

# The Bridegroom is with You

An excerpt from **Letter to Families, Pope St John Paul II, 1994**

#18

**D**ear brothers and sisters, spouses and parents, this is how the *Bridegroom is with you*. You know that he is the Good Shepherd. You know who he is, and you know his voice. You know where he is leading you, and how he strives to give you pastures where you can find life and find it in abundance. You know how he withstands the marauding wolves, and is ever ready to rescue his sheep: every husband and wife, every son and daughter, every member of your families. You know that he, as the Good Shepherd, is prepared to lay down his own life for his flock (cf. *Jn 10:11*). He leads you by paths which are not the steep and treacherous paths of many of today's ideologies, and he repeats to today's world the fullness of truth, even as he did in his conversation with the Pharisees or when he announced it to the Apostles, who then proclaimed it to all the ends of the earth and to all the people of their day, to Jews and Greeks alike. The disciples were fully conscious that Christ had made all things new. They knew that man had been made a "new creation": no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female, but "one" in Christ (cf. *Gal 3:28*) and endowed with the dignity of an adopted child of God. On the day of Pentecost man received the Spirit, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth. This was the beginning of the new People of God, the Church, the foreshadowing of new heavens and a new earth (cf. *Rev 21:1*).

The Apostles, overcoming their initial fears even about marriage and the family, grew in courage. They came to understand that marriage and family are a true vocation which comes from God himself and is an apostolate: the apostolate of the laity. Families are meant to contribute to the transformation of the earth and the renewal of the world, of creation and of all humanity.

Dear families, you too should be fearless, ever ready to give witness to the hope that is in you (cf. *1 Pet 3:15*), since the Good Shepherd has put that hope in your hearts through the Gospel. You should be ready to follow Christ towards the pastures of life, which he himself has prepared through the Paschal Mystery of his Death and Resurrection.



**I am the good shepherd.**  
The good shepherd  
lays down his life  
for the sheep.

– **John 10:11**

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*Do not be afraid* of the risks! God's strength is always far more powerful than your difficulties! Immeasurably greater than the evil at work in the world is the power of the *Sacrament of Reconciliation*, which the Fathers of the Church rightly called a "second Baptism". Much more influential than the corruption present in the world is the divine power of the *Sacrament of Confirmation*, which brings Baptism to its maturity. And incomparably greater than all is the power of the Eucharist.

The *Eucharist* is truly a wondrous sacrament. In it Christ has given us himself as food and drink, as a source of saving power. He has left himself to us that we might have life and have it in abundance (cf. *Jn 10:10*): the life which is in him and which he has shared with us by the gift of the Spirit in rising from the dead on the third day. The life that comes from Christ is a life for us. *It is for you, dear husbands and wives, parents and families!* Did Jesus not institute the Eucharist in a family-like setting during the Last Supper? When you meet for meals and are together in harmony, *Christ is close to you*. And he is Emmanuel, God with us, in an even greater way whenever you approach the table of the Eucharist. It can happen, as it did at Emmaus, that he is recognized only in "the breaking of the bread" (cf. *Lk 24:35*). It may well be that he is knocking at the door for a long time, waiting for it to be opened so that he can enter and eat with

us (cf. *Rev 3:20*). The Last Supper and the words he spoke there contain all the power and wisdom of the sacrifice of the Cross. No other power and wisdom exist by which we can be saved and through which we can help to save others. There is no other power and no other wisdom by which you, parents, can educate both your children and yourselves. The *educational power of the Eucharist* has been proved down the generations and centuries.

Everywhere the Good Shepherd is with us. Even as he was at Cana in Galilee, *the Bridegroom in the midst of the bride and groom* as they entrusted themselves to each other for their whole life, so the Good Shepherd is also with us today as the reason for our hope, the source of strength for our hearts, the wellspring of ever new enthusiasm and the sign of the triumph of the "civilization of love". Jesus, the Good Shepherd, continues to say to us: *Do not be afraid. I am with you*. "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt 28:20*). What is the source of this strength? What is the reason for our certainty that you are with us, even though they put you to death, O Son of God, and you died like any other human being? What is the reason for this certainty? The Evangelist says: "He loved them to the end" (*Jn 13:1*). Thus do you love us, you who are the First and the Last, the Living One; you who died and are alive for evermore (cf. *Rev 1:17-18*).

