

## The family - 26.Community

*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!

## The family - 25. Evangelization

*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.