

FAMILIES TEACH MEANING OF LIFE, SAYS PONTIFF

Stresses Divine Love Transmitted Through Marriage

PALERMO, Italy, OCT. 4, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The family is fundamental because it is the first place where people learn the meaning of life, Benedict XVI is affirming.

The Pope made this reflection Sunday in an address to families and youth gathered in Palermo's Piazza Politeama. The Pontiff spent Sunday on the Italian island of Sicily, visiting the faithful gathered there for a regional meeting of families and youth.

"The relationship between parents and children -- you know -- is fundamental," the Holy Father affirmed.

He noted that "it is the torch of faith that is passed on from generation to generation, this flame that is also present in the rite of baptism, when the priest says: 'Receive the light of Christ ... the paschal sign ... the flame that you must always keep alive.'"

"The family is fundamental because it is the place where there germinates in the human soul the first perception of the meaning of life," Benedict XVI affirmed.

"This perception grows in the relationship with the mother and with the father, who are not the owners of the life of the children but the first collaborators with God in the transmission of life and the faith," he added.

Blessed Chiara Badano

The Pope observed that "this occurred in an exemplary and extraordinary way in the family of Blessed Chiara Badano," an Italian youth who died in 1990 before her 19th birthday and was beatified Sept. 25.

"I invite you to get to know her," the Pontiff said. "Her life was brief but it is a stupendous message."

"There were two years, her last, that were also full of suffering, but always in love and in light, a light that shown all about her and came from inside: from her heart full of God!" he noted.

The Holy Father observed: "Humanly speaking, she was without hope, but she spread love, serenity, peace and faith.

"Evidently it was a grace from God, but this grace was also prepared and accompanied by human cooperation: Chiara's own cooperation, certainly, but also the cooperation of her parents and her friends. But first of all it was through the cooperation of her parents, the family."

"We need fertile soil in which to put down our roots," he noted, "a soil that is rich in nourishing elements that make the person grow."

"These are above all love and faith, the knowledge of the true face of God," Benedict XVI added.

Badano's parents were at her beatification ceremony and met personally with the Holy Father after last Wednesday's general audience. They reported afterward that the Pope expressed his gratitude to them.

Power of marriage

The Bishop of Rome went on to explain to the youth of Palermo that "the family is the 'little Church' because it transmits God, it transmits the love of Christ, by the power of the sacrament of matrimony."

"The divine love that united man and woman, and that made them parents, is able to make the seed of faith -- which is the light of life's profound meaning -- grow in the hearts of their children," the Pope said.

He added that "the family, to be a 'little Church,' must be well integrated into the 'big Church,' that is, into the family of God that Christ came to form."

"The greatest gift that we have received is to be Church," the Pontiff affirmed, "to be in Christ the sign and instrument of unity, of peace, and true freedom."

He continued: "No one can take this joy from us! No one can take this strength from us! Courage, dear young people and families of Sicily! Be saints!"

The Holy Father urged the tens of thousands of youth in the audience: "Do not be afraid to oppose evil! Together you will be like a forest that grows, perhaps silently, but capable of bearing fruit, of bringing life and of renewing your land in a profound way!

"Do not cede to the suggestions of the mafia, which is a road of death, incompatible with the Gospel, as your bishops have said many times!"

At the conclusion of this meeting with families and youth, Benedict XVI went to the airport for his return flight to Rome.

This is his fourth pastoral visit within Italy this year. His other visits included: Turin (May), Sulmona (July), and Carpineto Romano (September).