



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL BOARD OF LAZIO,
THE MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF ROME
AND THE PROVINCE OF ROME**

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 12 January 2006

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to receive you for the traditional exchange of good wishes at the beginning of this New Year, which is also the first year of my ministry as Bishop of Rome and universal Pastor of the Church. Indeed, it is a favourable opportunity to confirm and strengthen those links, developed and consolidated over two millennia of history, forged between the Successor of Peter and the City of Rome, its Province and the Lazio Region.

I offer my cordial and respectful greeting to the President of the Regional Board of Lazio, Hon. Mr Pietro Marrazzo, to the Mayor of Rome, Hon. Mr Walter Veltroni, and to the President of the Province of Rome, Hon. Mr Enrico Gasbarra. I thank them for their kind words, also on behalf of the Boards they head. With them, I greet the Presidents of the respective Council Assemblies and all of you who are gathered here.

First of all, I feel the need to express through you my affection and pastoral concern for all the citizens and inhabitants of Rome and Lazio. I do so with the words of my beloved Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, on the occasion of his [Visit to the Town Hall on the Capitoline Hill on 15 January 1998](#):

"The Lord has entrusted you, Rome, with the task of being *prima inter Urbes* in the world, a beacon of civilization and faith. Live up to your glorious past, to the Gospel proclaimed to you by the martyrs and saints who made your name great. Open the riches of your heart, Rome, and your

millennial history to Christ. Do not be afraid; he does not stifle your freedom and your greatness. He loves you and wants to make you worthy of your civil and religious vocation, so that you will continue to bestow the treasures of faith, culture and humanity on your children and on the people of our time" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], n. 5, 28 January 1998, p. 6).

During the months of John Paul II's illness followed by his death, the Population of Rome and Lazio showed the intensity of their loving response to the Pope's love in an extraordinary and touching way.

On this occasion, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to you, distinguished Authorities, and to the Institutions you represent, for your important contribution to welcoming the millions of people who came to Rome from every part of the world to pay their last tribute to the late Pontiff and later, for my election to the See of Peter.

During those days, Rome and Lazio, like the rest of Italy and all humanity, truly lived a profound spiritual experience of faith and prayer, of brotherhood and the rediscovery of the goods that make our life dignified and rich in meaning. Nor can such an experience remain barren in the context of the civil community, its tasks and its multiple responsibilities and relations.

I am thinking in particular of that highly sensitive area that is as crucial to the formation and happiness of people as to the future of society: the family.

For the past three years the Diocese of Rome has made the family the focus of its pastoral commitment, in order to help the family face the new causes of crises and challenges widespread in our cultural context by a clearer and more convinced awareness of its real nature and consequent duties.

Indeed, as I said last 6 June, speaking to the Convention the Diocese organized on these topics: "Marriage and the family are not in fact a chance sociological construction, the product of particular historical and financial situations. On the contrary, the question of the right relationship between man and woman is rooted in the essential core of the human being and it is only by starting from here that its response can be found" (*Address to Ecclesial Diocesan Convention*, St John Lateran, 6 June 2005; ORE, 15 June, p. 6).

I therefore added: "Marriage as an institution is thus not an undue interference of society or of authority. The external imposition of form on the most private reality of life is instead an intrinsic requirement of the covenant of conjugal love" (*ibid.*, p. 6).

Here, it is not a question of specific norms of Catholic morals but of elementary truths that concern our common humanity: respecting them is essential for the good of the person and of society. Consequently, they also call into question your responsibilities as public Administrators and your

legal competences in two directions.

On the one hand, all measures that can sustain young couples in forming a family, and the family itself, in the procreation and education of children, are as expedient as ever: in this regard, problems such as the cost of housing, nurseries and kindergarten schools for the tiniest children immediately spring to mind.

On the other, it is a serious error to obscure the value and roles of the legitimate family founded on marriage by attributing legal recognition to other improper forms of union for which there is really no effective social need.

The protection of unborn human life likewise requires attention: care must be taken that pregnant women in difficult conditions do not lack material help, and that drugs which in some way conceal the gravity of abortion are not introduced as an anti-life choice.

Then, in a society that is ageing, assistance to the elderly and the whole range of problems that concern the health care of citizens is becoming increasingly important. I would like to encourage you in the efforts you are making in these areas and to stress that in the health sector, the continuing scientific and technological developments as well as the commitment to containing costs must be promoted, keeping firmly to the superior principle of the centrality of the patient.

The many cases of suffering and of mental illness deserve special attention. This is partly in order not to leave without adequate help those families which often find they have to cope with very difficult situations.

I am pleased at the development in recent years of various forms of collaboration among the public Administrative Boards of Rome, the Province and the Region, and the ecclesial volunteer organizations, in the work aimed at alleviating both old and new forms of poverty, which unfortunately afflict a large part of the population and many immigrants in particular.

Distinguished Authorities, I assure you of my closeness and daily prayer, for you yourselves and for the exercise of your lofty responsibilities. May the Lord illumine your good resolutions and give you the determination to bring them to fruition.

With these sentiments, I warmly impart to each one of you my Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to your families and to all who live and work in Rome, in the Province of Rome and throughout Lazio.

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