

**PASTORAL VISIT OF JOHN PAUL II TO RIO DE JANEIRO**  
**MASS IN THE CATHEDRAL OF ST SEBASTIAN IN RIO DE JANEIRO**

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

October 4, 1997

Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ!

"There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee" (Jn 2:1).

1. Today the liturgy brings us to Cana in Galilee. Once again we participate in the wedding which is being celebrated there, and to which Jesus was invited together with his mother and the disciples. This detail makes us think that the wedding banquet took place in the home of his acquaintances, because Jesus too grew up in Galilee. Humanly speaking, who would ever have thought that such an occasion would, in a certain sense, have represented the beginning of his messianic activity? And yet this was the case. It was in fact there, at Cana, that Jesus, at his mother's request, worked his first miracle by transforming water into wine.

The Evangelist John, an eyewitness to the event, described what happened in detail. In his description everything seems full of deep meaning. And, as we gather here to participate in the World Meeting of Families, we must gradually discover this meaning. Actually the miracle worked at Cana in Galilee, like Jesus' other miracles, is a sign: it shows the action of God in human life. It is necessary to meditate on this action to discover the deepest meaning of what took place there.

The wedding banquet at Cana leads us to think about marriage, whose mystery includes the presence of Christ. May it not be legitimate to see the presence of the Son of God at that wedding feast as an indication that marriage should be an effective sign of his presence?

2. With my eyes turned towards the banquet at Cana and its guests, I address you, representatives of the great peoples of Latin America and the rest of the world, during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass celebrated with you, Bishops and priests, together with religious, the representatives of the Pastoral Theology Congress at this Second World Meeting of the Family, and the faithful who have come here to this Metropolitan Cathedral of St Sebastian in Rio de Janeiro.

I first wish to greet my venerable Brother Cardinal Eugênio de Araújo Sales, Archbishop of this traditional and dynamic Church, whom I have known and esteemed for many years; I am aware of how united he is to the See of Peter. May the blessings of the Apostles Peter and Paul descend upon the whole city, its parishes and its pastoral programmes, on the various centres of clergy formation, in a particular way on St Joseph's Archdiocesan Seminary, so dynamic and rich in priestly vocations, which also welcomes many seminarians from other Dioceses; on the Pontifical Catholic University; on the numerous religious congregations, the lay institutes and apostolic movements; on the Abbey of Our Lady of Montserrat; on the praiseworthy sodalities and confraternities and, in general, since I cannot mention everyone but do not wish to exclude anyone, on the aid organizations that do so much to assist the most needy.

I greet you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate of Brazil and of the world, and you who represent the Ordinaries for the faithful of the Eastern rites; I also greet you, priests, men and women religious and leaders of the Archdiocese's Popular Mission, and you, delegates of the Pastoral Theology Congress, as well as the representatives of the Christian Churches of various denominations and of the Muslim community here present. I wish to greet everyone, with the expression of my deep affection, best wishes and Blessing.

3. Let us return in spirit to the wedding banquet at Cana in Galilee, the Gospel description of which allows us to reflect on marriage in a sacramental perspective. As we read in the Book of Genesis, a man leaves his father and mother, and is joined to his wife in order, in a certain sense, to become one with her (cf. Gn 2:24). Christ drew on these Old Testament words in speaking to the Pharisees, who had asked him questions about the indissolubility of marriage. They were referring in fact to the prescriptions in the law of Moses which permitted, in certain cases, the separation of the spouses, that is to say, divorce. Christ replied to them: "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Mt 19:8). And he quoted the words of the Book of Genesis: "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? So they are no longer two, but one. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt 19:4-6).

Therefore at the basis of all social order we find this principle of the unity and indissolubility of marriage — the principle on which the

institution of the family and of all family life is founded. This principle receives confirmation and new force from the elevation of marriage to the dignity of a sacrament.

And what great dignity, dear brothers and sisters! It is a participation in God's life, that is, sanctifying grace and the countless graces that correspond to the vocation of marriage, to being parents and to the vocation of the family. The event at Cana in Galilee seems to lead us to this as well: that wonderful transformation of water into wine. So water, our most common drink, acquires a new character through Christ's action: it becomes wine, therefore a drink that is in a certain sense more valuable. The meaning of this symbol — the water and wine — finds its expression in Holy Mass. During the offertory, by adding a little water to the wine, we ask God, through Christ, to share in his life in the Eucharistic sacrifice. Marriage, parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood, the family, all this belongs to the order of nature, since God created man and woman; and all this through Christ's action is raised to the supernatural order. The sacrament of marriage becomes the way to participate in God's life. The man and woman who believe in Christ, who are joined together as husband and wife, can, for their part, confess: our bodies are redeemed — the marital union is redeemed. Parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood are redeemed, and all that bears with it the mark of holiness.

This truth appears in all its clarity when reading, for example, the life of the parents of St Theresa of the Child Jesus; and this is only one of countless examples. Many indeed are the fruits of the sacramental institution of marriage. With this meeting in Rio de Janeiro, let us thank God for all these fruits, for the whole work of sanctification of couples and families, which we owe to Christ. This is why the Church never ceases to present the doctrine of Christ on marriage in its entirety, with regard to its unity and indissolubility.

4. The first reading, from the Book of Esther, recalls the salvation of the nation through the intervention of this daughter of Israel at the time of the Babylonian captivity. This passage of Scripture will also help us understand the vocation of marriage, especially the immense service which this vocation renders to human life, to the life of each person and of all the peoples of the world. "Hear, O daughter, consider, and incline your ear ... the king will desire your beauty" (Ps 44 (45):11-12) Today the Pope wants to say the same thing to every human family: "Look! Listen to this: God wants you to be beautiful, to live in the fullness of human dignity and the holiness of Christ, to serve love and life. You had

your origin in the Creator and you were sanctified by the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, to become the hope of all nations".

May this service to humanity show married couples that a clear sign of the holiness of their marriage is precisely the joy with which they welcome and ask the Lord for vocations among their children. For this reason, allow me to add here that "the family that is open to transcendent values, that serves its brothers and sisters with joy, that fulfils its duties with generous fidelity, and is aware of its daily sharing in the mystery of the glorious Cross of Christ, becomes the primary and most excellent seedbed of vocations to a life of consecration to the kingdom of God" (*Familiaris consortio*, n. 53). In this context, I am pleased to greet and bless with paternal affection all the Brazilian families who have sons preparing for the priestly ministry or religious life, or daughters on their way to the total consecration of themselves to God. I entrust these young people to the protection of the Holy Family.

Mary, most holy, Hope of Christians, gives us the strength and confidence necessary for our journey on earth. For this reason we ask her: Be our guide, because you, O Blessed Mother, know the ways and paths that, through your love, lead to the love and glory of God.

Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ.