

Catecheses on the Family

At many Wednesday general audiences during 2015, Pope Francis dedicated his catechesis to the topic of the family. He reflected on the family in the light of scripture and tradition, social realities and challenges, current roles and future possibilities. Out of more than 30 talks, here is a selection highlighting some main features of the Holy Father's teaching on the family.

"The Incarnation of the Son of God opens a new beginning in the universal history of man and woman. And this new beginning happens within a family, in Nazareth. Jesus was born in a family. (...) God chose to come into the world in a human family, which He himself formed." (17.12.2014)

"There is a close link between the hope of a people and the harmony among generations. The joy of children causes the parents' hearts to beat and reopens the future. Children are the joy of the family and of society. They are not a question of reproductive biology, nor one of the many ways to fulfill oneself, much less a possession of their parents.... No. Children are a gift, they are a gift: understood? Children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable; and at the same time unmistakably linked to his/her roots." (11.2.2015)

"In the family, among siblings, human coexistence is learned, how one must live in society. Perhaps we are not always aware of it, but the family itself introduces fraternity into the world!" (18.2.2015) "First of all children remind us that we all, in the first years of life, were completely dependent upon the care and benevolence of others. The Son of God was not spared this stage. It is the mystery that we contemplate every year at Christmas. The Nativity Scene is the icon which communicates this reality in the simplest and most direct way." (18.3.2015)

"Man and woman are the image and likeness of God. This tells us that it is not man alone who is the image of God or woman alone who is the image of God, but man and woman as a couple who are the image of God." (15.4.2015) "Sin generates distrust and division between man and woman. Their relationship will be undermined by a thousand forms of abuse and subjugation, misleading seduction and humiliating ignorance, even the most dramatic and violent kind. And history bears the scar. Let us think, for example, of those negative excesses of patriarchal cultures. Think of the many forms of male dominance whereby the woman was considered second class. Think of the exploitation and the commercialization of the female body in the current media culture. And let us also think of the recent epidemic of distrust, skepticism, and even hostility that is spreading in our culture — in particular an understandable distrust from women — regarding a covenant between man and woman that is capable, at the same time, of refining the intimacy of communion and of guarding the dignity of difference.

If we do not find a surge of respect for this covenant, capable of protecting new generations from distrust and indifference, children will come into the world ever more uprooted from the mother's womb. The social devaluation for the stable and generative alliance between man and woman is certainly a loss for everyone. We must return marriage and the family to the place of honour!" (22.4.2015)

"The family tops all the indices of wellbeing among young people; but, fearing mistakes, many do not want to even consider it; even being Christians, they do not consider the

sacrament of matrimony, the single and unrepeatable sign of the covenant, which becomes a testimony of faith. Perhaps this very fear of failure is the greatest obstacle to receiving the Word of Christ, which promises his grace to the conjugal union and to the family. (...) The Christian seed at the root of equality between spouses must bear new fruit today. The witness of the social dignity of marriage shall become persuasive precisely in this way, the way of a testimony which attracts, the way of reciprocity between them, of complementarity between them. For this reason, as Christians, we must become more demanding in this regard. For example: firmly support the right to equal pay for equal work; why is it taken for granted that women should earn less than men? No! They have the same rights. This disparity is an absolute disgrace! At the same time, recognize women's motherhood and men's fatherhood as an always precious treasure, for the good of their children above all." (29.4.2015)

"The sacrament of marriage is a great act of faith and love: a witness to the courage to believe in the beauty of the creative act of God and to live that love that is always urging us to go on, beyond ourselves and even beyond our own family. (...) The decision to "wed in the Lord" also entails a missionary dimension, which means having at heart the willingness to be a medium for God's blessing and for the Lord's grace to all." (6.5.2015)

"Around us we find various families in so-called irregular situations — I don't really like this word". (24.6.2015) "The Church is fully aware that such a situation is contrary to the Christian Sacrament. However, her gaze as a teacher always draws from a mother's heart; a heart which, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, always seeks the good and the salvation of the people. This is why she feels obliged, "for the sake of truth", to "exercise careful discernment of situations". This is how St John Paul II expressed it in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (n. 84). (...) In fact, these persons are by no means excommunicated — they are not excommunicated! — and they should absolutely not be treated as such: they are still a part of the Church. Pope Benedict XVI spoke about this question, calling for careful discernment and wise pastoral accompaniment, knowing that there are no "simple solutions" (Speech at the Seventh World Meeting of Families, Milan, 2 June 2012). Here the repeated call to Pastors to openly and consistently demonstrate the community's willingness to welcome them and encourage them, so they may increasingly live and develop their membership in Christ and in the Church through prayer, by listening to the Word of God, by attending the liturgy, through the Christian education of their children, through charity and service to the poor, through the commitment to justice and peace." (5.8.2015)

"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!" (9.9.2015)

"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

domesticating the world. The family is at the beginning, 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!" (16.9.2015) "The family, the fruitful covenant between man and woman, is the answer to the great challenge of our world. That challenge is two-fold: fragmentation and standardization, two extremes that coexist and foster each other, and together they support the economic model of consumerism. The family is the answer because it is the cell of a society that balances the personal and the communal dimensions, and that at the same time can be the model for the sustainable management of the goods and resources of creation. The family is the principal agent of an integral ecology, because it is the primary social agent, which contains within it the two foundational principles of human civilization on the earth: the principle of communion and the principle of fruitfulness." (30.9.2015)

"With this reflection we arrive at the threshold of the Jubilee, its 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! (...) 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." (18.11.2015)