

Family - 30. Fidelity to the promise of love

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning! In the last meditation we reflected on the important promises that parents make to children, from when they are first thought of in love and conceived in the womb. We could add that, upon closer examination, the entire family reality is founded on that promise. Consider this carefully: the family identity is founded on the promise. One could say that the family lives on the promise of love and fidelity that a man and a woman make to one another. This includes the commitment to welcome and raise their children; but it is also carried out in caring for elderly parents, in protecting and tending to the weakest members of the family, in helping each other develop their own qualities and accept their own limitations. The conjugal promise expands so as to share in the joys and sorrows of all fathers, mothers, children, with generous openness with regard to human coexistence and to the common good. A family that is closed in on itself is like a contradiction, a mortification of the promise that gave birth to it and enables it to live. Never forget: the identity of a family is always a promise that expands, and it expands to the whole family and also to all of humanity. In our time, honouring fidelity to the promise of family life appears to be very much weakened. On the one hand, because a misunderstood right to seek one's own satisfaction, at all costs and in any relationship, is exalted as a nonnegotiable principle of freedom. On the other hand, because the constraints of relational life and commitment for the common good are entrusted exclusively to the requirements of law. But in reality, no one wants to be loved only for their assets or by constraint. Love, as well as friendship, owe their strength and their beauty to this very fact: that they engender a bond without taking away freedom. Love is free, the promise of the family is free, and this is its beauty. Without freedom there is no friendship, without liberty there is no love, without free consent there is no marriage. Thus, liberty and fidelity do not oppose one another, but rather, they support each other, both in interpersonal and social relationships. Indeed, let us consider the damage they cause, in the culture of global communication, the escalation of unkept promises, in various fields, and the condonation of infidelity to the word given and to commitments undertaken! Yes, dear brothers and sisters, fidelity is a promise of commitment that is self-fulfilling, growing in free obedience to the word given. Fidelity is a form of trust that "wants" to be truly shared, and a hope that "wants" to be cultivated together. Speaking of fidelity it comes to mind what our elderly folk, our grandparents, tell us: 'In those times, when one made an accord, a handshake was enough, because there was fidelity to promises made. And this too, which is a social fact, has its origin in the family, in a man or woman's handshake, in order to go forward together, for their whole life. Faithfulness to promises is a true masterpiece of humanity! If we look at its bold beauty, we are frightened, but if we disregard its courageous tenacity, we are lost. No relationship of love — no friendship, no form of loving, no happiness in the common good — reaches the height of our desire and of our hope, if this miracle does not come to dwell in the soul. I say "miracle" because the power and persuasion of fidelity, in spite of everything, do not end up enchanting us or astonishing us. Honoring the word given, fidelity to the promise, cannot be bought and sold. They cannot be compelled by force or shielded without sacrifice. No other school can teach the truth of love, if the family does not do it. No law can impose the beauty and legacy of this treasure of human dignity, if the personal bond between love and procreation is not inscribed in our flesh. Brothers and sisters, it is necessary to restore social honour to the fidelity of love: restore social honor to the fidelity of love! It is necessary to remove from concealment the daily miracle of millions of men and women who repristinates its foundation in the family, of which every society lives without being able to guarantee it in any other way. It is no accident that this principle of fidelity to the promise of love and of life is written in God's creation as a perennial blessing, to which the world is entrusted. If St. Paul could affirm that in the familial bond there is also mysteriously revealed a decisive truth for the bond of the Lord and the Church, meaning that the Church herself finds here a blessing to safeguard and from which to always learn, even before teaching it and regulating it. Our fidelity to the promise is always entrusted to the grace and mercy of God. Love for the human family, for better or for worse, is a point of honour for the Church! May God allow us to be worthy of this promise. Let us also pray for the Synod Fathers: may the Lord bless their work, performed with creative fidelity, with the confidence that He, first, the Lord — He first! — is faithful to his promises. Thank you.

Family - 31. Forgive us our debts

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning! The Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which concluded only recently, reflected in depth on the vocation and the mission of the family in the life of the Church and of contemporary society. It was an event of grace. At the end the Synod Fathers consigned to me the text with their conclusions. I wanted this text to be published, so that all may assist in the work in which we engaged for two years. This is not the moment to analyze these conclusions, on which I too must meditate. In the meantime, however, life does not stand still, in particular the life of families does not stop! You, dear families, are always journeying and you are already continually writing the beauty of the Gospel of the family on the pages of real life. In a world which is sometimes barren of life and love, you speak each day of the great gifts that marriage and family are. Today, I would like to emphasize this aspect: that the family is a great *training ground for the mutual giving and forgiving* without which no love can last for long. Without self-giving and seeking forgiveness love does not last, it does not endure. In the prayer that he himself taught us — namely the Our Father — Jesus makes us ask the Father: “*Forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors*”. And at the end he states: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt 6:12, 14-15). One cannot live without seeking forgiveness, or at least, one cannot live at peace, especially in the family. We wrong one another every day. We must take into account these mistakes, due to our frailty and our selfishness. However, what we are asked to do is to promptly heal the wounds that we cause, to immediately reweave the bonds that break within the family. If we wait too long, everything becomes more difficult. There is a simple secret to healing wounds and to avoiding recriminations. It is this: do not let the day end without apologizing, without making peace between husband and wife, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters... between daughters- and mothers-in-law! If we learn to apologize promptly and to give each other mutual forgiveness, the wounds heal, the marriage grows stronger, and the family becomes an increasingly stronger home, which withstands the shocks of our smaller or greater misdeeds. This is why there is no need for a long speech, as a caress is enough: one caress and everything is over and one can start afresh. But do not end the day at war! If we learn to live this way in the family, we can also do so outside, wherever we may be. It is easy to be skeptical about this. Many people — even Christians — think it is an exaggeration. It is said: yes, they are fine words, but it is impossible to put them into practice. But thanks be to God it is not so. Indeed, it is precisely in receiving forgiveness from God that we in turn are capable of forgiving others. This is why Jesus has us repeat these words each time we recite the Our Father prayer, that is, every day. And it is crucial that, in a sometimes pitiless society, there be places, such as the family, in which to learn to forgive one another. The Synod also rekindled our hope in this regard: namely, that the capacity to forgive and to seek forgiveness is part of the vocation and the mission of the family. Practicing forgiveness not only saves families from divisiveness, but makes them capable of helping society to be less heartless and less cruel. Yes, each act of forgiveness fixes the cracks in the house and strengthens its walls. The Church, dear families, is always beside you to help you build your house on the rock that Jesus spoke of. Let us not forget these words which immediately preceded the parable of the house: “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”. And he adds: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name...?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you’” (Mt 7:21-23). It is undoubtedly a strong word, with the purpose of shaking us and calling us to convert. I assure you, dear families, that if you are capable of walking ever more firmly on the path of the Beatitudes, learning and teaching to mutually forgive each other, the capacity to bear witness to the renewing power of God’s forgiveness will grow in the whole of the great family of the Church. Conversely, we may even make beautiful sermons, and perhaps drive away some demons, but in the end the Lord will not recognize us as his disciples, because we did not have the capacity to forgive and ask others to forgive us! Truly Christian families can do a great deal for today’s society, and also for the Church. For this reason I hope that in the Jubilee of Mercy families may rediscover the treasure of mutual forgiveness. Let us pray that families may be ever more capable of experiencing and building practical paths of reconciliation, where no one feels abandoned to the weight of his debts. With this intention, let us say together: “Our Father, forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors”. [Let us say it together: “Our Father, forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors”].