the Church on the family; we will even listen to the words of the Holy Father. What else can we say?

What can we add to such intense program, so complete in itself?

It seems to me that if we want to give back to the family its true countenance and restore its splendor, than beyond the talks, the warnings, the directives, the presentation of experiences, great value should be given to the luminous and universal

example that eternal Wisdom has devised: 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. And not only the families as such, but each member of the family can be inspired by this family of Nazareth to know what attitude 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, an incitement, a source of inspiration.

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

And every woman who is a wife and mother will be able to discover in Mary her true self, her equality to man, her own identity. In Joseph's wife she will find her own desire to have a leading role, completely fulfilled. From Mary she will understand how to go beyond the family circle in order to extend the rich qualities that are hers for the good of many: her capacity of self-sacrifice, that interiority which makes her secure, the religiosity which distinguishes her, and the in-born need to elevate herself and others irradiating candor, beauty, purity.

Analogously, children will find in Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph, a marvelous unity between the two tendencies which may torment them: on the one hand, the need to assert themselves as a generation which has to open a new chapter in history and on the other, the desire to seek protection under the wing of their parents, in love and obedience.

Yes, the Holy Family is the gem of every human society – that Family which mirrors the life of the Trinity where love makes God one. May this family stand before us today, with all of us, to direct this day for the good of the family in the world and in the Church, and for the glory of God.