

The family - 23. Work

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 labor. 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.

The family - 24. Prayer

Dear Brothers 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.