

SUMMARY OF POPE FRANCIS' AUDIENCES ON MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Foreword

In his desire to have a yearlong conversation in the Church about marriage and family, starting on 10th December 2014 and ending on 14th October 2015 - between the two Synods on the Family - Pope Francis devoted the majority of his Wednesday audiences to a catecheses (in 29 parts) in which he considers the different aspects of family life.

In his opening catechesis he stated that this was a theme which “fits into this intermediate period between two Assemblies of the Synod dedicated to this very important reality”. Indeed, his reflections are quite wonderful! He expresses so well God’s profound and enduring plan for marriage and the family, while at the same time, emphasizing that God’s mercy and protection reaches out to everyone. He does not mince his words: couples who are living out the beauty of marriage in family life face several challenges and difficulties, but the positive aspect is that their witness of love can transform the whole world.

Having enjoyed the privilege of being present in St Peter’s Square for one of the audiences on 9th September 2015, I can only say first-hand that Pope Francis has an informality and joy about him that really ignites people’s hearts. In a world where families are hungry for hope, Francis inspires that simply by his presence. As I listened to the Pope’s message for that day, my first thought was how in our contemporary lives, more than ever, we need to strengthen families and learn from one another about how to weave the truths of our faith into the very fabric of daily life.

Pope Francis has provided us with a very useful tool for our pastoral work. I hope that in my attempts to summarize his catecheses, I have not diminished any of their importance. His words are indeed an inspiration for all those of us who have the family – as God ordained it – at heart. I sincerely hope you will find these few pages useful and that they will serve as a catalyst for reading the catecheses in their entirety.

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1. Introduction – the communicative aspect of the family

Pope Francis commenced his catecheses on the subject of marriage and the family on 10th December 2015 with an exposé on the proceedings of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, which took place the previous October. He insisted that no intervention during the Synod called into question the fundamental truths of the Sacrament of Marriage, namely: indissolubility, unity, fidelity and openness to life. He insisted that the Synod was “not a parliament”, but rather an exercise of open communication between the Bishops, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, during his address for the 49th World Communications Day, on 23rd January 2015, the Pope insisted that the family was the perfect locus for people to learn how to communicate properly. It is the family where a person has his or her first experience of dialogue with others; it is within the family that people learn to embrace and support one another; to read body language; to express their emotions; to experience their own limits as well as those of others. In fact, it is this inter-relation at human level that precedes that religious dimension of communication which is prayer.

According to Pope Francis, one of the greatest challenges facing the contemporary world is to learn to talk to one another, not simply just to generate and consume information. It is the family which is the community that leads the rest of society to become a “communicating community”, one which has many unique voices and experiences, but remains a community bound together as one single reality. For this reason, families should be seen as a positive resource rather than as a problem for society. At their best, by their witness to love, all the members of the family should actively communicate the beauty and the richness of the relationship between man and woman, and between parents and children.

Indeed, by making several relevant allusions to Holy Scripture, this is what the Pope tries to do during the subsequent audiences, the content of which may be conveniently divided according to different themes. I would like to point out that in this summary of Pope Francis’ catecheses, the themes are not necessarily laid out in chronological order, but rather, grouped together according to subject matter. I will also allude to some key addresses of Pope Francis on marriage and the family which were delivered during the period in question, i.e. between 10th December 2014 and 14th October 2015.

2. Motherhood

God chose to come into the world through a human family formed in the remote village of Nazareth. Baby Jesus was warmly welcomed by his parents, Mary and Joseph, and in a similar fashion, each Christian family must welcome Jesus. In a most particular way, Mary, as his mother, “gives” Jesus to us, she shows us Jesus, and opens up the door for us to see Jesus.

From this starting point, the Pope goes on to speak about the figure of the mother and her significant importance in the human family. We all owe our lives, and much of what follows - our formation, both human and spiritual - to our mother. The value of faith is often passed on to the child by the mother through her own deep sense of religious practice. Yet sadly, in spite of all the sacrifices which motherhood entails, the figure of the mother is not always held in high regard and a mother’s struggles are not always appreciated.

Pope Francis states that mothers are the strongest antidote to the spreading of “self-centered individualism”, because time and time again, they “divide” themselves for the sake of their children. Indeed without mothers, society would be a “dehumanized society” because even in the worst of moments, mothers often remain witnesses of tenderness, dedication and moral strength.

Much in a similar way, the Church is our mother – our “Holy Mother Church” - who puts her motherhood at the service of families, fully committed to supporting her children with all her strength, in a society which poses several challenges to the gift of family.

3. Fatherhood

Just as Mary is an exemplary model of motherhood to whom the Holy Family of Nazareth was entrusted, so too her spouse, St Joseph, is a significant model of fatherhood. Every family needs a father, says the Pope. Over two entire audiences, he speaks about the dangers of “absent” fathers and the modern-day phenomenon of “a society without fathers”. He states that today, particularly in Western culture, the father figure is symbolically absent: as opposed to the past, when the father was often an authoritative, invasive and dominant figure in the family, today the problem seems to be that the father is absent, even in his very presence. The end result is that fathers have taken a step backward; however as a consequence, children have become more uncertain in taking their steps forward.

There are those fathers who are so concentrated on themselves and on their work or career that they forget completely about their family. This causes gaps and wounds in the lives of their children which may have some very serious repercussions on their future well-being. These fathers do not “behave like fathers”, even though they are present. They do not talk to their children, do not fulfil their role as educators; they do not set an example for their children to follow. Sometimes, they neglect their responsibilities with the excuse that they wish to be ‘friends’ with their children. It does not do to leave children orphaned in this manner, because they will grow up to be poor members of a civil society, deluded by false perspectives of the world.

This is the first need, according to the Pope. The other need is for the father to be an exemplary model of forgiveness, one “who knows how to wait and knows how to forgive from the depths of his heart”. This does not indicate weakness or sentimentality. Rather, this model of fatherhood is revealing the true Father who is in Heaven. A good father must correct his children without humiliating them, with a sense of dignity, and forgive their mistakes, just as God the Father forgives us. Like St Joseph, fathers are called to be the irreplaceable guardians and mediators of faith in goodness, of faith in justice and in God’s protection.

4. Children

Pope Francis emphatically states that children are the joy of the family and of society. As such, they are not a question of reproductive biology, not a means for the fulfilment of the parents, much less their possession. They are a timely reminder that all of us, in the first years of our life, are completely dependent upon the care and benevolence of others. Not only are they a treasure for humanity, but also for the Church, “for they constantly evoke that necessary condition for entering the Kingdom of God”. They remind us that we are not self-sufficient but we need help, love, forgiveness. Through their innocent way of viewing reality, their capacity to receive and give tenderness, their ability to cry and smile without reserve, they bring many riches to humanity: life, cheerfulness, hope, but also troubles.

Consequently, the Pope presents his catecheses on children under three separate, but related, headings.

a. Children as a gift

This is his starting point. A child is loved irrespective of his looks, qualities, capabilities. He is loved “because he’s one’s child”. From this derives the depth of the human experience of being a son or a daughter, which allows us to discover the most gratuitous dimension of love. God places His love within the soul of each and every child – this is the basis of his personal dignity, which nothing or no one can ever destroy.

The Holy Father states that in today’s world, it is difficult for children to imagine their futures, however they must be brave and not be afraid of building and improving upon what they receive. This must be done without arrogance, without presumption. He insists that they must continue to honour their parents, because a society with children who do not honour parents is a society without honour. They must also learn to assume responsibility for their family and mature through sharing in any hardships which their family could endure.

b. Children as siblings

From here, the Pope leads to defining the importance of fraternal relations between siblings. He states that when this is destroyed, “the road is open to painful experiences of conflict, of betrayal, of hate”. Yet, should the bond of fraternity which forms in the family between children arise in an atmosphere of openness to others, then it becomes “a great school of freedom and peace”. Siblings who learn to co-exist harmoniously with one another, who are nourished by affection and education at home, radiate God’s blessing in Jesus Christ, which expands into a bond between men and women who, even when they are completely different from one another, will be able to say “he is truly like a brother, she is just like a sister to me”.

Consequently, should a person encounter a weaker brother or sister, or another person who is sick or physically challenged, he would still be able to embrace him with generosity of spirit, thus opening the door to true Christian fraternity, which is so necessary at “the centre of our technocratic and bureaucratic society”.

c. The “passions” which children endure

The Pope rounds off his reflection on children by dwelling upon those difficult situations which children are sometimes doomed to endure, in some cases, even from the very first moments of their lives.

There are children who are rejected, abandoned and robbed of their childhood and their future by those who declare that it was a mistake to bring them into this world. The Pope insists that children are never a “mistake”. Adults are responsible for bearing children and therefore they should also be responsible for ensuring that they are reared in a loving environment and suitably educated. No efforts should be spared to help and protect those children who are abandoned or poor, marginalized or ill, exploited or violated.

Children are always the first victims in a culture of exaggerated individual rights and they are often the ones who absorb the violence which they are not able to “ward off”, thus growing accustomed to degradation. How beautiful it would be to live in a society in which no sacrifice is made on the part of adults to ensure that no child believed he or she is a mistake, worthless, or abandoned to a life of wounds and to the arrogance of men, says the Pope, for whom “children are no laughing matter”.

5. The elderly

Pope Francis also pays due attention to the older generation and dedicates part of his catecheses to the elderly members of our society. This is also done under three separate headings.

a. Old age as a problematic condition

The Pope refers to the “problematic condition” of the elderly, stating that thanks to the progress of medicine, life-spans have now increased, however society has not “expanded” to life. The number of elderly people has multiplied, but our societies are not organized well enough to accommodate them with the proper respect and practical consideration for their frailty and dignity. Sadly, sometimes, elderly people – particularly those who are fragile, alone or stricken by illness - are viewed as a “burden” and are tolerated very poorly, even neglected.

The Church cannot condone this attitude and rebukes this mentality of impatience and indifference - even contempt - towards old age. According to Pope Francis, we must “reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elder feel like a living part of his community”. An interesting point to notice is that the Pope includes himself in this category of people, using such comments as “**we** old people”.

b. Old age as a vocation

On a positive note, Pope Francis considers the immense value and importance of the role of elderly persons in family life. In spite of the fact that society tends to discard them, God definitely does not. He has called people to follow Him in every age of life, so old age has a grace and a mission as well; it has “a true vocation” from the Lord.

This period of life is different from all the others and there is no doubt that the elderly need to reinvent their way of living. They need to discover a new strength and new tasks, so that they may continue to give thanks and bear witness to God.

c. The elderly as grandparents

Finally the Pope appeals to those people who are grandparents to follow in the steps of “extraordinary elders” like Simeon and Anna in Holy Scripture. He appeals to them to become “poets of prayer” because the prayer of grandparents and of the elderly is a great gift for the Church, a treasure. He asks them to thank God for all their blessings, intercede for the younger generations and bear witness to the fact that “life without love is a barren life”. He reminds them that prayer purifies the heart and prevents it from becoming hardened by resentment and selfishness, and also to embrace the modern culture with “overflowing joy”.

6. Marriage and Sexuality

The Catholic Church understanding of sexuality and marriage is based upon immutable and undeniable truths. It is also embedded and integrated within the very fabric of its understanding of human and spiritual relations. That understanding has been consistent for 2,000 years and it was advanced even further and deeper in recent decades by the late Pope John Paul II's profound theology of the body. Pope Francis has been known to point to these latter teachings on marriage as a "promising and indeed indispensable means of communicating the liberating truth about Christian marriage". However, like Pope Benedict XVI before him, he has his own style of relaying these truths. This is evident through the catecheses on the subject which he delivered over four consecutive Wednesdays between April and May 2015. To these, we can add another audience, that of the 27th May, where he spoke about preparation for marriage and the engagement period.

a. Man and woman created as male and female

As a starting point, Pope Francis refers to the creation of man and woman and the sacrament of marriage as "the greatest gift that God gave to humanity". He refers to the first creation narrative, in the Book of Genesis, where we read that God, after creating the universe and all living things, created his "masterpiece" - the human being - in his own image and likeness (1, 27). It is not man alone, or woman alone who are in the image of God, but man and woman as a couple. This reveals that a human being needs the reciprocity of man and woman in order to develop and live harmoniously.

For this reason, the Pope criticizes the so-called "gender theory" – because it seeks to cancel out sexual difference. Men and women need to communicate more and better, and to love one another deeper, treating each other with respect and cooperating in friendship. Sustained by the grace of God, therefore, it becomes possible to plan a life-long marital and familial union.

In this respect, the Pope highlights two "worrisome signs":

- i. In order to give more strength to the reciprocity of man and woman, there is need for further advancement of women. Sadly it seems that society has not yet understood in enough depth what the "feminine genius" (a term coined by Pope John Paul II) has to offer and we must follow this path with greater creativity and courage.
- ii. Could the "crisis of collective trust in God" be connected to the "crisis of the alliance between man and woman"? That is to say, could it be that the lack of trust in God, which is so rampant in today's society, is being reflected in a lack of trust in the communion between man and woman?

Turning to the second creation narrative, in the Book of Genesis, Pope Francis explains how after God created Adam, He observed that he did not have a helper fit for him. So He presents him with a woman (2,18), whom Adam exultantly recognizes as a part of him (2,23). Finally, there is reciprocity. Later on in the Genesis narrative, we read how sin distorts this relationship, generating distrust and division between man and woman. But we

need to find “a surge of respect” for the marital covenant and return marriage and family to “a place of honour”. It is our responsibility to guard this covenant between man and woman, because after having considered the two narratives from the Book of Genesis, the Pope goes on to reveal how God, through Jesus, restored order to his creation.

b. God’s plan for man and woman as a couple

The Gospel of John recounts the story of the wedding at Cana (2, 1-11), during which Jesus “saved the feast” with the miracle of changing water into wine. This takes us back to the creation accounts in Genesis, when God completes his work of creation and makes a masterpiece – man and woman. At the wedding, Jesus creates another masterpiece: the family, formed by a man and woman who love each other and enter into marriage with one another.

Since the time of the wedding at Cana, many things have changed but the Pope reiterates that the “sign” of Christ contains a message which remains valid even today in a climate where it is difficult to speak of marriage as a feast which is renewed over and over again as the years go by. There are so many challenges to marriage in our contemporary society: several young people who are choosing not to commit to marriage; the number of separations and divorces which are on the increase; the number of children is on the decline; marriage is no longer being viewed as a life-long bond but as something temporary.

Yet it is not all doom and gloom. With characteristic positivism, Pope Francis states that the most persuasive testimony of the blessing of Christian marriage is the good life of Christian spouses and their children. Their witness is the best way to speak of the beauty of the sacrament of marriage.

c. The beauty of Christian marriage

Christian marriage is beautiful in that it is not merely a ceremony in a church adorned with flowers, a lovely dress, photographs, and all the paraphernalia, but by the fact that it takes place IN the Church, and which also MAKES the Church, by giving rise to a new family community.

The Pope says that 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 same love. Marriage requires the free consent of the spouses, and at the foundation of this consent is the Christian vocation to love unconditionally and without limit, with the grace of God. Christian marriage is “to marry in the Lord”, that is to say, to be willing to mediate God’s blessing and grace to all. In this way, Christian spouses participate in the mission of the Church, and hence the life of the Church becomes enriched by the beauty of the spousal covenant.

This is not to say that the marital journey will be easy. Most likely, it will be fraught with difficulties which the couples will encounter as they strive to build their family life.

d. The importance of good marriage preparation and the engagement period

Here the Pope stresses upon a proper and good preparation for married life. The period preceding marriage is traditionally referred to as the “engagement period”. This is the time when the couple is called to perform “a real labour of love” in their effort to discover one another little by little, in order to eventually commit to a covenant which is irrevocable, strong and lasting.

This covenant of love cannot be improvised. It is not made in a hurry. It must be something that is learned and carefully crafted, and slowly refined. Today’s culture has become rather indifferent to “the delicateness and seriousness of this step” and marriage preparation courses are sometimes attended with great reluctance. Yet after the period of preparation is complete, most couples admit that they are happy and grateful to have been given the opportunity to reflect upon their experience.

In such a way, engaged couples who commit themselves prepare for the beautiful celebration of marriage not in a worldly way but in a Christian way.

e. The three expressions

Yet no amount of solid preparation prepares the couple for the reality of the journey. Well-prepared as they may be, there are always the ups and downs of everyday married life to be faced. On 13th May, Pope Francis delivered what will probably remain to be the most popular of all the audiences on the topic of marriage and the family.

He spoke about the necessity of couples frequently using three simple expressions which can open up the way to living family life well, to living in peace, even when there are thousands of problems. These expressions, which basically are a sign of good manners that cultivate good family relations, are:

- i. *may I?* – this calls for respect for the other person’s freedom and the ability to wait until the other accepts
- ii. *thank you* – this shows that one is grateful and appreciative of the other person’s efforts
- iii. *pardon me* – it is often difficult to ask for forgiveness but it is the only way to sincerely heal wounds

The Pope concludes by saying that “these are the words that truly enter into the love of a family”.

f. Helping families to rediscover the beauty of their vocation

On 14th June 2015, the Pope returns to the topic of marriage during his address to participants in Rome’s Diocesan Conference. Although this does not form part of his audiences, I feel it deserves to be included in his body of teachings on this topic.

In brief, on this particular occasion, the Pope invites families to rediscover the beauty of their vocation, by dwelling on the aspects of communion and mission. He states that to

become a father and a mother is a vocation, a most beautiful call from God to be “in an altogether special way, in the image and likeness of God”. There is so much beauty in a couple loving one another, and spouses should display their love for each other even in front of their children because there is no greater testimony for a child than seeing his own parents loving one another tenderly.

He states that there is much joy in seeing couples who have lived several years of marriage together, in spite of any difficulties which they may have encountered along the way. God is at the centre of this communion and so the couple helps each other to grow day by day, through the cultivation of a spirit of reciprocity and forgiveness. This is essential for the mission of the couple, who are called to become collaborators with the Holy Spirit and missionaries to their children.

7. Sufferings of the family through the frailties of the human condition

Pope Francis devotes five audiences to particular trials, all of which place a lot of stress upon family life. These are:

- Poverty (including war)
- Illness
- Death
- Wounds

Every family faces situations which test its strength. The Pope states we are to live these situations with faith. The family is to entrust its daily life to God's blessing and should try and overcome its tribulations with dignity. As Christians, we should be close to all those who are suffering and take care of those families in order to alleviate their pain. This can be done both materially (by sharing what we have) and by support (through our action and prayer).

With regards to death, he states that it is a condition which touches all families but ultimately love is stronger than death and through our faith, we can seek and find consolation in all our experiences of grief.

When speaking about the wounds which are inflicted upon one another by family members, the Pope states that hurts are mostly rectifiable if they are not ignored. He focuses particularly upon misunderstandings between spouses, stating that the depletion of conjugal love spreads resentment which often is transferred onto the children. When separation of the couple is inevitable, sometimes "even morally necessary", children should not be "taken hostage"; parents should not speak ill of one another and continue to accompany their children in a profound way so that their hearts and lives are affected as little as possible. Persons who enter a new union are also a concern for the Church, who while being aware that their situation is contrary to the Christian sacrament, remains as a mother, ready to listen and meet them.

In fact, in all situations, the Church is a Mother who is always there to respond to the family in its fragility. It invites constant prayer for those who are stricken with suffering and through her institutions, provides material assistance for those families in need. Yet we must all do our part in adopting a similar attitude so that no one will be excluded from God's infinite love.

8. Dimensions of the family

Pope Francis devotes four audiences to some essential dimensions of the family which are education, celebration, work and prayer.

a. Education

It is the natural vocation of the parents to educate their children so that they may grow up and be responsible for themselves and for others. It is a wise rule to raise children who listen to their parents and obey them; in turn, parents should not order them around in a negative way; neither should they provoke children to do things which they are not capable of doing, lest they become discouraged. Parents should 'be around' for the children because it is hard to educate them only when they see them for a short time in the evenings.

The Pope criticizes the educational alliance between society and the family, stating that at school, relationships between parents and teachers have been compromised. In this regard, parents are being deprived of their proper role, relying more on "experts" who have assumed the role of parents in even the most intimate aspects of education. He feels that this approach is not good, but rather it is disharmonious and does not encourage dialogue and cooperation.

b. Celebration

Celebration, as created by God, is "a loving and grateful look at work well done", even if it occurs in difficult and sorrowful circumstances. Family moments are sacred, because they remind us that we are created in the image and likeness of God. They are sacred also because during a celebration, God is always present in a special way.

For the Christian, Sunday celebrations, in a most particular way, are a beautiful moment of celebration at the end of a busy week of labour. For this reason, they should be celebrated by the whole family together because they add value to family life. The Sunday Eucharist brings to the celebration every grace of Jesus Christ: his presence, his love, his sacrifice, his forming us into a community, his being with us. All aspects of our family life become transfigured by the grace of Christ.

c. Work

A complimentary element of celebration is work, which is also sacred and a part of God's creative design. Work endows the person with the dignity of being created in the image of God. In fact, the absence of work damages a person's spirit. Work is necessary in order to maintain the family and for raising children. It is also concerned with the common good because one does not only work for the good of the family, but also for the good of society. The father and the mother teach should children the value of work through their own example.

d. Prayer

Another important element of family life is prayer. It is important to find time to pray because it is a means for the human heart to be at peace. Yet, says the Pope, in order to find it, we need to cultivate in our hearts an “ardent” and affectionate love for God. He acknowledges that as a rule, family time is “a complicated and crowded time, busy and preoccupied” but when a family finds the time to pray together then the whole of family life becomes “enveloped in the womb of God’s love” and this helps the family to rediscover the peace and joy of unexpected gifts.

9. Communicating our faith through Community and Evangelization

The last stage on the Pope's journey of catecheses on the family deals with the responsibility which the family has of communicating our faith, both within and outside the family.

First and foremost, the Pope makes a strong connection between the family and the Christian community: the Church is a spiritual family and the family is the domestic Church. The family and the parish are two places where the communion of love, which finds its ultimate source in God, takes place. The Church, through the parish must be a second home which hospitably welcomes all the members of the family, and strengthening the bonds between the two is "indispensable and urgent". When the family brings its precious gifts to the community, it acts as a living witness for a more communal life for the whole of society and fosters interpersonal dialogue and awareness and mutual esteem.

Through this witness, the family is living out one dimension of its responsibility to transmit the faith. The Pope mentions other ways through which the family can live out this dimension: "the smile of a family", which can overcome what he calls the "desertification of cities"; coming "out of the towers and from the armoured vaults" to spend time in homes and with other people; growing in an atmosphere of emotional maturity, because that is the way to understand God.

Finally, he urges families to respond to the call of Jesus to "consign the stewardship of the world back to the covenant of man and woman with God". He refers to this covenant – the familial-conjugal union of man and woman - as "the generative grammar, the golden knot" because the created world was entrusted to man and to woman, and what takes place between them leaves its mark on everything. If we have enough faith, then the families of all the nations of the world will recognize themselves in the blessing which God made to man and woman at the start of history, a blessing which extends to all human beings until the end of time.

10. Conclusion – the way forward

This work would not be complete without a brief résumé of the many beautiful addresses of Pope Francis with respect to marriage and the family during his visit to Cuba and Philadelphia.

Speaking in Cuba on 22nd September 2015, the Pope more or less touches upon many themes from his catecheses. To begin with, he refers to weddings as being a special time of family celebration, events which bring together the past and the future, as a sign of memory and hope. Jesus enters family life at weddings, much in the same way as he used to enter family life at other meals during his public life. There is great value in meal-times because they serve as a means of promoting dialogue among the family members and are an integral part of the family's fellowship. He also refers to the family as the "domestic church", a place where one must constantly thank the other, offer/receive forgiveness and find peace. Without the warmth of the home, life grows empty and our society becomes divided as a result. Without family life, people become self-centered and lack a sense of solidarity, fraternity, cooperation and love. The "perfect family" does not exist but as long as there is the love of God, then love always engages with the persons it loves. He concludes his address by encouraging families to always be sustained by the Eucharist because it is the meal *par excellence* which allows us to be nourished by the love of Jesus and strengthened in our faith.

In Philadelphia, the Pope also recalls some themes from his catecheses, among others:

- The family as the living symbol of the loving plan of God.
- The family as having "a divine identity", i.e. created as places where truth, love and beauty could continue to take root and grow.
- The importance of providing special care for the elderly and children because they are a sign of memory and hope, respectively.
- The necessity of sharing our assets with families who lack the basic needs to live with dignity.

In his address to the Bishops taking part in the World Meeting of Families, on 27th September 2015, he calls upon his brothers to collect their energies and to rebuild enthusiasm for making families correspond more fully to the blessing of God, which they are, and to encourage young people to accept God's invitation to commit to a relationship through marriage.

The Pope ended his visit to Philadelphia with a mass celebrated on 27th September 2015. Reflecting upon the Scripture Readings of the liturgy, he states the family love is shown and spread through little homely gestures of tenderness, affection and compassion which are displayed in small ways through the daily signs that make one feel at home. These are signs that Jesus is a living and active presence in our world today. He asks us to remain open to miracles of love which benefit every family and augurs that we may all be prophets in order to show that the Holy Spirit is alive and at work even in a world which is tired of "inventing new divisions, new hurts, new disasters".