



Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis

Consilium Internationale

FAMILY COMMISSION

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The Family of Jesus, a Path to Follow

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this small space for reflection we want to continue reflecting on the reality of our families. There are many realities that every family has to attend to and respond to at each stage of the life of its members. For this we consider what the Church teaches us today based on the reflection of Pope Francis. We should note that we are not going to address all the challenges of the current family here but we will stop to contemplate some aspects of it considering the experience of the Family of Nazareth. In this very special year dedicated to Saint Joseph we want to share the tenderness and love of the Family of Nazareth.

See

In the last fifty years, families have undergone a drastic transformation. In many places, large numbers of marriages end in divorce. Free union [cohabitation] is increasingly common and more and more children are born to unmarried couples. Adoption and parenting by same-sex couples is becoming increasingly normal.

- *Faced with this reality, as a starting point, we can speak in fraternity about the following questions.*

- 1. What factors are triggering these changes in the family structure?**
- 2. How does communication take place in our families? What are we communicating?**

Judge

From our Christian worldview we are called to look at this situation with serenity and work for the vitality of our families. Problems, difficulties, times of crisis can befall us but **our faith and our values** invite us to **look further**. We share the

reflection of Pope Francis, who proposes the Family of Nazareth to us as the model towards which we are called and should always return. The Pope told us: The liturgy invites us to contemplate the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. It is beautiful to think about the fact that the Son of God wanted to have, like all children, the need for the warmth of a family. Precisely because of this, because it is the family of Jesus, the family of Nazareth is the family-model, in which all the families of the world can find their solid point of reference and a firm inspiration. In Nazareth the spring of the human life of the Son of God sprouted, at the moment in which he was conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit in the virginal womb of Mary. Within the welcoming walls of the house of Nazareth, the childhood of Jesus took place in an atmosphere of joy, surrounded by the maternal care of Mary and the care of Joseph, in which Jesus could see the tenderness of God (cf. Letter apost. *Patris corde*, 2).



** This section, on judging, can be done in three groups. Each group can discuss one point and then can share in plenary session.*

- a. Once a point has been read by each group, we meet in plenary and explain to the others what the Pope proposes.**
- b. In a second part share the fruit of the group's reflection on the subject.**

First Point

In imitation of the Holy Family, we are called to rediscover the educational value of the family unit: it requires being founded on the love that always regenerates relationships, opening up horizons of hope. Within the family one can experience sincere communion when it is a house of prayer, when affections are serious, profound, pure, when forgiveness prevails over discord, when the daily harshness of life is softened by mutual tenderness and serene adherence to God's will. In this way, the family opens itself up to the joy that God gives to all those who know how to give joyfully. At the same time, it finds the spiritual energy to be open to the outside world, to others, to serving brothers and sisters, to cooperation in building an ever new and better world; capable, therefore, of becoming a bearer of positive stimuli; the family evangelizes by the example of life. It is true that there are problems, and at times arguments in every family. "Father, I argued...". But we are human, we are weak, and we all quarrel within the family at times. I will tell you something: if you quarrel within the family, do not end the day without making peace. "Yes, I quarrelled", but before the end of the day, make peace. And do you know why? Because a cold war, day after day, is extremely dangerous. It does not help. And then, in the family there are three words, three phrases that must always be held dear: "Excuse me", "Thank you", and "Sorry". "Excuse me", so as not to be intrusive in the life of others. "Excuse me: may I do something? Do you think I can do this? Excuse me". Always, not being intrusive. "Excuse me", the first phrase. "Thank you": so much help, so much service that we do for one another within the family. Always say thank you.

Gratitude is the lifeblood of the noble soul. “Thank you”. And then, the hardest one to say: “I am sorry”. Because we always do some bad things and often someone is offended by this: “I am sorry”, “I am sorry”. Do not forget the three phrases: “excuse me”, “thank you”, and “I am sorry”. If there are these three phrases in a family, in a family environment, then the family is fine. (*Angelus Sunday, December 27, 2020, Feast of the Holy Family*).

Second Point

Joseph saw Jesus grow daily “in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favour” (*Lk 2:52*). As the Lord had done with Israel, so Joseph did with Jesus: he taught him to walk, taking him by the hand; he was for him like a father who raises an infant to his cheeks, bending down to him and feeding him (cf. *Hos 11:3-4*).

In Joseph, Jesus saw the tender love of God: “As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him” (*Ps 103:13*).

In the synagogue, during the praying of the Psalms, Joseph would surely have heard again and again that the God of Israel is a God of tender love,^[11] who is good to all, whose “compassion is over all that he has made” (*Ps 145:9*).

The history of salvation is worked out “in hope against hope” (*Rom 4:18*), through our weaknesses. All too often, we think that God works only through our better parts, yet most of his plans are realized in and despite our frailty. Thus Saint Paul could say: “To keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness’” (*2 Cor 12:7-9*).

Since this is part of the entire economy of salvation, we must learn to look upon our weaknesses with tender mercy.^[12]

The evil one makes us see and condemn our frailty, whereas the Spirit brings it to light with tender love. Tenderness is the best way to touch the frailty within us. Pointing fingers and judging others are frequently signs of an inability to accept our own weaknesses, our own frailty. Only tender love will save us from the snares of the accuser (cf. *Rev 12:10*). That is why it is so important to encounter God’s mercy, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where we experience his truth and tenderness. Paradoxically, the evil one can also speak the truth to us, yet he does so only to condemn us. We know that God’s truth does not condemn, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us. That truth always presents itself to us like the merciful father in Jesus’ parable (cf. *Lk 15:11-32*). It comes out to meet us, restores our dignity, sets us back on our feet and rejoices for us, for, as the father says: “This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (v. 24). (*Apostolic Letter, Patris Corde Pope Francis*)

Third Point

Today’s Gospel passage invites families to welcome the light of hope that comes from the home of Nazareth, in which Jesus’ childhood unfolded in joy. Jesus, says

St Luke, “increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man” (2:52). The nuclear family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is for each believer and especially for families an authentic school of the Gospel. Here we admire the fulfilment of the divine plan to make of the family a special community of life and love. Here we learn that every Christian nuclear family is called to be a “domestic church”, to make the Gospel virtues shine and become a leaven of good in society. The classic traits of the Holy Family are: reflection and prayer, mutual understanding and respect, and a spirit of sacrifice, work and solidarity.

From the exemplary witness of the Holy Family, each family can find precious guidance for the style and choices of life, and can draw strength and wisdom for each day’s journey. Our Lady and Joseph teach us to welcome children as a gift of God, to beget them and raise them, cooperating wonderfully in the work of the Creator and giving to the world, in each child, a new smile. It is in a united family that children bring their existence to maturity, living out the meaningful and effective experience of freely given love, tenderness, reciprocal respect, mutual understanding, forgiveness and joy.

I would like to pause above all on joy. The true joy which is experienced in the family is not something random and fortuitous. It is a joy produced by deep harmony among people, which allows them to savour the beauty of being together, of supporting each other on life’s journey. However, at the foundation of joy there is always the presence of God, his welcoming, merciful and patient love for all. If the door of the family is not open to the presence of God and to his love, then the family loses its harmony, individualism prevails, and joy is extinguished. Instead, the family which experiences joy — the joy of life, the joy of faith — communicates it spontaneously, is the salt of the earth, and light of the world, the leaven for all of society.

May Jesus, Mary and Joseph bless and protect all the families in the world, so that in them may reign the serenity and joy, the justice and peace which Christ by his Birth brought as a gift to humanity.

(Angelus of the Pope on the Solemnity of the Holy Family, December 27, 2015)

Act

** Once you have finished sharing in small groups, consider sharing responses on the following questions:*

- a. What resonates with you based on what we have shared up to now?**
- b. What values does Pope Francis invite us to incorporate and keep working on in our families?**
- c. What could we do as a fraternity to support and accompany families in our community?**

PRAYER TO SAINT JOSEPH

Hail, protector [and guardian] of the Redeemer

and spouse of the Virgin Mary.

To you, God entrusted his Son,

*Mary placed her trust in you,
with you, Christ was forged as a man.*

*Oh blessed Joseph,
show yourself as father to us also
and guide us on life's path.*

*Grant us grace, mercy and courage,
and defend us from all evil. Amen*

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