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Christians and Hindus: Promoting hope among families

Today the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue published its message to Hindus for the festival of Deepavali or Diwali, the “Feast of Lights”, which falls between October and November, during the Hindu month of Ashwayuja. The festival of Deepavali, among the most important in the calendar, lasts for five days, during which bonds with relatives and friends are strengthened by visiting one another and eating together, offering sweets and illuminating the night with candles and fireworks. It symbolises the triumph of good over evil and commemorates the return to the city of Ayodhya of Prince Rama after defeating the demon king Ravana. According to legend, the inhabitants of Ayodhya placed rows of lamps on the walls and on the roofs so that Rama could find his way easily.

This year’s message, signed by the president of the dicastery, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, and by the secretary, Bishop Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J., is entitled “Christians and Hindus: Promoting hope among families”.

“On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we offer our best wishes as you celebrate Deepavali on 30 October 2016”, the text begins. “May your celebrations around the world deepen your familial bonds, and bring joy and peace to your homes and communities.

The health of society depends on our familial bonds and yet we know that today the very notion of family is being undermined by a climate that relativises its essential significance and value. So too, family life is often disrupted by harsh realities such as conflicts, poverty and migration, which have become all too commonplace throughout the world. There are, however, strong signs of renewed hope due to the witness of those who hold fervently to the enduring importance of marriage and family life for the wellbeing of each person and society as a whole. With this abiding respect for the family, and keenly aware of the global challenges daily confronting us, we wish to offer a reflection on how we, Christians and Hindus together, can promote hope in families, thus making our society ever more humane.

We know that the family is “humanity’s first school” and that parents are the “primary and principal” educators of their children. It is in the family that children, led by the noble example of their parents and elders, are formed in the values that help them develop into good and responsible human beings. Too often, however, the optimism

and idealism of our youth are diminished by circumstances that affect families. It is especially important, therefore, that parents, together with the wider community, instil in their children a sense of hope by guiding them towards a better future and the pursuit of the good, even in the face of adversity.

Providing a formation and education in hope is thus a task of paramount importance for families, as it reflects the divine nature of mercy which embraces the disheartened and gives them purpose. Such an education in hope encourages the young themselves to reach out, in charity and service, to others in need, and so become a light for those in darkness.

Families, therefore, are meant to be a workshop of hope, where children learn from the example of their parents and family members, and experience the power of hope in strengthening human relationships, serving those most forgotten in society and overcoming the injustices of our day. St. John Paul II said that “the future of humanity passes by way of the family”. If humanity is to prosper and live in peace, then families must embrace this work of nurturing hope and encouraging their children to be heralds of hope to the world.

As Christians and Hindus, may we join all people of good will in supporting marriage and family life, and inspiring families to be schools of hope. May we bring hope’s light to every corner of our world, offering consolation and strength to all in need. We wish you all a joyful Deepavali!”
