



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** *Saint Peter's Square*

Wednesday, 7 October 2015 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

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)!

Special greetings:

I offer an affectionate greeting to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, including those from England, Scotland, Ireland, the Faroe Islands, Gibraltar, the Netherlands, Norway, Nigeria, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Canada and the United States. I ask you to continue to pray for the Synod on the Family, and to recommit your families to Christ. May you always be witnesses to his mercy and love in the world. God bless you all!