Session 5

Work & Celebration in the Family

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground." God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth."

God also said: "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground, I give all the green plants for food." And so it happened.

God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed – the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation. Such is the story of the heavens and the earth at their creation (Gen 1:26-31; 2:1-4).

D. Biblical Catechesis

1. God said: Let us make man.

The biblical account of the beginning presents the creation of man, male and female, as God's work, the fruit of his labor. God creates man by working like a potter who shapes the clay (Gen 2: 7). Also, when he gives life to his people Israel, frees them from slavery in Egypt and leads them to the promised land, God's work will be like that of a shepherd who leads his flock to pasture (Cfr. Psalm 77:21).

God's creative work is accompanied by his word; indeed, it is accomplished through his word: "God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"...and "God created man in his image...". What God brings about is not first of all "used" but contemplated. He looks at what he has made until he sees its splendor and rejoices in the beauty of the good he has created. In his eyes, the work appears to be a masterpiece.

Session 5

Work & Celebration in the Family

Those who can still marvel at the wonders of the world relive God's joy in some way. Even today, for those who can look with simplicity and faith, the beauty of the universe invites us to recognize God's hand and to understand that it is not the product of chance but of the Creator's loving work for the human creature who is not only "good", like all the other creatures, but "very good".

The word that accompanies God's creation cannot be absent for the man who works either. Work must never stifle man to the point that it reduces him to silence! When a worker is deprived of the right to speak, he falls into the condition of a slave who is prevented from rejoicing in his work because every fruit is taken away from him by his owner.

Man has to work to live, but working conditions must safeguard and indeed promote his dignity as a person. Today the labor market forces not a few people, especially if they are young and women, into situations of constant uncertainty and impedes them from working stably and with certainties of an economic and social nature which ensure that the young generations can have a family and that families can generate and raise their children.

The convenient " flexibility" of work called for by the so-called "globalization" does not justify the permanent "precariousness" of those whose only resource to ensure a livelihood for themselves and their families is their "labor force". Adequate social security and protection mechanisms should integrate the labor economy so that especially families that are going through very delicate moments like motherhood, or very difficult moments, such as sickness or unemployment, can count on a reasonable economic security.

2. God blessed them, saying… fill the earth and subdue it.

Man should not just contemplate the "very good" creation; he is also called to collaborate. In fact, work, for every man, is a call to take part in God's work and so it is a real place of sanctification.

By transforming reality, man recognizes that the world comes from God who involves man in completing the good work begun by him. This means, for example, that serious unemployment, a product of the current world economic crisis, not only deprives families of the necessary means for survival, but it also hinders man from developing himself fully by denying or reducing the work experience .

It is not work that should subject man, but it is man, through work, who is called to "subject" the earth (Gen 1:28). The entire earthly globe is at man's disposal so that through his creativity and effort he will discover the resources needed to live and make proper use of them. For this purpose, today, much more than in the past, we

should not forget that God entrusted the earth to us like a garden to be appreciated and cultivated (Gen 2:7).

The responsible use of the earth's resources in view of sustainable development has become a primary question today: the "ecological question". The environmental degradation of many areas of the planet, the rising levels of pollution, and other negative factors like global warming are warning bells regarding a way of conducting technical-scientific progress that overlooks the collateral effects of its undertakings. Studying industrial, agricultural and urban policies that will put man at the center and safeguard creation is the indispensable condition for guaranteeing families today, and especially in the future, a livable and hospitable world.

After working for six days on the creation of the world and man, on the seventh day God rested. God's rest reminds man about the need to suspend work so that religious, personal, family and community life will not be sacrificed to the idols of accumulating wealth, career advancement and the increase of power. One does not live only of work relations that are functional to the economy. It takes time to cultivate the gratuitous relationships of family affections and the bonds of friendship and kinship.

Unfortunately, in the West, the dominant culture only tends to consider the individual as functional to the society of production and consumption. When he is more productive because he is more willing to move and keep flexible hours, he consumes percentage-wise more than those who live in the family.

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.

Created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26), man, like God, works and rests. A serene time for rest and a joyful time for celebration are also the space to thank God, the Creator and Savior. By suspending work, people remember and experience that at the origin of their working activity there is God's creative action. Human creativity plunges its roots into God the Creator because only He creates from nothing.

By resting in God, people also rediscover the right measure of their work with respect to their relations with their neighbor. Work is at the service of the deeper bonds which God wanted for the human creature. The bread we earn by working is not only for ourselves, but also gives sustenance to the others that live with us. Through work spouses nurture their relationship and their children's lives. Moreover, work is also the act of justice through which people share in the good of the society and contribute to the common good.

Session 5

Work & Celebration in the Family

As a gratuitous time for interpersonal and social relations, rest from work is a favorable occasion for nurturing family affections and making bonds of friendship with other families. In fact, work rhythms today dictated by the consumer economy are limiting to the point that for certain professions they almost cancel the spaces for life in common, especially in the family. Current living conditions seem to contradict what was thought until not too long ago. It was expected that technological progress would have increased free time. The frenetic work rhythms and the traveling time to and from work drastically reduce the space for comparison and sharing between the spouses and the possibility to be with their children. One of the most difficult challenges of the economically developed countries is to balance the times for the family with those for work. On the other hand, the difficult task for the developing countries is to increase productivity without losing the riches of human, family and community relations, and to solve and reconcile the family-work relation in the context of external as well as internal migrations.

God blessed them…

From the account of creation, a close connection emerges between conjugal love and work. In fact, God's blessing concerns the couple's fruitfulness and dominion over the earth. The twofold blessing invites us to recognize the goodness of family life and work. Therefore, it encourages us to find a way to live family and work in a balanced, harmonious way. Today attempts in this direction are not absent: for example, where it is possible and advisable, part-time work, or authorizations or leaves of absence compatible with work duties which correspond to the family's needs. Flexible work hours can also favor the right balance between family demands, especially regarding childcare, and work demands.

The blessing is given to the spouses so that they will be fruitful and derive benefit from the earth's fruitfulness. The family blessed by God is called to recognize the gifts it receives from God. One concrete way to remember God's beneficial action, the origin of all good, is the prayer of blessing which the family recites at meals. Getting recollected together to praise God and thank him for their food is both a simple and a profound act: it is the expression of gratitude to the heavenly Father who provides for his children on earth and lavishes upon them the grace to love one another and the bread to live.

E. Listening to the Magisterium

Not only work but also rest from work constitutes a fundamental right and an essential good for individuals and their families. This is what the post-synod Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis states. A man and a woman are worth more than their work. They are made for communion and encounter. So Sunday should

not take the form of an interval from work to be filled with frenetic activities or unusual experiences, but rather a day of rest which opens up to the encounter, lets the other be rediscovered, and makes it possible to dedicate time to family relations and friends and to prayer.

The meaning of rest and work

It is particularly urgent nowadays to remember that the day of the Lord is also a day of rest from work. It is greatly to be hoped that this fact will also be recognized by civil society, so that individuals can be permitted to refrain from work without being penalized. Christians, not without reference to the meaning of the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition, have seen in the Lord's Day a day of rest from their daily exertions.

This is highly significant, for it relativizes work and directs it to the person: work is for man and not man for work. It is easy to see how this actually protects men and women, emancipating them from a possible form of enslavement. As I have had occasion to say, "work is of fundamental importance to the fulfillment of the human being and to the development of society. Thus, it must always be organized and carried out with full respect for human dignity and must always serve the common good. At the same time, it is indispensable that people not allow themselves to be enslaved by work or to idolize it, claiming to find in it the ultimate and definitive meaning of life." It is on the day consecrated to God that men and women come to understand the meaning of their lives and also of their work. [Sacramentum Caritatis, 74]

Session 5

Work & Celebration in the Family

F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

Questions for the couple

1. Do we feel realized in our work?
2. Do we compare our work experiences with one another?
3. Does the exercise of a profession conflict with our conjugal and family ties?
4. Do we have the habit of praying at meals? What meaning do we give to blessing food?

Questions for the family group and the community

1. In our Christian communities is attention given to the problems of work and the economy?
2. In Caritas in veritate, Benedict XVI talks about conditions for "decent work" (CV 63). In what way can we get committed to guaranteeing everyone dignified work?
3. Does work flexibility represent an opportunity or is it detrimental?
4. What forms of idolatry of work are present in the society we live in?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn