

CATECHESIS ON  
**THE FAMILY**  
2015 (VOL. III)



POPE FRANCIS

# CATECHESIS ON THE FAMILY

VOL. III

Pope Francis  
2015

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# WOUNDED FAMILIES

General Audience  
August 5, 2015

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

With this catechesis we return to our reflection on the family. After speaking the last time about families wounded due to misunderstandings between spouses, today I would like to focus our attention on another reality: how to take care of those who, after an irreversible failure of their matrimonial bond, have entered into a new union.

The Church is fully aware that such a situation is contrary to the Christian Sacrament. However, her gaze as a teacher always draws from a mother's heart; a heart which, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, always seeks the good and the salvation of the people. This is why she feels obliged, "for the sake of truth", to "exercise careful discernment of situations". This is how St John Paul II expressed it in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (n. 84), giving as an example the difference between one subjected to separation compared to one who has caused it. This discernment has to be made.

If we then also look at these new bonds through the eyes of the young sons and daughters — and the little ones watch — through the eyes of the children, we are aware of a greater urgency to foster a true welcome for these families in our communities. For this reason it is important that the style of the community, its language, its attitudes, always be attentive to people, starting with the little ones. They are the ones who suffer the most in these situations. After all, how can we encourage these parents to do everything possible to raise their children in the Christian life, to give them an example of committed and exercised faith, if we keep them at arm's length from the life of the community, as if they are excommunicated? We must act in a way so as not to add even more to the burdens which the children in these situations already feel they have to bear! Unfortunately, the number of these children and youth is really large. It is important for them to feel the Church as loving mother to all, always ready to listen and to meet.

In these decades, in truth, the Church has been neither insensitive nor lazy. Thanks to the in-depth analysis performed by Pastors, led and guided by my Predecessors, the awareness has truly grown that it is necessary to have a fraternal and attentive welcome, in love and in truth, of the baptized who have established a new relationship of cohabitation after the failure of the marital sacrament; in fact, these persons are by no means excommunicated — they are not excommunicated! — and they should absolutely not be treated as such: they are still a part of the Church.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke about this question, calling for careful discernment and wise pastoral accompaniment, knowing that there are no “simple solutions” (*Speech at the Seventh World Meeting of Families*, Milan, 2 June 2012, answer n. 5). Here the repeated call to Pastors to openly and consistently demonstrate the community’s willingness to welcome them and encourage them, so they may increasingly live and develop their membership in Christ and in the Church through prayer, by listening to the Word of God, by attending the liturgy, through the Christian education of their children, through charity and service to the poor, through the commitment to justice and peace.

The biblical icon of the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11-18) summarizes the mission that Jesus received from the Father: that of giving his life for the sheep. This attitude is also a model for the Church, which embraces her children as a mother who gives her life for them. “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open”.... No closed doors! No closed doors! “Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community”.... The Church “is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems” (Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 47).

In the same way all Christians are called to imitate the Good Shepherd. Especially Christian families can cooperate with Him by taking care of wounded families, accompanying them in the life of faith of the community. Each one must do his part in taking on the attitude of the Good Shepherd, who knows each one of his sheep and excludes no one from his infinite love!

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# CELEBRATION

General Audience  
August 12, 2015

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,*

Today we open a short series of reflections on the three dimensions that articulate, so to speak, the rhythm of family life: celebration, work, prayer.

Let's begin with celebration. Today we will speak about celebration. And let's say straight away that celebration is the invention of God. Let us recall the conclusion of the story of Creation in the Book of Genesis, which we have heard: "And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation" (2:2-3). God himself teaches us the importance of dedicating time to contemplate and enjoy what has been done well in work. I speak of work, naturally, not only in the sense of employment and profession, but in the broader sense: every action by which we as men and women cooperate in God's creative work.

Thus celebration is not lazily lounging in an armchair, or the euphoria of foolish escape. No, celebration is first and foremost a loving and grateful look at work well done; we celebrate work. You too, newlyweds, are celebrating the work of a fine period of engagement: and this is beautiful! It is the time to look at your children, or grandchildren, who are growing up, and to think: how beautiful! It's the time to look at our home, the friends we host, the community that surrounds us, and to think: what a good thing! God did this when he created the world. And he does so again and again, because God is always creating, even at this moment!

It may happen that a celebration occurs in difficult or sorrowful circumstances, and perhaps we celebrate "with a lump in our throat". Yet, even in these cases, we ask God for the strength not to empty it completely. You mothers and fathers really understand this: how many times, for love of your children, you are able to swallow your sorrows so as to let them

enjoy the celebration, to savour the good taste of life! There is so much love in this!

In the workplace too, at times — without neglecting our duties — we are able to let “infiltrate” a glint of celebration: a birthday, a wedding, a birth, just as a farewell or a new arrival..., it’s important. It’s important to celebrate. These are family moments in the inner workings of the productive machinery: it does us good!

A true moment of celebration brings work to a pause, and it is sacred, because it reminds men and women that they are made in the image of God, who is not a slave to work, but its Lord, and thus we too must never be slaves to work, but its “lords”. There is a commandment about this, a commandment which concerns everyone, without exception! Yet we know that there are millions of men and women and even children who are slaves to labour! At this time there are slaves, they are exploited, slaves to labour and this is against God and against the dignity of the human person! The obsession with economic profit and technical hyper-efficiency put the human rhythms of life at risk, for life has its human rhythms. The time for rest, especially on Sunday, is ordained for us so that we can enjoy what is not produced and not consumed, not bought and not sold. Instead we see that the ideology of profit and consumerism even wants to feed on celebration: it too is sometimes reduced to a “business”, to a way of making and spending money. But is this what we are working for? The greed of consumerism, which leads to waste, is an ugly virus which, among other things, makes us end up even more tired than before. It harms true labour and consumes life. Irregular rhythms of celebration often make victims of the young.

Ultimately, the time for celebration is sacred because God is there in a special way. Sunday Eucharist brings to the celebration every grace of Jesus Christ: his presence, his love, his sacrifice, his forming us into a community, his being with us.... And like this every reality receives its full meaning: work, family, the joys and trials of each day, even suffering and death; everything becomes transfigured by the grace of Christ.

The family is endowed with an extraordinary ability to understand, guide and sustain the authentic value of the time for celebration. How beautiful family celebrations are, they are beautiful! Sunday celebrations in

particular. It is surely no coincidence that celebrations which have room for the whole family are those that turn out the best!

Family life itself, regarded through the eyes of faith, looks better to us than the toils that cost us. It looks to us like a masterpiece of simplicity, beautiful precisely because it is not artificial, not false, but able to incorporate within itself all aspects of real life. It looks to us like something “very good”, as God says at the completion of the creation of man and woman (cf. Gen 1:31). Thus, celebration is a precious gift of God; a precious gift that God gave to the human family: let’s not spoil it!

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# WORK

General Audience  
August 19, 2015

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

After having reflected on celebration in the life of the family, today we will ponder a complimentary element, that of *work*. Both are part of God's creative design, celebration and work.

Work, as it is commonly said, is necessary for maintaining the family, for raising children, for ensuring a dignified life for our loved ones. In speaking about a serious, honest person, the most beautiful thing that can be said is: "he or she is a worker", one who works, one who in a community doesn't just live off of others. There are many Argentinians today, I see, and I will say what we say: "*No vive de arriba*" [Don't just live it up].

And indeed work, in its many forms, beginning with that in the home, is also concerned with the common good. Where does one learn this hard-working lifestyle? First of all, one learns it in the family. *The family teaches work through the example of the parents*: the father and the mother who work for the good of the family and of society.

In the Gospel, the Holy Family of Nazareth appears as a family of workers, and Jesus himself is called "son of a carpenter" (Mt 13:55) and even "the carpenter" (Mk 6:3). And St Paul would not fail to warn Christians: "If any one will not work, let him not eat" (2 Thess 3:10) — that's a good recipe for losing weight, you don't work, you don't eat! The Apostle explicitly refers to the false spiritualism of some who indeed live off their brothers and sisters "not doing any work" (2 Thess 3:11). Commitment to work and the spiritual life, in the Christian conception, are not at all at odds with one another. It is important to understand this properly! Prayer and work can and must be in harmony, as St Benedict teaches. The absence of work damages the spirit, just as the absence of prayer damages practical activity.

Work — I repeat, in its many forms — is proper to the human person. It expresses the dignity of being created in the image of God. Thus, it is said that work is sacred. And thus, managing one's occupation is a great human and social responsibility, which cannot be left in the hands of the few or

unladen onto some divinized “market”. Causing the loss of jobs means causing serious harm to society. It makes me sad to see people without work, who don’t find work and don’t have the dignity of bringing bread home. And I rejoice greatly when I see governments go to great lengths to find jobs and try to see to it that everyone has work. Work is sacred, work gives dignity to a family. We have to pray that no family is left without work.

Therefore, work too, like celebration, is part of God’s creative plan. In the Book of Genesis, the theme of the earth like a back yard, entrusted to the care and cultivation of man (2, 8:15), is anticipated by a very moving passage: “In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up — for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground” (2:4-6). It’s not romanticism, it is God’s revelation; and we are responsible for understanding and implementing it. The Encyclical *Laudato Si’*, which proposes an integral ecology, also contains this message: the beauty of the earth and the dignity of work were made to be united. The two go together: the earth becomes beautiful when it is worked by man. When work is detached from God’s covenant with man and woman, and it is separated from its spiritual qualities, when work is held hostage by the logic of profit alone and human life is disregarded, the degradation of the soul contaminates everything: even the air, water, grass, food ... the life of society is corrupted and the habitat breaks down. And the consequences fall most of all on the poor and on poor families. The modern organization of work sometimes shows a dangerous tendency to consider the family a burden, a weight, a liability for the productivity of labour. But let us ask ourselves: what productivity? And for whom? The so-called “smart city” is undoubtedly rich in services and organization; but, for example, it is often hostile to children and the elderly. At times those in charge are interested in managing individuals as a workforce, assembling and utilizing them or throwing them away on the basis of economic benefit. The family is a great workbench. When the organization of work holds it hostage, or even blocks its path, then we can be certain that human society has begun to work against itself!

In this circumstance, Christian families are posed a great challenge and a great mission. They bring to the field the foundations of God’s Creation: the identity is the bond between man and woman, the procreation of children, the work which harnesses the earth and renders the world habitable. The

loss of these foundations is a very serious matter and there are already too many cracks in the common home! It is not an easy task. Sometimes it may seem to family associations as though they are like David facing Goliath ... but we know how that challenge turned out! It takes faith and shrewdness. In this difficult moment of our history, may God grant us the ability to accept with joy and hope his call, the call to work to give dignity to ourselves and to our families.

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# PRAYER

General Audience  
August 26, 2015

*Dear Brother and Sisters, Good morning,*

After reflecting on how the family lives the time of celebration and that of work, let us now consider *the time of prayer*. The most frequent complaint of Christians is actually with regard to time: “I should pray more...; I would like to but often I have no time”. We hear it all the time. The regret is sincere, certainly, because the human heart always desires prayer, even without realizing it; and if it doesn’t find it, it is not at peace. But in order to find it, we need to cultivate in our hearts an “ardent” love for God, an affectionate love.

Let us ask a very simple question. It’s good to believe in God with all our heart, it’s good to hope that he will help us in difficulty, it’s good to feel obliged to give him thanks. All this is just; but *do we love the Lord, even a little?* Does the thought of God move us, amaze us, soften us?

Let us think of the wording of that great Commandment, which is the basis of all others: “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Dt 6:5; cf. Mt 22:37). The formula uses the intense language of love, addressing it to God. See, the spirit of prayer dwells here above all. And if it dwells here, *it dwells all the time* and never leaves. Are we able to think of God as the caress that keeps us alive, before which there is nothing? A caress from which nothing, not even death, can separate us? Or do we think of him only as the great Being, the Almighty who made all things, the Judge who monitors every action? All true, of course; but only when God is the affection above all our affections, does the meaning of these words find their fullness. Then we feel happy, even if a little confused, because he thinks of us and above all he loves us! Isn’t that impressive? Isn’t it impressive that God caresses us with the love of a father? It is so beautiful! He could have simply revealed himself as the Supreme Being, given his commandments and waited for the results. Instead, God did and does infinitely more than this. He accompanies us on life’s journey, he protects us, he loves us.

If love for God does not light the fire, the spirit of prayer will not warm time. We may also multiply our words, “as the pagans do”, says Jesus; or even

perform our rituals, “as the pharisees do” (cf. Mt 6:5,7). A heart which is home to affection for God makes a prayer of an unspoken thought, or an invocation before a holy image, or a kiss blown to the Church. It’s beautiful when mothers teach their little children to blow kisses to Jesus or to Our Lady. What tenderness there is in this! In that moment the child’s heart is transformed into a place of prayer. And it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Let us never forget to ask for this gift for each one of us! Because the Spirit of God has that special way of saying in our heart “Abba” — “Father”. It teaches us to say “Father” just as Jesus said it, a way that we can never find on our own (cf. Gal 4:6). *It is in the family that one learns to ask for and appreciate this gift of the Spirit.* If one learns to say it with the same spontaneity with which one learns “father” and “mother,” one has learnt it forever. When this happens, the time of the whole of family life is enveloped in the womb of God’s love, and seeks spontaneously the time of prayer.

We know well that family time is a complicated and crowded time, busy and preoccupied. There is always little, there is never enough, there are so many things to do. One who has a family soon learns to solve an equation that not even the great mathematicians know how to solve: within 24 hours they make twice that many! There are mothers and fathers who could win the Nobel Prize for this. Out of 24 hours they make 48: I don’t know how they do it but they get on and do it! There is so much work in a family!

The spirit of prayer gives time back to God, it steps away from the obsession of a life that is always lacking time, it rediscovers the peace of necessary things, and discovers the joy of unexpected gifts. Two good guides for this are the sisters Martha and Mary, spoken of in the Gospel we have just heard; they learned from God the harmony of family rhythms: the beauty of celebration, the serenity of work, the spirit of prayer (cf. Lk 10:38-42). The visit of Jesus, whom they loved, was their celebration. However, one day Martha learned that the work of hospitality, though important, is not everything, but that listening to the Lord, as Mary did, was the really essential thing, the “best kind” of time. Prayer flows from listening to Jesus, from reading the Gospel. Do not forget to read a passage of the Gospel every day. Prayer flows from closeness with the Word of God. Is there this closeness in our family? Do we have the Gospel at home? Do we open it sometimes to read it together? Do we meditate on it while reciting the Rosary? The Gospel read and meditated on as a family is like good bread that nourishes everyone’s heart. In the morning and in the evening, and when we sit at the table, we learn to say together a prayer with great simplicity: it is Jesus who comes among us, as he was with the family of

Martha, Mary and Lazarus. There is something that is very close to my heart; because I have seen it in the city: there are children who have not learned to make the Sign of the Cross! But you, mother, father, teach your child to pray, to make the Sign of the Cross: this is a lovely task for mothers and fathers!

In the prayer of the family, in its intense moments and in its difficult seasons, we are entrusted to one another, so that each one of us in the family may be protected by the love of God.

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# EVANGELIZATION

General Audience  
September 2, 2015

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,*

In this last stage on our journey of catecheses on the family, let us broaden our gaze to the way in which it lives out its responsibility to *communicate the faith*, to transmit the faith, both inside and out.

At first, what may come to mind are several Gospel expressions that seem to oppose the bonds of family and the following of Christ. For example, the strong words that we all know and we all have heard: “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:37-38).

Naturally, by this Jesus doesn't intend to cancel out the fourth commandment, which importantly is the first commandment directed to people. The first three are in relation to God, this one is directed at people. Nor can we think that, after performing his miracle for the newlyweds in Cana, after consecrating the marriage bond between man and woman, after restoring sons and daughters to the life of the family, would the Lord ask us to be insensitive to these bonds! This is not the explanation. On the contrary, when Jesus affirms the primacy of faith in God, he finds no paragon more fitting than that of familial love. Moreover, these same familial bonds, within the experience of the faith and love of God, are transformed, they become “filled” with greater meaning and become capable of *going beyond themselves*, to create a fatherhood and motherhood, and to welcome as brothers and sisters also those who are in the margins of every bond. One day, to those who told him that his mother and brothers were outside looking for him, Jesus responds, pointing to his disciples: “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mk 3:34-35).

Emotional maturity can't be bought or sold and it is the greatest endowment of the familial genius. It is precisely in the family where we learn to grow in the atmosphere of emotional maturity. Its “grammar” is learned there, otherwise it is very difficult to learn it. And it is through this language that God makes us all understand.

The invitation to place family ties within the context of obedience to the faith and to the covenant with the Lord does not demean them; on the contrary it protects them, frees them from selfishness, protects them from degradation, rescues them for life which knows no death. A familial style that flows through human relationships *is a blessing for the peoples*: it brings hope back to the land. When familial affections are allowed to convert to the Gospel witness, they become capable of inconceivable things, which make tangible the works of God, those works which God performs in history, such as those which Jesus did for the men, women and children he encountered. Just one smile miraculously rising out of the desperation of an abandoned child, who is beginning to live again, explains God's action in the world better than a thousand theological treatises. One man and one woman, capable of risking and sacrificing themselves for another's child and not just for their own, explains the matters of love better than any scientist. And wherever there are such familial affections, there too arise these heartfelt gestures that are more eloquent than words. The gesture of love.... This makes us think.

The family that responds to the call of Jesus *consigns the stewardship of the world back to the covenant of man and woman with God*. Imagine developing this testimony today. Let us imagine that the helm of history (of society, of the economy, of politics) is entrusted — finally! — to the covenant of man and woman, in order that they tend to it with their gaze directed at the generations to come. The themes of earth and home, of the economy and of work, would sing a very different tune!

If we were — beginning with the Church — to centre our attention on the family that listens and practices the Word of God, we would become like the good wine of the wedding feast of Cana, we would ferment like the leaven of God!

Indeed, the family's covenant with God is called today to counteract the community desertification of the modern city. But the lack of love and smiling has turned our cities into deserts. So much entertainment, so many things for wasting time, for making laughter, but love is lacking. The smile of a family can overcome this desertification of our cities. This is the victory of family love. No economic and political engineering can substitute this contribution of families. The Babel project builds lifeless skyscrapers. The Spirit of God instead makes the desert fruitful (cf. Is 32:15). We must come out of the towers and from the armoured vaults of the elite, to again spend

time in the homes and open spaces of the multitudes, open to the love of families.

The communion of charisms — those bestowed in the Sacrament of Marriage and those granted at consecration through the Kingdom of God — is intended to transform the Church into a fully familial place through the encounter with God. Let us go forth on this path, let us not lose hope. Wherever there is a loving family, that family with its witness of love is capable of warming the heart of an entire city.

Pray for me, let us pray for one another, that we become capable of recognizing and supporting the visits of God. The Spirit will bring happy disarray to Christian families, and the city of man will rise from its depression.

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# COMMUNITY

General Audience  
September 9, 2015

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today I would like to focus our attention on *the connection between the family and the Christian community*. This bond is natural, so to speak, because the Church is a spiritual family and the family is the domestic Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 9).

The Christian community is the home of those who believe in Jesus as the font of brotherhood among all human beings. The Church journeys among her people, in the history of men and women, of fathers and mothers, of sons and daughters: this is the history that matters to the Lord. The great events of worldly powers are written in history books, and there they will remain. But the history of human feelings is written directly in the heart of God; and that is the history that will endure for eternity. This is where life and faith are located. The family is the place of our irreplaceable and indelible initiation into this history... into this history of life in its fullness, which will culminate in heaven with the contemplation of God for all eternity, but which begins in the family! And that is why the family is so important.

The Son of God learned the human story in this way, and he walked in it to the very end (cf. Heb 2:18; 5:8). It is beautiful to contemplate Jesus and the signs of this bond! He was born into a family and there “he learned about the world”: one shop, four homes or so, a tiny village. Yet, living for 30 years there, Jesus absorbed the human condition, welcoming it in his communion with the Father and in his apostolic mission. Then, when he left Nazareth and began his public ministry, Jesus formed around him a community, an “*assembly*”, that is, a con-vocation of people. This is the meaning of the word “church”.

In the Gospels, the assembly of Jesus takes the form of a family and of a *hospitable family*, not an exclusive, closed sect: there we find Peter and John, but also the hungry and the thirsty, the stranger and the persecuted, the sinner and the tax collector, the pharisee and the multitude. And Jesus never stops accepting and speaking to everyone, even those who no longer

expect to encounter God in this life. That is an important lesson for the Church! The disciples were chosen to care for this assembly, for this family of God's guests.

In order to maintain this reality of the assembly of Jesus in today's situation, it is indispensable to renew the covenant between the family and the Christian community. We could say that *the family and the parish* are the two places where the communion of love, which finds its ultimate source in God, takes place. A Church truly according to the Gospel cannot but take the form of a *hospitable home*, with its doors open, always. Churches, parishes, institutions with closed doors must never be called churches, they should be called museums!

And today, this covenant is crucial. "Against the ideological, financial and political 'centres of power', we place our hopes in these centres of evangelizing love, rich in human warmth, based on solidarity and participation" (Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Teachings of J.M. Bergoglio-Pope Francis on the Family and Life 1999-2014*, LEV 2014, 189), and also on forgiveness among us.

Strengthening the bond between the family and the Christian community today is indispensable and urgent. Certainly, there is need for generous faith in order to rediscover the understanding and courage to renew this covenant. Families at times draw back, saying that they cannot live up to this: "Father, we are a poor family and even a little worse for the wear", "We aren't able", "We already have so many problems at home", "We don't have the strength". This is true. But no one is worthy, no one is able to live up to it, no one has the strength! Without the grace of God, we can do nothing. Everything is given to us, given freely! And the Lord never comes into a new family without working some miracle. Let us remember what he did at the wedding of Cana! Yes, if we place ourselves in his hands, the Lord will work miracles for us — but they are miracles of every day life! — when the Lord is there, present in the family.

Naturally, the Christian community must also do its part. For example, overcoming attitudes that give too much advice or are too managerial, in order to foster interpersonal dialogue and awareness and mutual esteem. May families take the initiative and feel the responsibility for bringing their precious gifts to the community. We must all be aware that the Christian faith is played on an open field of life shared with all. The family and the

parish must work the miracle of a more communal life for the whole of society.

At Cana, there was the Mother of Jesus, the “mother of good counsel”. Let us listen to her words: “Do whatever he tells you” (cf. Jn 2:5). Dear families, dear parish communities, let us allow ourselves to be inspired by this Mother, let us do whatever Jesus tells us and we will find the source of all miracles, of every day miracles! Thank you!

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# NATIONS (CONCLUSION)

General Audience  
September 16, 2015

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

This is our concluding reflection on marriage and the family. We are at the threshold of two beautiful and challenging events, which are directly linked to this important theme: The World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia and the Synod of Bishops here in Rome. Both are of world-wide significance, corresponding to the universal dimension of Christianity as well as the *universal scope of what is fundamental and irreplaceable in the human community, namely, the family.*

The current transition in civilization seems to be marked by the long-lasting effects of a society governed by economic technocracy. This subordination of ethics to the logic of profit commands substantial resources and the widespread support of the media. In this context, *a new covenant between man and woman* has become not only necessary, but crucial *for emancipating humanity from the colonization of money.* This covenant should once again guide politics, the economy and civil coexistence! It decides the habitability of the earth, the transmission of love for life, the bonds of memory and hope.

In this covenant, the familial-conjugal union of man and woman is the generative grammar, the “golden knot”, we might say. The faith draws it from the wisdom of the creation of God, who has *entrusted to the family*, not the care of intimacy as an end in itself, but rather the exciting *project of making the world “domestic”.* At the beginning there was the family, at the root of this world culture that saves us... saves us from many, many attacks, from so much destruction, from so many “colonizations”, like that of money or of the ideologies that threaten so much of the world. The family is the basis of our defense!

We have taken our essential inspiration for these brief Wednesday reflections on the family from the biblical Word of creation. From this Word we can and we must once again draw anew abundantly and deeply. A great and very exciting undertaking awaits us. God’s creation is not a mere philosophical premise: it is the universal horizon of life and of faith! There is no divine plan other than creation and its salvation. It is for the salvation

of creatures — of every creature — that God became man: “for us men and for our salvation”, as the Creed says. And the Risen Jesus is “the first-born of all creation” (Col 1:15).

The created world was entrusted to man and to woman: what takes place between them marks everything. Their rejection of God’s blessing fatally leads them to a delirium of omnipotence that ruins everything. That is what we call “original sin”. And we all bear the inheritance of this disease from birth.

Nevertheless, we are not cursed, nor are we abandoned to ourselves. The ancient account of God’s first love for man and woman already had fire written into its pages in this regard! “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed” (Gen 3:15a). These are the words God directs to the serpent deceiver, the serpent charmer! Through these words God marks woman with a protective barrier against evil, to which she can turn — if she wants — in every generation. It means that *woman carries within her a secret and a special blessing*, to defend His creation from the evil one! Like the Woman in the book of Revelations, who hastens to hide the child from the Dragon. And God shields her (cf. Rev 12:6).

Think what depth is opened here! There exist many stereotypes, some rather offensive, about the woman temptress who inspires evil. On the contrary, there is room for a theology of woman worthy of this blessing of God for her and for every generation!

The merciful *protection of God for man and woman*, in every case, never fails either of them. Let us not forget this! The symbolic language of the Bible tells us that before exiling them from the Garden of Eden, God made for man and woman garments of skins, and clothed them (cf. Gn 3:21). This act of tenderness means that in the painful consequences of our sin, God does not want us to be left naked and abandoned to our fate as sinners.

This divine tenderness, this care for us, we see incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, son of God “born of woman” (Gal 4:4). And St Paul says ever and again: “while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Christ, born of woman, of a woman. That is God’s gentle caress upon our wounds, upon our errors, upon our sins. God loves us as we are and desires to lead us forward in this plan, and woman is the stronger one who carries this plan forward.

The promise God makes to man and woman, at the start of history, extends to all human beings, until the end of time. If we have enough faith, *the families of the all the nations of the earth will recognize themselves in this blessing*. In every way, all those who feel moved by this vision, whatever people, nation or religion to which they may belong, let them take up the journey with us. He and she will be our brother and sister, without having to proselytize them. Let us walk together in this blessing and in the plan of God to make us all brothers and sisters in the life of a world which moves forward and which is born from the family, from the union of man and woman.

May God bless you, families from every corner of the earth! May God bless you all!

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