

## The family - 27. Nations

*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 worldwide 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 bother 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!

## Family - 28. The family spirit

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!* Just a few days ago the Synod of Bishops opened on the theme: "The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world". The family that walks in the way of the Lord is fundamental to the witness of God's love and therefore deserves all the dedication the Church is capable of. The Synod is called to interpret this concern and this attention of the Church for the present. Let us accompany the entire path of the Synod first of all with our prayer and our interest. In this period the catecheses reflection will draw inspiration from certain aspects of the relationship — which we might well call indissoluble! — between the Church and the family, whose horizon is open to the good of the entire Christian community. An attentive look at the everyday life of today's men and women immediately shows the omnipresent need for a healthy injection of "family spirit". Indeed, the form of the relationship — civil, economic, juridical, professional, civic — seems quite rational, formal, organized, but also very "dehydrated", arid, anonymous. At times it becomes unbearable. While seeking to be inclusive in its forms, in reality it abandons more and more people to loneliness and discards them. This is why, for the whole of society, the family opens a much more human prospect: it opens its sons and daughters' eyes — and not only sight but also all the other senses — to life, representing a vision of the human relationship built on the free covenant of love. The family posits the need for the bonds of loyalty, sincerity, trust, cooperation and respect. It encourages its members to plan an inhabitable world and belief in trusting relationships, even in difficult conditions; it teaches them to honour one's word, to respect each individual, to share within one's personal limitations and those of others. We are all aware of the irreplaceable attention of the family for the littlest, most vulnerable, most wounded, and even the most debilitated members, in living their lives. In society, those who practice these attitudes have assimilated them from the family spirit, certainly not through competition and the desire for self-fulfillment. Well, although knowing all this, the family is not accorded due importance — or recognition, or support — in the political and economic organization of contemporary society. Furthermore, I would like to say: not only does the family not receive adequate recognition, but it no longer engenders learning! At times it might be said that, with all its science, its technology, modern society is no longer able to translate this knowledge into better forms of civil coexistence. Not only is the organization of ordinary life increasingly thwarted by a bureaucracy completely irrelevant to fundamental human bonds but, even social and political customs often show signs of degradation — aggressiveness, vulgarity, contempt — which are well below the threshold of even a minimal family education. In such circumstances, the opposite extremes of this abasement of relationships — namely technocratic obtuseness and amoral familism — join and incite each other. This is a paradox.

The Church identifies today, at this exact point, the historical meaning of her mission with regard to the family and to the authentic family spirit: beginning from a careful review of life, which examines itself. One could say that the "family spirit" is a constitutional charter for the Church: this is how Christianity must appear, and this is how it must be. It is written in bold characters: "you who were far off" — St Paul says — [...] are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:17, 19). The Church is and must be the family of God.

Jesus, when he called Peter to follow him, told him that he would make him a "fisher of men"; and for this reason a new type of net is needed. We should say that today families are one of the most important nets for the mission of Peter and of the Church. This is not a net that takes one prisoner! On the contrary, it frees people from the cruel waters of abandonment and indifference, which drown many human beings in the sea of loneliness and indifference. Families know well the feeling of dignity conferred by being sons and daughters and not slaves, nor strangers, not just a number on an identity card.

From here, from the family, Jesus resumes his passage among human beings to persuade them that God has not forgotten them. From here Peter draws the strength for his ministry. From here the Church, obeying the Teacher's word, puts out to fish in the deep waters, certain that, if she does so, the catch will be miraculous. May the enthusiasm of the Synod Fathers, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, foster the impetus of a Church that abandons the old nets and puts out again to fish, trusting in the word of her Lord. Let us pray earnestly for this! Christ, after all, promised and encourages us: even if bad fathers do not deny their hungry children bread, how much more will God give the Spirit to those who — imperfect as they are — ask him with fervent persistence (cf. Lk 11:9-13)!