



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE NATIONAL NUMEROUS FAMILY ASSOCIATION

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Sunday, 28 December 2014*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

First of all, I have a question as I am curious to know what time you got up this morning? Six o'clock? Five o'clock? And you aren't drowsy? But I shall put you to sleep with this speech!

I am pleased to meet you on the ten-year anniversary of the Association which brings large families together in Italy. It shows that you love the family and you love life! It is beautiful to thank the Lord for this on the Day that we celebrate the Holy Family.

Today the Gospel shows us Mary and Joseph, who take the Baby Jesus to the Temple; there, the elderly Simeon and Anna, who await them, prophecy about the Baby. The image of an "extended" family, somewhat as your families are, where the different generations meet each other and help each other. I thank Archbishop Paglia, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, — a specialist in doing these things — who truly desired this event, and Bishop Beschi, who worked hard to establish and promote your Association, which started in Brescia, the city of Blessed Paul VI.

You have come with the most beautiful fruit of your love. Motherhood and fatherhood are a gift of God, but to accept the gift, to be astounded by its beauty and to make it shine in society, this is your task. Each of your children is a unique creature that will never be duplicated in the history of humanity. When one understands this, or that God wanted each one, we are astounded by how great a miracle a child is! A child changes your life! We have all seen — men, women — that when a child arrives, life changes, it is another thing. A son or daughter is a miracle that changes life. You, boys and girls, are exactly this: each one of you is the unique fruit of love, you come from love and you grow in love. You are *unique*, but not *alone*! And the fact of having brothers and

sisters is good for you: the sons and daughters of a large family are more capable of fraternal communion even from early childhood. In a world often marked by selfishness, a large family is a school of solidarity and sharing; and this attitude is to the benefit of society as a whole.

You, children and young people, are the fruit of the tree that is the family: you are good fruit when the tree has deep roots — your grandparents — and a strong trunk — your parents. Jesus said that every sound tree bears good fruit but every bad tree bears evil fruit (cf. 7:17). The great human family is like a forest, where sound trees bear solidarity, communion, trust, support, security, happy sobriety, friendship. The presence of large families is a hope for society. And this is why the presence of grandparents is very important: a precious presence both for practical help, and above all for their educational contribution. Grandparents preserve in themselves the values of a people, of a family, and they help parents pass them on to the children. In the last century, in many European countries, it was the grandparents who passed on the faith: they secretly took the child to receive Baptism and passed on the faith.

Dear parents, I am grateful for your example of the love of life, which you guard from conception until the natural end, even with all of life's difficulties and burdens, which unfortunately public institutions do not always help you to bear. You rightly recall that the Italian Constitution, under Article 31, calls for particular consideration to large families; but this is not adequately reflected in reality. It remains in print. I therefore hope, also in view of the low birth rate that has been recorded for some time in Italy, for greater attention in policies and from public administrators at every level, in order to give the envisaged support to these families. Each family is a cell of society, but a large family is a richer, more vital cell, and the State has every interest in investing in it!

Therefore, families joined in associations — like this one in Italy and like those in other European countries, represented here — are welcome; and also welcome is a network of family associations which are present and visible in society and in politics. In this regard, St John Paul II wrote: “families should grow in awareness of being ‘protagonists’ of what is known as ‘family politics’ and assume responsibility for transforming society; otherwise families will be the first victims of the evils that they have done no more than note with indifference” (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 44). The task that family associations carry out in various national and local “*Fora*”, is precisely that of fostering in society and in the laws of the State the values and needs of the family.

Welcome too are the ecclesial movements, in which you members of large families play a present and active part. I always thank the Lord in seeing mothers and fathers of large families, together with their children, committed to the life of the Church and of society. For my part I am close to you in prayer, and I place you under the protection of the Holy Family of Jesus, Joseph and Mary. The good news is that in Nazareth itself a home is being set up for the families of the world who go there on pilgrimage to where Jesus grew in age, wisdom and grace (cf. Lk 2:40).

I pray in particular for the families most tried by the economic crisis, those where the mother or father has lost a job, — and this is hard — where the young people cannot find work; the families tried by their dearest ones and those tempted to surrender to loneliness and division.

Dear friends, dear parents, dear young people, dear children, dear grandparents, happy holidays to all of you! May each of your families be ever more rich with the tenderness and comfort of God. I bless you with affection. And you, please, keep praying for me, as I am something of a grandfather to all of you. Pray for me! Thank you.