

Holy Family 2023

At a question and answer session with Pope Benedict in 2012, a seven-year old girl asked the Pope, who was then 85: “Tell me about your family and when you were very young, like me.” After talking about the importance of their faith and the natural beauty of Bavaria that inspired him growing up, he concluded: *“We were one in heart and soul, enjoying so many experiences together, even though times were hard, as this was during the Second World War: first we had the dictatorship and then poverty. But the mutual love that we shared, our joy, even in simple things, was so strong that it enabled us to endure and overcome. Even little things were a source of joy because they were an expression of love among us. And so we grew up convinced that it was good to be human, because we saw God’s goodness reflected in our parents and our brothers and sisters.”*

It is good to be human. Though families differ in countless ways, that simple statement is a beautiful summary of the mission of the family, the place we are formed in ever-new ways to be more truly human and learn who we are, made in the image of God. Catholic faith calls your home a domestic Church, since in your homes, as in the home of Mary and Joseph, *Jesus dwells in Your midst.* In the daily business of simply being families, you are sharing the Gospel, providing formation in what truly matters in life ... to forgive, to serve, to pray, to love. Thank you for that irreplaceable gift to the world. The goodness of human life is also the lesson of Christmas, so needed in a time when many lose hope in goodness. As the eternal Son of God takes to Himself our common human nature, we know that it is indeed good in God’s eyes to be human.

St. Paul VI once said that the family is beautiful for the problems it poses. Even the Holy Family had to endure the loss of their home and flee persecution. They knew the cold fear of a missing child for three days. They lived through the loss of husband and father, and then Mary was seemingly left alone in the world after seeing her only Son die. Whatever our particular sufferings, it is not the problems that are beautiful, but their potential to teach us the lessons of life that help us grow, mature, and persevere. I am

grateful today for the many people I have been honored to know who testify by their love, patience, and courage that it is good to be human, it is good to live in families, it is good to trust in the bonds of love.

We naturally think of our own families today, but it is good for us to remember families around the world – families where war, or sickness, or persecution, or slavery, have separated family members from one another. Many live daily amid unrest and destruction. Some are in refugee camps, or on the streets, alone and hungry and frightened. Other families know the sorrow of conflict and division, sickness, worry about the next meal, the loss of a loved one through illness or tragedy. As we count our blessings, we also pray for them, our brothers and sisters in the family of the Church.

Do something good for your family this week, and do something good for others AS a family this week. I pray today that each family – whatever the problems that refine its beauty – will be able to say those same words from Pope Benedict: *“We were one in heart and soul, enjoying so many experiences together, even though times were hard. But the mutual love that we shared, our joy, even in simple things, was so strong that it enabled us to endure and overcome. Seeing God’s love through one another, we grew up convinced that it was good to be human.”*