

# Early church grew thanks to married couples

VATICAN CITY - From the earliest days of Christianity, the faith was nourished and the church grew thanks to the commitment of believing married couples, Pope Benedict XVI said.

Continuing what he described as a verbal “portrait gallery” of important figures in the early church, the pope focused his Feb. 7 general audience remarks on Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple who assisted St. Paul in his ministry in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome.

The couple not only opened their home to St. Paul, but also to all local Christians, hosting the community’s gatherings to read the Scriptures and share the Eucharist, the pope said.

“It is thanks to the faith and apostolic commitment of lay faithful, of families (and) spouses like Priscilla and Aquila that Christianity has reached our generation,” the pope said.

The faith proclaimed by the apostles, he said, took root in the lives of the people thanks to the commitment of couples and families, “and it always will be only in this way that the church grows.”

“This couple demonstrates how important is the action of Christian couples. When they are supported by the faith and a strong spirituality, their courageous commitment for the church and in the church becomes natural,” he said.

Pope Benedict said Christians today should follow the example of Priscilla and Aquila.

“Every home can be transformed into a little church,” not only being a place marked by love and care for others, but particularly being a place where every activity and attitude revolves around a clear recognition that Jesus Christ is lord, he said.

While it is true that the love of a husband and wife mirrors Christ's love for his church, the pope said, "we also can maintain that the apostle (Paul) models the life of (the) entire church on that of the family. The church is, in reality, the family of God."

At the end of the audience, the estimated 7,000 people who participated were told – in several languages – that they would sing together the Lord's Prayer in Latin and that the words had been printed on the back of their free entrance tickets.

The Prefecture of the Pontifical Household began printing the words on the tickets in mid-2006, but the Feb. 7 audience marked the first time it was publicly pointed out to all the visitors.

Before his regular general audience, Pope Benedict met in St. Peter's Basilica with more than 2,500 pilgrims from the 10 dioceses of Italy's Lombardy region who were accompanying their bishops to the Vatican for their "ad limina" visits, which heads of dioceses must make every five years.

Just two months before the scheduled publication of his new book on Jesus, the pope told the pilgrims that in order to be effective witnesses of the faith "we need to know better the figure of Jesus, to have a knowledge that is not just second-hand, but a knowledge from an encounter with him through prayer, the liturgy and love for our neighbors."