

Undoubtedly, in recent years the family and marriage have been the target of open and sustained attacks, to the point that in some countries the laws that once protected the family have now become inoperative, and have even been replaced by unjust laws that undermine society's foundation and accelerate its decomposition. Pope Benedict XVI, following in the footsteps of John Paul II, who did so much to strengthen the family, insists on the importance of a deep understanding of the meaning of marriage and the family in the divine plan, in contrast to those who insist on seeing them as mere human institutions, open to arbitrary modifications with the passage of time.

As responsible citizens and consistent Christians, we have to do all we can to defend and foster the essential values in this area that hold a fundamental importance for the life of the Church and civil society. This task, one of the most urgent components of the new evangelization, falls to each one of us. St. Josemaría was greatly concerned about the good of families. When he spoke with young couples or parents, he reminded them that marriage is a specific path of Christian life, and that happiness is not simply the consequence of attaining material goals (a comfortable life, a home, work), but of the sincere search for holiness through mutual dealings within the family. He suggested that they imitate the Holy Family of Nazareth, so as to learn from Mary, Jesus and Joseph to love, to suffer, and to give themselves for the benefit of their spouse and children, putting themselves joyfully at

their service. This is the principal way of imbuing society with a Christian spirit.

## Rome April 10, 2006

*In the audience granted by Pope Benedict XVI to the youth participating in the UNIV Congress*

Holy Father:

I would like to thank Your Holiness for having consented to receive the participants in the UNIV International Congress this morning—a Congress which has been held in Rome each year since 1968. The aim of this meeting is to help university students to be aware of the challenges presented by today's society and to help them to collaborate—each in his or her own place of study or work—in the task of bringing Christ to all environments. Thus so many people who are awaiting him, perhaps without knowing it, and who need him, can find him and get to know him.

Since the 1930's, St. Josemaría Escrivá dedicated himself passionately to the university. He invited students, one by one, personally, to the task of "spreading goodness, light, enthusiasm, generosity, a spirit of sacrifice, constancy in work, deep study" (*Furrow*, no. 937).

To meet the Holy Father is always, for a son or daughter of the Church, a source of deep joy. It is also

a call to responsibility, confirming the mission the Church has conferred upon each one: that of being “anchored firmly in the word of Christ, capable of responding to the challenges of our times” (Message for the XXI World Youth Day). The Roman Pontiff has set forth this goal especially for young people, who trust sin-

cerely in your prayer for this intention. As Your Holiness has suggested, we place the prayer and work of these days in the hands of Mary, in order to be closer to Jesus on the Cross.

I now hand over the meeting to the President of UNIV 2006. Thank you again, Holy Father.

## Pastoral letter

Rome  
March 1, 2006

*A pastoral letter from the Prelate for Lent*

Lent is “a privileged time of interior pilgrimage towards the One who is the fount of mercy. It is a pilgrimage on which He himself accompanies us through the desert of our poverty, sustaining us on our journey towards the deep joy of Easter” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for Lent 2006*).

Through its insistent invitation to prepare ourselves for the Easter celebrations, the liturgy in the upcoming days urges us to pray with greater intensity and constancy, to be more generous in offering mortifications and in carrying out works of mercy. This last point is the aspect that Pope Benedict XVI wanted to emphasize in his Message, in choosing as his theme the Gospel verse: “When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them” (*Mt 9:36*). We can and

should apply these words of St. Matthew to our daily lives, characterized by constant contact with a wide variety of people: in our family, at work, when resting, in social relationships....

The Holy Father reminds us that we have to strive, in all moments, to look upon others as our Lord looked upon them and try to help them. We need to see, in those around us, without excluding anyone, souls redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ (Cf. *1 Cor 6:20*). Just as twenty centuries ago, “Christ’s compassionate ‘look’ continues to fall upon individuals and peoples, knowing that the divine plan includes their call to salvation. Jesus knows the perils that put this plan at risk, and He is moved with pity for the crowds. He chooses to defend them from the wolves even at the cost of his own life. Jesus’ gaze embraces individuals and multitudes, and he brings them all before the Father, offering Himself as a sacrifice of expiation” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for Lent 2006*). When dwelling physically among