



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS DURING THE MEETING ON THE FAMILY

*Saint Peter's Square
Saturday, 4 October 2014*

Video

Dear Families, Good evening!

Evening falls on our assembly. It is the hour at which one willingly returns home to meet at the same table, in the depth of affection, of the good that has been done and received, of the encounters which warm the heart and make it grow, good wine which hastens the unending feast in the days of man.

It is also the weightiest hour for one who finds himself face to face with his own loneliness, in the bitter twilight of shattered dreams and broken plans; how many people trudge through the day in the blind alley of resignation, of abandonment, even resentment: in how many homes the wine of joy has been less plentiful, and therefore, also the zest — the very wisdom — for life. Let us make our prayer heard for one another this evening, a prayer for all.

It is significant how — even in the individualistic culture which distorts bonds and renders them ephemeral — in each person born of woman, there remains alive an essential need for stability, for an open door, for someone with whom to weave and to share the story of life, a history to belong to. The communion of life embraced by spouses, their openness to the gift of life, the mutual protection, the encounter and the memory of generations, educational support, the transmission of the Christian faith to their children.... With all this, the family continues to be a school unparalleled in humanity, an indispensable contribution to a just and supportive society. (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *[Evangelii Gaudium](#)*, nn. 66-68). And the deeper its roots, the more possible it is in life to go out and go far, without getting lost or feeling a stranger in a foreign land. This

horizon helps us to grasp the importance of the Synod Assembly which opens tomorrow.

The *convenire in unum* around the Bishop of Rome is indeed an event of grace, in which episcopal collegiality is made manifest in a path of spiritual and pastoral discernment. To find what the Lord asks of his Church today, we must lend an ear to the debates of our time and perceive the “fragrance” of the men of this age, so as to be permeated with their joys and hopes, with their griefs and anxieties (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1). At that moment we will know how to propose the good news on the family with credibility.

We know, in fact, that in the Gospel, there is a strength and tenderness capable of defeating that which creates unhappiness and violence. Yes, in the Gospel there is salvation which fulfills the most profound needs of man! Of this salvation — the work of God’s mercy and grace — as a Church, we are a sign and instrument, a living and effective sacrament (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 112). Were it not so, our edifice would be only a house of cards, and pastors would be reduced to clerics of state, on whose lips the people would search in vain for the freshness and “the fragrance of the Gospel” (*ibid.*, 39).

The essence of our prayer thus emerges within this framework. For the Synod Fathers we ask the Holy Spirit first of all for the gift of *listening*: to listen to God, that with him we may hear the cry of the people; to listen to the people until breathing in the will to which God calls us.

Along with listening, we invoke openness toward a sincere, open and fraternal *discussion*, which leads us to carry with pastoral responsibility the questions that this epochal change brings with it. Let us allow it to flow back into our hearts, never losing peace, but with serene trust which in his own time the Lord will not fail to lead us back into unity. Does Church history not perhaps — we know it does — recount many similar situations, which our Fathers were able to overcome with persistent patience and creativity?

The secret lies in a *gaze*: and it is the third gift that we implore with our prayer. Because, if we truly intend to walk among contemporary challenges, the decisive condition is to maintain a fixed gaze on Jesus Christ, to pause in contemplation and in adoration of his Face. If we accept his way of thinking, of living and of relating, we will never tire of translating the Synod work into guidelines and paths for the pastoral care of the person and of the family. Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed-of possibilities open up. This can be intuited from the Gospel: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). These are words which contain the spiritual testament of Mary, “the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 286). Let us make these words our own!

At that point, the three things: our *listening* and our *discussion* on the family, loved with the *gaze* of Christ, will become a providential occasion with which to renew — according to the example of St Francis — the Church and society. With the joy of the Gospel we will rediscover the way of a

reconciled and merciful Church, poor and a friend of the poor; a Church “given strength that it might, in patience and in love, overcome its sorrows and its challenges, both within itself and from without” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 8).

May the Wind of Pentecost blow upon the work of the Synod, on the Church, and on the whole of humanity. May it untie the knots which prevent people from encountering one another, heal the wounds that bleed, and rekindle much hope; there are so many people without hope! May we be granted this creative charity which allows one to love as Jesus loved. And may our message reclaim the vivacity and enthusiasm of the first missionaries of the Gospel.