



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO CUBA, TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AND VISIT TO THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
(19-28 SEPTEMBER 2015)

PRAYER VIGIL FOR THE FESTIVAL OF FAMILIES

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

B. Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia
Saturday, 26 September 2015

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Dear Families,

I thank those who offered their witness and those who brought us joy through their art, through beauty, which is the way to God. Beauty brings us to God. And a truthful witness brings us to God, because God is also truth. He is beauty and he is truth. A witness intended to help others is good, it makes us good, because God is goodness. It brings us to God. All that is good, all that is true and all that is beautiful brings us to God. Because God is good, God is beauty, God is truth.

I thank all of you. Those who spoke to us and the presence of everyone here, which is itself a witness. A truthful witness that family life is something worthwhile, and that a society grows stronger and better, it grows in beauty and it grows in truth, when it rises on the foundation of the family.

A young person once asked me – you know how young people ask hard questions! – “Father, what did God do before he created the world?” Believe me, I had a hard time answering that one. I told him what I am going to tell you now. Before he created the world, God was in love, because

God is love. The love he had within himself, the love between the Father and the Son, in the Holy Spirit, was so great, so overflowing – I'm not sure if this is theologically precise, but you will get what I am saying – that love was so great that God could not be selfish. He had to go out from himself, in order to have someone to love outside of himself. So God created the world. God made this wonderful world in which we live and which, since we are not too smart, we are now in the process of destroying. But the most beautiful thing God made – so the Bible tells us – was the family. He created man and woman. And he gave them everything. He entrusted the world to them: "Grow, multiply, cultivate the earth, make it bear fruit, let it grow". All the love he put into that marvelous creation, he entrusted to a family.

Let's go back a bit. All the love God has in himself, all the beauty God has in himself, all the truth God has in himself, he entrusts to the family. A family is truly a family when it is capable of opening its arms to receive all that love. Of course the garden of Eden is long gone; life has its problems; men and women – through the wiles of the devil – experienced division. And all that love which God gave us was practically lost. And in no time, the first crime was committed, the first fratricide. Brother kills brother: war. God's love, beauty and truth, and on the other hand the destructiveness of war: we are poised between those two realities even today. It is up to us to choose, to decide which way to go.

But let's go back. When the man and his wife went astray and walked away from God, God did not leave them alone. Such was his love. So great was his love that he began to walk with mankind, he began to walk alongside his people, until the right time came and then he gave the greatest demonstration of love: his Son. And where did he send his Son? To a palace, to a city, to an office building? He sent him to a family. God came into the world in a family. And he could do this because that family was a family with a heart open to love, a family whose doors were open. We can think of Mary, a young woman. She couldn't believe it: "How can this be?" But once it was explained to her, she obeyed. We think of Joseph, full of dreams for making a home; then along comes this surprise which he doesn't understand. He accepts, he obeys. And in the loving obedience of this woman, Mary, and this man, Joseph, we have a family into which God comes. God always knocks on the doors of our hearts. He likes to do that. He goes out from within. But do you know what he likes best of all? To knock on the doors of families. And to see families which are united, families which love, families which bring up their children, educating them and helping them to grow, families which build a society of goodness, truth and beauty.

We are celebrating the festival of families. The family has a divine identity card. Do you see what I mean? God gave the family an identity card, so that families could be places in our world where his truth, love and beauty could continue to take root and grow. Some of you may say to me: "Father, you can say that because you're not married!". Certainly, in the family there are difficulties. In families we argue. In families sometimes we throw dishes. In families children cause headaches. I'm not going to say anything about mothers-in-law! Families always, always, have crosses. Always. Because the love of God, the Son of God, also asked us to follow him along this

way. But in families also, the cross is followed by resurrection, because there too the Son of God leads us. So the family is – if you excuse the word – a workshop of hope, of the hope of life and resurrection, since God was the one who opened this path. Then too, there are children. Children are hard work. When we were children, we were hard work. Sometimes back home I see some of my staff who come to work with rings under their eyes. They have a one- or two-month-old baby. And I ask them: “Didn’t you get any sleep?” And they say: “No, the baby cried all night”. In families, there are difficulties, but those difficulties are resolved by love. Hatred doesn’t resolve any difficulty. Divided hearts do not resolve difficulties. Only love is capable of resolving difficulty. Love is a celebration, love is joy, love is perseverance.

I don’t want to keep on talking because it will go on too long, but I did want to stress two little points about the family. I would ask you to think about them. We have to care in a special way for children and for grandparents. Children and young people are the future; they are our strength; they are what keep us moving forward. They are the ones in whom we put our hope.

Grandparents are a family’s memory. They are the ones who gave us the faith, they passed the faith on to us. Taking care of grandparents and taking care of children is the sign of love – I’m not sure if it is the greatest, but for the family I would say that it is the most promising – because it promises the future. A people incapable of caring for children and caring for the elderly is a people without a future, because it lacks the strength and the memory needed to move forward. The family is beautiful, but it takes hard work; it brings problems. In the family, sometimes there is fighting. The husband argues with the wife; they get upset with each other, or children get upset with their parents. May I offer a bit of advice: never end the day without making peace in the family. In the family the day cannot end in fighting. May God bless you. May God give you strength. May God inspire you to keep moving forward. Let us care for the family. Let us defend the family, because there our future is at stake. Thank you. God bless you, and please pray for me.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Dear Families,

First of all, I want to thank the families who were willing to share their life stories with us. Thank you for your witness! It is always a gift to listen to families share their life experiences; it touches our hearts. We feel that they speak to us about things that are very personal and unique, which in some way involve all of us. In listening to their experiences, we can feel ourselves drawn in, challenged as married couples and parents, as children, brothers and sisters, and grandparents.

As I was listening, I was thinking how important it is for us to share our home life and to help one another in this marvelous and challenging task of “being a family”.

Being with you makes me think of one of the most beautiful mysteries of our Christian faith. God did not want to come into the world other than through a family. God did not want to draw near to humanity other than through a home. God did not want any other name for himself than Emmanuel (cf. *Mt* 1:23). He is “God with us”. This was his desire from the beginning, his purpose, his constant effort: to say to us: “I am God with you, I am God for you”. He is the God who from the very beginning of creation said: “It is not good for man to be alone” (*Gen* 2:18). We can add: it is not good for woman to be alone, it is not good for children, the elderly or the young to be alone. It is not good. That is why a man leaves his father and mother, and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh (cf. *Gen* 2:24). The two are meant to be a home, a family.

From time immemorial, in the depths of our heart, we have heard those powerful words: it is not good for you to be alone. The family is the great blessing, the great gift of this “God with us”, who did not want to abandon us to the solitude of a life without others, without challenges, without a home.

God does not dream by himself, he tries to do everything “with us”. His dream constantly comes true in the dreams of many couples who work to make their life that of a family.

That is why the family is the living symbol of the loving plan of which the Father once dreamed. To want to form a family is to resolve to be a part of God’s dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga of building a world where no one will feel alone, unwanted or homeless.

As Christians, we appreciate the beauty of the family and of family life as the place where we come to learn the meaning and value of human relationships. We learn that “to love someone is not just a strong feeling – it is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise” (Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*). We learn to stake everything on another person, and we learn that it is worth it.

Jesus was not a confirmed bachelor, far from it! He took the Church as his bride, and made her a people of his own. He laid down his life for those he loved, so that his bride, the Church, could always know that he is God with us, his people, his family. We cannot understand Christ without his Church, just as we cannot understand the Church without her spouse, Christ Jesus, who gave his life out of love, and who makes us see that it is worth the price.

Laying down one’s life out of love is not easy. As with the Master, “staking everything” can sometimes involve the cross. Times when everything seems uphill. I think of all those parents, all those families who lack employment or workers’ rights, and how this is a true cross. How many sacrifices they make to earn their daily bread! It is understandable that, when these parents return home, they are so weary that they cannot give their best to their children.

I think of all those families which lack housing or live in overcrowded conditions. Families which

lack the basics to be able to build bonds of closeness, security and protection from troubles of any kind.

I think of all those families which lack access to basic health services. Families which, when faced with medical problems, especially those of their younger or older members, are dependent on a system which fails to meet their needs, is insensitive to their pain, and forces them to make great sacrifices to receive adequate treatment.

We cannot call any society healthy when it does not leave real room for family life. We cannot think that a society has a future when it fails to pass laws capable of protecting families and ensuring their basic needs, especially those of families just starting out. How many problems would be solved if our societies protected families and provided households, especially those of recently married couples, with the possibility of dignified work, housing and healthcare services to accompany them throughout life.

God's dream does not change; it remains intact and it invites us to work for a society which supports families. A society where bread, "fruit of the earth and the work of human hands" continues to be put on the table of every home, to nourish the hope of its children.

Let us help one another to make it possible to "stake everything on love". Let us help one another at times of difficulty and lighten each other's burdens. Let us support one another. Let us be families which are a support for other families.

Perfect families do not exist. This must not discourage us. Quite the opposite. Love is something we learn; love is something we live; love grows as it is "forged" by the concrete situations which each particular family experiences. Love is born and constantly develops amid lights and shadows. Love can flourish in men and women who try not to make conflict the last word, but rather a new opportunity. An opportunity to seek help, an opportunity to question how we need to improve, an opportunity to discover the God who is with us and never abandons us. This is a great legacy that we can give to our children, a very good lesson: we make mistakes, yes; we have problems, yes. But we know that that is not really what counts. We know that mistakes, problems and conflicts are an opportunity to draw closer to others, to draw closer to God.

This evening we have come together to pray, to pray as a family, to make our homes the joyful face of the Church. To meet that God who did not want to come into our world in any other way than through a family. To meet "God with us", the God who is always in our midst.

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