



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 5 April 2008*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to meet you at the end of the 18th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family on the theme: "*Grandparents: their witness and presence in the family*". I thank you for accepting my suggestion at the Meeting in Valencia when I said: "In no way should [grandparents] ever be excluded from the family circle. They are a treasure which the younger generation should not be denied, especially when they bear witness to their faith" (*Address at the Fifth World Meeting of Families*, Valencia, 8 July 2006). I greet in particular Cardinal Ricardo Vidal, Archbishop of Cebu and a member of the Committee of the Presidency, who has expressed your common sentiments, and I address an affectionate thought to dear Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo who has guided this Dicastery with passion and competence for 18 years. We miss him and offer him our best wishes for a prompt recovery, together with our prayers.

The theme you have discussed is very familiar to all. Who does not remember their grandparents? Who can forget their presence and their witness by the domestic hearth? How many of us bear their names as a sign of continuity and gratitude! It is a custom in families, after their departure, to remember their birthdays with the celebration of Mass for the repose of their souls and if possible, a visit to the cemetery. These and other gestures of love and faith are a manifestation of our gratitude to them. They gave themselves, they sacrificed themselves for us, and in certain cases also gave their lives.

The Church has always paid special attention to grandparents, recognizing them as a great treasure from both the human and social, as well as religious and spiritual viewpoints. My venerable Predecessors Paul VI and John Paul II - we have just celebrated the [third anniversary of the latter's death](#) - emphasized on various occasions the Ecclesial Community's respect for the elderly, for their dedication and their spirituality. In particular, during the Jubilee of the Year 2000, John Paul II summoned [the world's elderly to St Peter's Square in September](#) and said on that occasion: "Despite the limitations brought on by age, I continue to enjoy life. For this I thank the Lord. It is wonderful to be able to give oneself to the very end for the sake of the Kingdom of God!". These words were contained in the [Letter that about a year earlier, in October 1999, he had addressed to the elderly](#) and which have preserved intact their human, social and cultural timeliness.

Your Plenary Assembly has discussed the theme of grandparents' presence in the family, the Church and society with a look that can include the past, present and future. Let us briefly analyze these three moments. In the past, grandparents had an important role in the life and growth of the family. Even with their advancing age they continued to be present with their children, their grandchildren and even their great-grandchildren, giving a living witness of caring, sacrifice and a daily gift of themselves without reserve. They were witnesses of a personal and community history that continued to live on in their memories and in their wisdom. Today, the economic and social evolution has brought profound transformations to the life of families. The elderly, including many grandparents, find themselves in a sort of "parking area": some realize they are a burden to their family and prefer to live alone or in retirement homes with all the consequences that such decisions entail.

Unfortunately, it seems that the "culture of death" is advancing on many fronts and is also threatening the season of old-age. With growing insistence, people are even proposing euthanasia as a solution for resolving certain difficult situations. Old age, with its problems that are also linked to the new family and social contexts because of modern development, should be evaluated carefully and always in the light of the truth about man, the family and the community. It is always necessary to react strongly to what dehumanizes society. Parish and diocesan communities are forcefully challenged by these problems and are seeking today to meet the needs of the elderly. Ecclesial movements and associations exist which have embraced this important and urgent cause. It is necessary to join forces to defeat together all forms of marginalization, for it is not only they - grandfathers, grandmothers, senior citizens - who are being injured by the individualistic mindset, but everyone. If grandparents, as is said often and on many sides, are a precious resource, it is necessary to put into practice coherent choices that allow them to be better valued.

May grandparents return to being a living presence in the family, in the Church and in society. With regard to the family, may grandparents continue to be witnesses of unity, of values founded on fidelity and of a unique love that gives rise to faith and the joy of living. The so-called new models of the family and a spreading relativism have weakened these fundamental values of the

family nucleus. The evils of our society - as you justly observed during your work - are in need of urgent remedies. In the face of the crisis of the family, might it not be possible to set out anew precisely from the presence and witness of these people - grandparents - whose values and projects are more resilient? Indeed, it is impossible to plan the future without referring to a past full of significant experiences and spiritual and moral reference points. Thinking of grandparents, of their testimony of love and fidelity to life, reminds us of the Biblical figures of Abraham and Sarah, of Elizabeth and Zechariah, of Joachim and Anne, as well as of the elderly Simeon and Anna and even Nicodemus: they all remind us that at every age the Lord asks each one for the contribution of his or her own talents.

Let us now turn our gaze towards the sixth World Meeting of Families which will be celebrated in Mexico in January 2009. I greet and thank Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, Archbishop of Mexico, present here, for all he has already done in these months of preparation together with his collaborators. All Christian families of the world look to this Nation, "ever faithful" to the Church, which will open the doors to all the families of the world. I invite the Ecclesial Communities, especially family groups, movements and associations of families, to prepare themselves spiritually for this event of grace. Venerable and dear Brothers, I thank you once again for your visit and for the work you have done during these days; I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and to your loved ones.