

Family - 32. Conviviality

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning! Today we will reflect upon a distinctive quality of family life which is learned in the very first years of life: *conviviality*, in other words the attitude of sharing life's goods and being happy to be able to do so. Sharing and knowing how to share is a precious virtue! Its symbol, its "icon", is the family gathered around the dinner table. The sharing of meals — and thus, in addition to food, also of affection, of stories, of events — is a common experience. When there is a celebration, a birthday, an anniversary, we gather around the table. In some cultures it is also customary to do so at times of bereavement, to be close to those who are suffering the loss of a family member. Conviviality is a sure barometer for measuring the health of relationships: if in a family something has gone awry, or there is some hidden wound, it is immediately understood at the table. A family that hardly ever eats together, or that does not talk at the table but watches television, or looks at a smartphone, is a "barely familial" family. When children are engrossed with a computer at the table, or a mobile phone, and do not talk to each other, this is not a family, it is like a boarding house. Christianity has a special gift for conviviality, everyone knows this. The Lord Jesus gladly taught at the table, and sometimes portrayed the Kingdom of God as a festive banquet. Jesus also chose meal time to consign to his disciples his spiritual testament — he did so at supper — embodied in the memorial gesture of his Sacrifice: the gift of his Body and of his Blood as salvific Food and Drink, which nourish true and lasting love. In this perspective we can rightly say that the family is "at home" at Mass, precisely because it brings to the Eucharist its own experience of conviviality and opens it up to the grace of universal conviviality, to God's love for the world. By partaking of the Eucharist, the family, purified of the temptation to close in on itself, is strengthened in love and fidelity, and broadens the borders of its fraternity in accordance with the heart of Christ. In our time, marked by so much closure and by too many walls, conviviality, created by the family and expanded by the Eucharist, becomes crucial. The Eucharist and the families it nourishes can overcome closure and build bridges of acceptance and charity. Yes, the Eucharist of a Church of families, capable of restoring to the community the effective leaven of conviviality and mutual hospitality, is a school of human inclusion that does not fear confrontation! There are no little ones, orphans, defenseless, wounded and disappointed, desperate and abandoned, whom the eucharistic conviviality of the family cannot nourish, refresh, protect and harbor. Recalling family virtues helps us to understand. We too have known and still know, what miracles can happen when a mother fixes her gaze and attention, protection and care on the children of others, in addition to her own. Until recently, one mother was enough for all the children in the courtyard! Indeed, we are well aware what strength is acquired by a people whose fathers are ready to go to protect everyone's children, because they consider children an undivided gift, that they are happy and proud to protect. Today many social contexts create obstacles to familial conviviality. It's true, today it is not easy. We have to find a way to recover it. At the table we talk, at the table we listen. No silence, that silence that is not the silence of monks, but the silence of selfishness, where each one is focused on himself, or the television, or the computer ... and does not talk. No, not silence. It is important to recover that familial conviviality and adapt it to the times. Conviviality seems to have become something that is bought and sold, but it is something else this way. Food does not always represent a fair sharing of goods, that can reach those who have neither bread nor affection. In wealthy countries we are prompted to purchase an excess of food, and now we need to rectify that once again. And this meaningless "business" diverts our attention from the true hunger of the body and of the soul. When there is no conviviality there is selfishness, each one thinks of him- or herself. All the more so because advertising has channeled people to yearn for snacks and desire sweets. Meanwhile so many, too many brothers and sisters do not have access to the table. It is rather shameful! Let us look to the mystery of the Eucharistic Banquet. The Lord breaks his Body and pours out his Blood for all. Truly no division can withstand this Sacrifice of communion; only the attitude of falsehood, of complicity with the evil one can exclude one from it. No other indefensible gap can withstand the power of this broken Bread and this shed Blood, the Sacrament of the One Body of the Lord. The living and vital covenant of Christian families, which precedes, supports and embraces in the dynamism of its hospitality the toil and joy every day and cooperates with the grace of the Eucharist, which is able to create communion ever anew with its power which includes and saves. Precisely in this way the Christian family will show the breadth of its true horizon, which is the horizon of the Church, Mother of all mankind, of all the abandoned and the excluded, in all peoples.

Let us pray that this familial conviviality may grow and mature in the time of grace of the forthcoming Jubilee of Mercy.

Family - 33. The Welcoming Door

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning! With this reflection we arrive at the threshold of the Jubilee, it's close. The door is before us, not just the Holy Door, but another: the great door of the Mercy of God — and that is a beautiful door! — which embraces our penance, offering the grace of his forgiveness. The door is generously open, it takes a little courage on our part to cross the threshold. Each of us has burdensome things within ourselves. We are all sinners! Let us take advantage of this coming moment and cross the threshold of this mercy of God who never tires of forgiving, never tires of waiting for us! He watches us, he is always beside us. Take heart! Let us enter through this door! From the Synod of Bishops, which we celebrated in the month of October, all families and the entire Church received great encouragement to meet at the threshold of this open door. The Church was encouraged to open her doors, to go out with the Lord to meet her sons and daughters on the path, at times uncertain, at times dismayed, in these difficult times. Christian families in particular were encouraged to open the door to the Lord who is waiting to enter, bringing his blessing and his friendship. And as the door of God's mercy is always open, so too must the doors of our churches, our communities, our parishes, our institutions, our dioceses, be open, because this is how we can all go out to bring this mercy of God. The Jubilee signifies the great door of the mercy of God but also the small doors of our churches, open to allow the entrance of the Lord — or often the exit of the Lord — who is a prisoner of our structures, of our selfishness and of so many things. The Lord never forces the door open; he too asks permission to enter. The Book of Revelation says: "I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (3:20). Let us imagine the Lord knocking at the door of our heart! In the last great vision of the Book of Revelation, the City of God is prophesied like this: "its gates shall never be shut by day", which means for ever, because "there shall be no night there" (21:25). There are places in the world in which doors are not locked, there still are. But there are so many where armoured doors have become the norm. We must not give in to the idea that we must apply this system to our whole life, to the life of the family, of this city, of society, much less to the life of the Church. That would be terrible! An inhospitable Church, like a family closed off within itself, mortifies the Gospel and withers the world. No armoured doors in the Church, none! Completely open! The symbolic management of "doors" — of thresholds, of passages, of borders — has become crucial. The door must protect, of course, but not reject. The door must not be forced but on the contrary, one asks permission, because hospitality shines in the freedom of welcoming, and dims in the arrogance of invasion. The door is frequently opened, in order to see if there is someone waiting outside, perhaps without the courage nor, perhaps, the strength to knock. How many people have lost faith, do not have the courage to knock at the door of our Christian heart, at the doors of our churches.... And they are there, they don't have the courage, we have taken away trust: please, may this never happen. A door says many things about the house, and also about the Church. Tending the door requires careful discernment and, at the same time, must inspire great faith. I would like to pay a word of gratitude to all porters: of our condominiums, of civil institutions, of the Churches themselves. Often a porter's acumen and courtesy can offer an image of humanity and of welcome to the entire house, right from the entrance. There is something to be learned from these men and women, who are watchmen at the places of encounter and welcome in the city of man! To all of you watchmen of so many doors, be they residential doors or church doors, many thanks! Always with a smile, always demonstrating the acceptance of that house, of that Church, so people feel happy and welcomed in that place. In truth, we are well aware that we too are watchmen and servants of the Door of God, and what is the name of the door of God? Jesus! He lights up all of life's doors for us, including those of our birth and of our death. He himself affirmed it: "I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (Jn 10:9). Jesus is the door that lets us go in and out. Because God's sheepfold is a refuge, it isn't a prison! The house of God is a refuge, it isn't a prison, and the door is called Jesus! If the door is closed, we say: "Lord, open the door!". Jesus is the door and lets us go in and out. Those who try to avoid the door are thieves: it's curious, thieves always try to enter by another way, by the window, by the roof, but they avoid the door, because they have evil intentions, and they sneak into the sheepfold in order to deceive the sheep and take advantage of them. We must enter through the door and listen to Jesus' voice: if we hear the tone of his voice, we are certain, we are saved. We can go in without fear and go out without danger. In this beautiful discourse Jesus also speaks of the gatekeeper, whose task is opening to the Good Shepherd (cf. Jn 10:2). If the gatekeeper hears the Shepherd's voice, he opens and lets in all of the sheep that the Shepherd brings, all of them, including those lost in the wood, whom the Good Shepherd went to get back. The sheep are not chosen by the gatekeeper, they are not chosen by the parish secretary or parish administrator; the sheep are all called, they are chosen by the Good Shepherd. The gatekeeper — he too — obeys the Shepherd's voice. Thus, we can well say that we must be like that gatekeeper. The Church is the gatekeeper of the house of the Lord, she is not the proprietor of the Lord's house.

The Holy Family of Nazareth knows just what an open or closed door means, for those expecting a child, for those who have no shelter, for those who need to escape danger. Christian families make the threshold of their homes a great sign of the Door of the mercy and welcome of God. It is precisely how the Church will have to be recognized, in every corner of the earth: as the watchman of a God who knocks, as the welcome of a God who does not close the door in your face with the excuse that you are not part of the household. With this spirit let us approach the Jubilee: there will be the Holy Door, but there is the door of the great mercy of God. May there also be the door of our heart for all to receive God's forgiveness and to give, in our turn, our forgiveness, welcoming all those who knock at our door.