

# **SYNOD15 - FINAL RELATIO OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS TO THE HOLY FATHER, FRANCIS, 24<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2015**

*(A Working English Translation from the Original Italian - by Bishop Michael G Campbell OSA of the Catholic Diocese of Lancaster, England on 7 November 2015).*

The following is the text of the final Relatio of the Synod of Bishops presented to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, at the close of the 14<sup>th</sup> ordinary general assembly (4<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> October 2015) on the theme of “The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the modern world.”

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#### SIGLE

- AA Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II, Decreto *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 novembre 1965)  
AG Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II, Decreto *Ad Gentes* (7 dicembre 1965)  
CCC Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica (15 agosto 1997)  
CiV Benedetto XVI, Lettera Enciclica *Caritas in Veritate* (29 giugno 2009)  
DC Pontificio Consiglio per i Testi Legislativi, Istruzione *Dignitas Connubii* (25 gennaio 2005)  
DCE Benedetto XVI, Lettera Enciclica *Deus Caritas Est* (25 dicembre 2005)  
DeV San Giovanni Paolo II, Lettera Enciclica *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 maggio 1986)  
GS Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II, Costituzione Pastorale *Gaudium et Spes* (7

dicembre 1965)

- EdE* San Giovanni Paolo II, Lettera Enciclica *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 aprile 2003)
- EG* Francesco, Esortazione Apostolica *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 novembre 2013)
- EN* Beato Paolo VI, Esortazione Apostolica *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 dicembre 1975)
- EV* San Giovanni Paolo II, Lettera Enciclica *Evangelium Vitae* (25 marzo 1995)
- FC* San Giovanni Paolo II, Esortazione Apostolica *Familiaris Consortio* (22 novembre 1981)
- IL* III Assemblea Generale Straordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi, Le sfide pastorali sulla famiglia nel contesto dell'evangelizzazione, *Instrumentum Laboris* (24 giugno 2014)
- LF* Francesco, Lettera Enciclica *Lumen Fidei* (29 giugno 2013)
- LG* Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II, Costituzione Dogmatica *Lumen Gentium* (21 novembre 1964)
- LS* Francesco, Enciclica *Laudato Si'* (24 maggio 2015)
- MV* Francesco, Bolla *Misericordiae Vultus* (11 aprile 2015)
- NA* Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II, Decreto *Nostra Aetate* (28 ottobre 1965)
- NMI* San Giovanni Paolo II, Lettera Apostolica *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 gennaio 2001)
- RM* San Giovanni Paolo II, Lettera Enciclica *Redemptoris Missio* (7 dicembre 1990)
- VS* San Giovanni Paolo II, Lettera Enciclica *Veritatis Splendor* (6 agosto 1993)

## INTRODUCTION

1. We Fathers, united in Synod with Pope Francis, thank him for having called us to reflect with him, and under his guidance, of the vocation and mission of the family today. We offer him the fruit of our labours with humility, in the awareness of the limits which it presents. We can state however that we have kept constantly in mind the families of the world, with the joys and hopes, with their sadnesses and pains. The disciples of Jesus know “that there is nothing truly human which does not also affect them. Their community is composed of people united in Christ who are directed by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage towards the Father’s kingdom and who have received the message of salvation to be communicated to everyone. For this reason it feels itself closely connected to the human race and its history” (GS 1). We thank the Lord for the generous fidelity with which so many Christian families respond to their vocation and mission, even in the face of obstacles, misunderstandings and sufferings. To these families go the encouragement of the whole Church, which united to its Lord and guided by the action of the Spirit, knows that it has a word of truth and of hope to offer to all people. Pope Francis recalled this in the celebration which opened the last stage of this synodal journey dedicated to the family: “God has not created human beings to live in sadness or solitude, but to share their journey with another person to complement them...It is the same plan which Jesus...sums up in these words:”From the beginning of creation (God) made them male and female; for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become a single flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh” (Mk. 10;6-8; Cf. Gen. 1:27; 2:24)” God “unites the hearts of a man and a woman who are in love, bonding them in unity and indissolubility. This means that the object of married life is not only to live together for ever, but to love each other for ever! Jesus therefore re-establishes the original and originating order (.....) only in the light of the folly of the gratuitousness of the paschal love of Jesus does the folly of the

gratuitousness of a single married life *until death* make sense” (homily of the opening Mass of the Synod, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

**2.** As the womb of joys and trials, the family is the first and foremost “school of humanity (cf. GS 52). Despite the signs of crisis within the institute of the family in its different contexts, the desire for a family remains alive in the younger generations. The Church, expert in humanity and faith to its mission, proclaims with deep conviction the “Gospel of the family”: received with the revelation of Jesus Christ and taught in unbroken fashion by the Fathers, the teachers of spirituality, and the Magisterium of the Church. The family assumes a particular importance for the Church on her journey: “So great was the love with which God began to walk with humanity, he began to walk with his people, until the moment of maturity arrived and he gave the greatest sign of his love: his own Son. And where did he send his Son? In a palace? To set up a business. He sent him into a family. God has entered the word in a family. And he was able to do so because that family had a heart open to love, it had open doors.” (Francis, Discourse on the Celebration of Families, Philadelphia, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2015). The families of today are called to be “missionary disciples” (cf. EG, 120). It is in this sense necessary that the family is rediscovered as an indispensable subject for evangelisation.

**3.** The Pope has called the Synod of Bishops to reflect on the reality of the family. “The gathering in unity around the Bishop of Rome is already an occasion of grace, in which episcopal collegiality becomes evident in a journey of spiritual and pastoral discernment” (Francis, Discourse at the Vigil of prayer in preparation for the Extraordinary Synod on the family, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2014). Within the arc of two years there have taken place the General Extraordinary Assembly (2014), and the Ordinary General Synod (2015), which have undertaken the task of listening to the signs from God and of human history, in fidelity to the Gospel. The fruit of the first synodal encounter, to which the People of God made an important contribution, is embodied in the *Relatio Synodi*. Our dialogue and our reflection have been inspired by a three-pronged approach: The act of listening to the reality of today’s family, from the perspective of faith, in the complexities of its light and shade. Keeping our gaze fixed on Christ, so as to rethink revelation with renewed freshness and enthusiasm, handed on in the faith of the Church. The encounter with the Holy Spirit in order to discern the paths to renew the Church and society in their duty towards the family, based on the marriage between a man and a woman. The family, apart from the solicitude in responding to present day problems, is above all called by God to assume a new awareness of its own missionary identity. The synodal Assembly has been enriched by the presence of couples and of families within the discussion which directly concerns them. Safeguarding the precious fruit of the previous Assembly, dedicated to the challenges to the family, we have turned our attention to its vocation and mission in the Church and in the contemporary world.

## **PART I**

### **THE CHURCH IN DIALOGUE WITH THE FAMILY**

**4.** The mystery of the creation of life on earth fills us with wonder and amazement. The family founded on the marriage of a man and woman is the splendid and irreplaceable place of the personal love which transmits life. Love is not reduced to a momentary illusion, love is not an end in itself, love seeks the trustworthiness of a personal “you”. In the mutual promise of love, in good times and in bad, love desires continuity of life, right until death. The fundamental desire to form networks of love,

sound and inter-generational within the family presents itself in a constant and significant way, transcending cultural and religious confines and social changes. In the liberty of the free “yes” exchanged life-long between a man and a woman, the love of God is both present and experienced. For the Catholic faith marriage is a sacred sign in which the love of God for his Church becomes effective. The Christian family is consequently a lived part of the Church: a “domestic Church”.

The couple and life in marriage are not abstract realities, they remain imperfect and vulnerable. For this reason the will to conversion is ever necessary, to forgive and to begin again. In our responsibility as Pastors, we are concerned for the life of families. We wish to listen to the reality of their life and their challenges, and to accompany them with the look of love which comes from the Gospel. We wish to give them strength and to help them take up their mission today. We wish to accompany them with a big heart also in their concerns, giving them courage and hope, starting with the mercy of God.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The family and the anthropological-cultural context**

#### **The social cultural-context**

5. Docile to what the Holy Spirit demands of us, we approach today’s families in their diversity, in the awareness that “Christ, the new Adam ...reveals man fully to himself” (GS 22). We turn our attention to the contemporary challenges which bear upon numerous aspects of life. We are conscious of the principal orientation of anthropological-cultural changes, by reason of which individuals are less supported than in the past by social structures in their emotional and family life. On the other hand, it is equally imperative to consider the developments of an exaggerated individualism which dislocates family bonds, causing the ideal to prevail of a subject constructed according to his own desires, weakening the power of any tie. We are thinking of mothers and fathers, grandparents, brothers and sisters, relatives near and far, and on the bond between two families woven by every marriage. We must not however overlook the lived reality: the strength of family ties continues everywhere to hold the world in life. There persists immense dedication to the care of the dignity of every person – man, woman, and children -, of ethnic groups and minorities, like the defence of the rights of every human being to increase within the family. Their fidelity is not honourable if there is not confirmation of the clear conviction of the value of family life, in particular by trusting in the light of the Gospel even in different cultures. We are conscious of the powerful changes which the anthropological-cultural transformation determines in all aspects of life, and we remain convinced that the family is a gift of God, the place in which he reveals the power of his saving grace. Even today the Lord calls man and woman to marriage, accompanies them in their family life, and offers himself to them as an ineffable gift; it is one of the signs of the times that the Church is called to examine and interpret “in the light of the Gospel, so that it can offer in a manner appropriate to each generation replies to the continual human questions on the meaning of this life and the life to come and on how they are related. There is a need, then, to be aware of, and to understand, the world in which we live, together with its expectations, its desires and its frequently dramatic character” (GS 4).

#### **The religious context**

6. The Christian faith is strong and alive. In some parts of the world can be seen a marked decline of religious influence in the social ambience which has its effect on the life of the family. This orientation tends to relegate the religious dimension to the

private and family sphere, and brings with it the risk of posing an obstacle to the witness and mission of Christian families in today's world. In the social setting of an advanced consumer society, people run the risk of entrusting every hope to the exaggerated search for social success and economic prosperity. In other regions of the world, the negative effects of an unjust world economic order lead to forms of religiosity permeated by a religious and political fanaticism, often hostile to Christianity. Creating instability and sowing disorder and violence, they are the cause of great misery and suffering for the life of families. The Church is called to accompany the religiosity lived out in families to direct it to a gospel sense.

### **The anthropological change**

7. In different cultures, relationship and belonging are important values which forge the identity of individuals. The family offers to the person the possibility of self-realisation and of contributing to the growth of others in society at large. The same Christian and ecclesial identity received in baptism flowers within the beauty of family life. In present day society we can witness a multitude of challenges which manifest themselves in greater or lesser measure in different parts of the world. In various cultures not a small number of youth show resistance to definitive commitment where affective relationships are concerned, and often choose to live with a partner or simply to engage in occasional relationships. The declining birth rate, and the outcome of other factors, among which are industrialisation, the sexual revolution, the fear of over population, economic problems, the rise of a contraceptive and abortion mentality. The consumer society can also dissuade people from having children purely to keep their liberty and maintain their own style of life. Some Catholics have difficulty in living their life in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage and the family, and to see in such teaching the goodness of God's creative plan for them. Marriage in some parts of the world are in decline, while separations and divorce are not infrequent.

### **Cultural contradictions**

8. The cultural conditions which impinge on the family present a different picture in many parts of the world, as well as being under the widespread influence of the media. On the one hand, marriage and the family enjoy great esteem and still remain the dominant idea that the family represents a secure place for the most profound and satisfying sentiments. On the other hand, such representations sometimes bear the traits of excessive expectations and consequently of reciprocal exaggerated pretences. The tensions deriving from an excessively individualistic culture of possession and enjoyment beget within the family a dynamic of impatience and aggression. Also to be mentioned is a certain vision of feminism, which denounces maternity as a pretext for the exploitation of a woman and a barrier to her full realisation. Then there is the growing tendency to look on the generation of a child as a mere device of self-realisation, to be obtained in whatever way. A present day cultural challenge of considerable significance results from the ideology of "gender" which denies the difference and natural mutuality of man and woman. It has in prospect a society without difference and sex, and deprives the family of an anthropological foundation. Such an ideology leads to educational projects and legislative planning which promote a personal identity and affective intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between masculine and feminine. Human identity is reduced to individual choice, which can even be changed in time. In the vision of faith, human sexual difference carries within it the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). "This tells us that not only man, considered in

himself, is the image of God, but also the man and the woman, as a couple, are the image of God. .... We can say that without the reciprocal enrichment in this relationship – in thought and in action, in sentiments and in work, in faith as well – the two would be unable to understand in depth what it means to be a man and a woman. Modern present day culture has opened up new spaces, new liberties and new depths to enrich the understanding of this difference. But it has also introduced many doubts and much scepticism. .... The removal of the difference... is the problem, not the solution” (Francis, General Audience, 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2015).

### **Conflicts and social tensions**

**9.** The affective and spiritual quality of family life is seriously threatened by the increase of conflicts, lack of resources, and migratory movements. Violent religious persecutions, especially of Christian families have laid waste to whole areas of our planet, creating movements and immense waves of refugees which place great pressure on the capacity of those lands which receive them. The families who undergo such trials are very often, are compelled to uproot and brought to the threshold of breakdown. The fidelity of Christians to their faith, their patience and their attachment to their countries of origin are, in every way, admirable. The efforts of political and religious authorities to propagate and protect a culture of human rights remain as yet insufficient. There is still need to respect the liberty of conscience and to promote harmonious coexistence between all citizens based on citizenship, equality and justice. The burden of unjust economic and social politics, even in prosperous societies, weighs heavily on the upbringing of children, on care of the sick and elderly. Dependence on alcohol, on drugs, gambling is such an expression of these social contradictions and unease which have consequences for the life of families. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few and the diversion of resources intended for family projects increase the impoverishment of families in many areas of the world.

### **Fragility and power of family life**

**10.** The family, the fundamental human community, in the present day cultural and social crisis, suffers painfully its weakness and its fragility. It displays however the ability to find in itself the courage to face the shortcomings and responsibility of institutions when confronted with the formation of the person, the quality of social bonds, the care of its most vulnerable members. It is therefore particularly essential to adequately value the power of the family in order to support its fragility. Such a power resides fundamentally in its capacity to love and to teach how to love. No matter how wounded a family may be, it can always grow by starting from love.

## **Chapter II**

### **The family and the socio-economic context**

#### **The family an irreplaceable resource of society**

**11.** The family is a school for a richer humanity...it is the foundation of society” (GS 52). The totality of family ties, beyond the confines of the nuclear family, offers a precious support in the upbringing of children, in the transmission of values, in the protection of ties between the generations, in the enrichment of a lived spirituality. While in some regions of the world this fact pertains profoundly to a widespread social culture, elsewhere it appears to be undergoing attrition. Indeed, in a period of rapid fragmentation of life situations, the multiple levels and facets of ties between



family members and relations often constitute the only points of connection with one's origins and family ties.

### **Political action in favour of the family**

**12.** The authorities responsible for the common good should feel a serious obligation when faced with this primary social good which is the family. The concern which must direct the administrators of civil society is that of allowing and promoting political policies in favour of the family which can support and encourage families, in the first place those most disadvantaged. It is necessary to recognise a more concrete compensatory action in favour of the family in the context of modern "welfare systems": such action would redistribute resources and pursue aims indispensable to the common good, so contributing to readdressing the negative effects of social injustice. "The family deserves special attention on the part of those responsible for the common good, because it is the foundational cell of society which brings with it solid bonds of union, on which is based human life in common, and with the birth and upbringing of children assures the renewal and future of society" (Francis, Discourse at El Alto Airport, Bolivia, 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2015).

### **Loneliness and precariousness**

**13.** In cultural contexts in which relationships have become tenuous because of the style of a selfish life, loneliness has become a condition ever more widespread. Often it is only the sense of God's presence which supports people in the face of this emptiness. The general sense of weakness when confronted with an oppressive socio-economic reality, of increasing poverty and the precarious work situation, imposes ever more frequently the search for employment far from the family, with the aim of supporting it. Necessity of this kind means long absences and separations which weaken relationships and isolate the members of families from one another. It is the responsibility of the State to create by law conditions of work to guarantee the future of young people and assist them to realise their aim of founding a family. Corruption, which often threatens these institutions, deeply corrodes the trust and hope of new generations, and not only them. The negative consequences of this distrust are evident: from demographic crises to the difficulties in upbringing, from the task of welcoming new life to seeing the presence of the elderly as a burden, to the extent that there is a widespread affective unease, leading at times to aggression and violence.

### **Economy and equity**

**14.** Material and economic conditions influence family life in two senses: it can contribute to its growth and flourishing or it can place obstacles to its flowering, its unity and its coherence. Economic pressures the access of families to education, to cultural life, and to an active social life. The actual economic system produces different forms of social exclusion. Families suffer in a particular way from problems regarding work. The possibilities for young people are few and the offer of a job is very selective and precarious. Working days are long and often demanding through extended periods away. This does not help parents to be with one another and with their children, in a way which nurtures their daily relationships. The "growth in equity" demands "decisions, programmes, mechanisms and specific processes geared to a better distribution of income" (EG 204) and that the integral promotion of the poor becomes effective. Adequate political policies in favour of the family are essential for family as a condition of a viable, harmonious and worthy future.

## **Poverty and exclusion**

**15.** Some social and religious groups find themselves everywhere on the margins of society: migrants, gypsies, the homeless, displaced people, refugees, the untouchables according to a caste system, and those afflicted with diseases to which a stigma is attached. The Holy Family of Nazareth has also known the bitter experience of being marginalised and that of refugees (Lk. 2:7; Mt. 2:13-15). The words of Jesus at the last judgement in this regard are unequivocal: “Whatever you did to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40). The present economic system is creating new types of social exclusion, which often make the poor invisible in the eyes of society. The prevailing culture and the means of communication contribute to aggravate this invisibility. This happens because: “in this system, man, the human person is taken from the centre and has been replaced by something else. Therefore an idolatrous worship is offered to money. Therefore indifference is globalised! (Francis, Discourse to those present at the world meeting of popular movements, 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2014). In such a scenario, there is particular concern for the condition of children: innocent victims of exclusion, which makes them true and real “social orphans”, and tragically marks them for the rest of their lives. In spite of the enormous difficulties which they face, many poor and marginalised families strive to live their daily lives with dignity, entrusting themselves to God who does not delude or abandon anyone.

## **Ecology and the family**

**16.** The Church, thanks to the impulse of the pontifical magisterium, hopes for a thoroughgoing re-thinking of the direction of the world system. From this perspective, it collaborates in the development of a new cultural ecology: a reflection, a politic, an educational programme, a style of life, and a spirituality. Since everything is intimately connected, as Pope Francis affirms in his the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, it is essential to explore in depth the aspects of an “integral ecology”, which includes not only environmental dimensions, but those also which are human, social, and economic, for the sustainable development and preservation of the created order. The family, which forms an important part of human ecology, must be adequately protected (cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 38). Through the family we belong to the totality of creation, we contribute in a specific way in the promotion of ecological care, we learn the meaning of corporality and the language of love in the man-woman differentiation and we collaborate in the plan of the Creator (cf. *LS*, 5, 155). The awareness of all this calls for the true and genuine conversion to be implemented within the family. In it “are cultivated the first habits of love and care for life, for example the correct use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local eco-system and the protection of all creatures. The family is the place of integral formation, where the different aspects are unfolded, the intimate relationships between them, and personal maturity” (*LS* 213).

## **Chapter III**

### **Family, inclusion and society**

**17.** One of the most serious and pressing of tasks for the Christian family is to safeguard the bond between the generations in the transmission of the faith and of the fundamental values of life. Most families show respect for the elderly, surround them with affection and look on them as a blessing. A special appreciation is due to those associations and family movements who work for the benefit of the elderly, from a spiritual and social dimension, especially in collaboration with priests in the care of souls. In some contexts, the elderly are perceived as a treasure in as much as

they are a guarantee of stability, of continuity and of the family's memory and that of society. In highly industrialised societies, where they tend to be on the increase while the birth rate decreases, they run the risk of being looked upon as a burden. On the other hand, the care which they require is often a real trial for those dear to them. "The elderly are men and women, fathers and mothers who have been on the same road before us, in our very same house, in our daily struggle for a dignified life. They are men and women from whom we have received a great deal. The elderly person is not a stranger. We are the elderly person: in a little while, or longer, but inevitably, even if we do not think about it. And if we do not treat the elderly well, they will treat us in the same way" (Francis, General Audience, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2015)

**18.** The presence of grandparents within the family deserves special consideration. They form the binding link between the generations, and assure an affective-psychic balance through the transmission of traditions and customs, of values and virtues, in which the very young can discern their true roots. Furthermore, grandparents frequently assist their children in economic matters, the upbringing and handing on of the faith to grandchildren. Many people can attest that they really owe their initiation into the Christian faith to their grandparents. As the book of Sirach says: "Do not disregard the discourse of the aged, for they themselves learned from their fathers; because from them you will gain understanding, and learn how to give an answer in time of need" Sir.(8:9). It is our hope that in the family, and in the succession of the generations, the faith will be communicated and safeguarded as a precious inheritance for the new nuclear families.

### **Widowhood**

**19.** Widowhood is an especially difficult experience for a person who has chosen and lived the married state as a gift. Yet the standpoint of faith allows us to see the positive possibilities of this state. From the time in which they have to live this experience, some people display the ability to redirect their energies once more with great determination to their children and grandchildren, discovering in this expression of love a new mission in the question of their upbringing. The void which has been brought about by the death of their married partner is, in a sense, filled up by the affection of their family who value their widowhood, so allowing him or her to preserve the precious memory of their own marriage. Those who cannot rely on the presence of family to which they can dedicate themselves and from whom they receive affection and closeness, should be supported with particular care and availability, above all if they find themselves in conditions of need. Widowed people can celebrate a new sacramental union which takes nothing from their earlier marriage (cf. *1 Cor 7,39*). From the beginning, and as her history unfolded, the Church has shown a particular care where widows are concerned (cf. *1 Tim. 5,3-16*), reaching the point of establishing "*the Order of Widowhood*", which in our day should be re-established.

### **The last stage of life and grief in the family**

**20.** Sickness, accident or old age which lead to death have repercussions on the whole of family life. The experience of grief becomes particularly heart-rending when it concerns the loss of children or young people. This sad experience requires particular pastoral care, even through the involvement of the Christian community. Appreciation for the final stage of life is more necessary than ever today when there is the temptation to remove in every way the moment of passing. The fragility and dependence of the aged are being unjustly exploited for pure economic advantage.

Countless families teach us that it is possible to face the final stages of life with an appreciation of the sense of fulfilment and of the integration of one's entire existence into the paschal mystery. Large numbers of the elderly are welcomed into church establishments where they can live in an atmosphere which is serene and family-like on the material and spiritual plain. Euthanasia and assisted suicide pose grave threats to the family throughout the world. In many countries their practice is legal. The Church, while she strongly opposes these practices, feels obliged to assist families who care for their elderly and frail members, and to promote in every way that dignity and value of the person until the natural end of life.

### **People with special needs**

**21.** It is necessary to look with particular care on families having members who are disabled, whose disability, which disrupts life, brings a challenge, profound and unexpected, disturbs equilibrium, wishes and aspirations. This results in contrasting emotions and decisions which are difficult to deal and work with, at the same time imposing tasks, emergencies and fresh responsibilities. The image of the family with its whole cycle of life are disturbed in the strongest possibly way. Those families who lovingly accept the trial of a disabled child deserve the greatest admiration. They give to the Church and society a precious witness of fidelity to the gift of life. The family will discover, along with the Christian community, new gestures and language, ways of comprehension and identity, on their journey of welcoming and caring for the mystery of fragility. Disabled persons constitute for the family and a gift and an opportunity to grow in love, in mutual help and in unity. The Church, the family of God, wishes to be a house of welcome for families with disabled members (cf. John Paul II, Homily on the occasion of the Jubilee of the community with the disabled, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2000). It helps to support their relationship and family upbringing, and offers ways of participating in the liturgical life of the community. For the disabled of various kinds who have been abandoned and left alone, often it is Church institutions of welcome who make up their only family. To these the Synod expresses its warm gratitude and profound appreciation. Such a process of integration becomes more difficult in those societies where stigma and prejudice persist – even being theorised in eugenic terms. By way of contrast, many families, communities and ecclesial movements uncover and celebrate the gifts of God in those with special needs, particularly their unique capacity to communicate and to belong. Special attention goes to those disabled persons who outlive their parents and the wider family which has sustained them throughout their life. The death of those who have loved them and of those they themselves have loved makes them especially vulnerable. The family which accepts with the vision of faith the presence of disabled persons will come to recognise and guarantee the quality and value of every life, with its needs, its rights, and its opportunities. It will evoke service and care, and develop companionship and affection in every phase of life.

### **Non-married people**

**22.** Many people who do not marry are not only committed to their own families of origin, but often give great service within the circle of their friends, in the ecclesial community and in their their profession life. Nonetheless, their presence and contribution are regularly overlooked, and this causes them to feel a certain sense of isolation. Among them, in not a few instances, are to be found noble aspirations which commit them to art, science and the good of humanity. Many, therefore, place their talents at the service of the Christian community in a sign of charity and voluntary work. Then there are those who do not marry because they consecrate their

life for the love of Christ and their brothers and sisters. Through their dedication, the family, in Church and in society, is greatly enriched.

### **Migrants, refugees, those persecuted**

**23.** The phenomenon of migration and its effect on the family merits particular attention. It affects, in different ways, whole populations in different parts of the world. In this area the Church has played a role of the first order. The obligation to abide by and develop this gospel witness appears more urgent today than ever. The history of humanity is a history of migrants: this truth is inscribed in the life of nations and of families. Our own faith corroborates this: we all come from pilgrims. This conviction should arouse in us understanding openness and responsibility before the challenge of migration, both that borne with suffering, and that considered as a opportunity for life. Human mobility, which is in keeping with the natural historical movement of peoples, can reveal in itself an authentic enrichment both for the family which emigrates and for the country which receives it. A further consideration is the forced migration of families, caused by situations of war, persecution, poverty, injustice, marked by the vicissitudes of a journey which is often life-threatening, traumatises individuals and destabilises families. The accompaniment of migrants calls for a special pastoral ministry directed to migrant families, but also to those members of the nuclear families who remain in their places of origin. This should take place with respect for their cultures, their religious and human formation from where they originate, for the spiritual richness of their rites and traditions, even by means of a specific pastoral care. “It is important to look on migrants not only on the basis of their regular or irregular status, but above all as persons who, with their dignity safeguarded, can make a contribution to the wellbeing and progress of all, especially when they accept in a responsible way the obligations in meeting those who receive them, respecting with acknowledgement the material and spiritual patrimony of the country which gives them hospitality, obeying their laws and contributing to their burdens” (Francis, Message for the World Day of migrants and refugees 2016, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2015). Migrations appear exceptionally dramatic and devastating for families and individuals when they take place outside the bounds of legality and are supported by international groups dealing in the trafficking of human persons. The same can be said with regard to unaccompanied women and children, forced to put up with long stays in places of passage, refugee camps, where it is impossible to begin a way of integration. Extreme poverty and other situations of displacement at times even lead families to sell their own children for prostitution or for the trafficking of organs.

**24.** The encounter with a new country and a new culture is made more difficult when the conditions for a genuine welcome and acceptance are lacking, with regard to the rights of everyone and for a peaceful and solid co-existence. This task issues a direct call to the Christian community: “The responsibility for offering welcome, solidarity and assistance to refugees is incumbent first and foremost on the local Church. It is called to incarnate the demands of the gospel by going out to meet, without distinction, these people in their time of need and solitude” (Pontifical Council, *Cor Unum* and the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care for migrants and tourists, the Refugees, a challenge to solidarity, 26). The feeling of disorientation, nostalgia for lost places of origin, and the difficulties of integrating, show that today in many places they have not been overcome and disclose new sufferings even in the second and third generation of migrant families, nurturing phenomena of fundamentalism and a violent rejection on the part of the hospitable culture. A precious resource for

overcoming these difficulties has been shown to be the very real encounter between families, and the key role often played by women in the process of integration, through sharing of experience in the upbringing of their own children. In effect, even in their precarious situations, women bear witness of a culture of family love which gives encouragement to other families to welcome and protect life, by practising solidarity. Women can hand on to new generations a living faith in Christ which has sustained them in the difficult situation of migration and which has been strengthened by it. The persecution of Christians, likewise those of ethnic and religious minorities, in different parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East are a great trial: not only for the Church, but for the whole international community as well. Every effort should be supported which favours Christian families and communities staying in their countries of origin. Benedict XVI has affirmed: “A Middle East without or with a few Christians is no longer the Middle East, in as much as Christians share with other believers the particular identity of a region” (Apostolic Exhortation, *Church in the Middle East*, 31).

### **Some particular challenges**

**25.** In some societies the practice of polygamy continues to flourish; in other contexts there persists the practice of combined marriages. In those countries where the presence of the Catholic Church is in the minority there are many mixed marriages and of disparity of cult, with all the difficulties which they imply regarding legal configuration, baptism, the upbringing of children and the mutual respect of outlook for the difference in faith. In marriages of this kind there can exist the danger of relativism or of indifference, but there can also be the possibility of furthering an ecumenical spirit and interreligious dialogue in a harmonious life in common within a community which live in the one place. In numerous situations, and not only in the West, there exists the widespread practice of cohabitation before marriage, or a form of living together not orientated to assume the nature of an institutional bond. To this can be often added civil legislation which compromises marriage and the family. Due to secularisation, in many parts of the world, the reference to God is greatly reduced and the faith is no longer socially shared.

### **Children**

**26.** Children are a blessing from God (cf. Gn. 4:1). They must rank first in family and social life, and they constitute a priority in the pastoral activity of the Church. “In effect, a society can be judged to the degree that its children are treated, but not only morally, also sociologically, if a society is free or a society is a slave of international interests.....Children are a reminder to us that we are always children.... And this brings home to us the fact that life is not what we have been given but that we have received it” (Francis, General Audience, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015). However, children often become the object of a struggle between parents and are the true victims of wounded families. In many instances the rights of children are overlooked. In some parts of the world they are looked upon as truly mercenary, treated as workers on a low wage, used in warfare, objects of every kind of physical and psychological violence. Migrant children are exposed to different types of suffering. The sexual exploitation of infants amounts to one of the most scandalous and perverse realities of present day society. In societies marked by violence caused by war, terrorism, or the presence of organised crime, the number of families in situations of degradation is increasing. In the great cities and their peripheries the so-called phenomenon of street children worsens dramatically.

## **Woman**

**27.** The woman plays a dominant role in the life of the person, the family and society. “Every person owes his or her life to a mother, and almost always is greatly indebted to her for the successive phases of life, of human and spiritual formation” (Francis, General Audience, 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015). A mother guards the memory and meaning of birth throughout a whole lifetime: “Mary, for her part, kept all these, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19,51). It is a fact, however, that the condition of women is subject to considerable differences which derive from prevailing social and cultural factors. The dignity of women needs defending and promoting. It is not a question simply of economic resources, but of a different cultural perspective, as the difficult condition of women in recently developed countries makes clear. In countless situations even today, to be a woman provokes discrimination: the very gift of motherhood is penalised rather than appreciated. From another perspective, for a woman to be sterile in some cultures, is a socially discriminating condition. Nor is there need to forget the growing phenomena of violence to which women are subject within the family. The exploitation of women and the violence perpetrated on their body are often linked to abortion and forced sterilisation. Added to which are the negative consequences of practices connected to procreation, such as the renting of wombs or the marketing of gametes and embryos. The emancipation of women demands a rethink of the roles of the spouses in their reciprocity and their common responsibility towards family life. The desire for a child at any cost has not made family relationships happier or more solid, but in many cases has served to aggravate the inequality between men and women. A greater appreciation of their responsibility in the Church can contribute to the social recognition of the decisive role of women: their part in decision making, their participation in the government of some institutions, their involvement in the formation of ordained ministers.

## **Man**

**28.** The man plays an equally decisive role in the life of the family, particularly in the protection and support of the wife and children. Saint Joseph is the model for this figure, a just man, who in the hour of danger “took the child and his mother into the night” (Mt.2:14) and brought them to safety. Many men are conscious of the importance of their own role within the family and live it out with that capacity unique to the masculine nature. The absence of the father leaves a grave mark on family life, the rearing of children, and their insertion into society. His absence can be physical, affective, cognitive and spiritual. This lack deprives the children of an appropriate model of paternal behaviour. The growing employment of the woman outside the home has not found sufficient compensation in a greater commitment of the man in the domestic environment. In the present day setting the sensitivity of the man in the role of protecting the spouse and children from every form of violence and degradation has been weakened. “The husband – says St. Paul - ought to love his wife ‘as his own body’” (Eph.5:28); to love her as Christ “has loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (v.25). But do you husbands.... understand this? To love your wife as Christ loved the Church? ..... The effect of this radical dedication required of a man, for the love and dignity of the woman, based on the example of Christ, ought to have been enormous within the same Christian community. This seed of gospel newness, which re-establishes the original mutuality of dedication and respect, has matured slowly in history, but has prevailed in the end” (Francis, General Audience, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2015).

## **Young people**

**29.** Many young people still look on marriage as the supreme desire of their life, and the idea of a family of their own as the fulfilment of their aspirations. However, in the concrete they adopt different attitudes as far as marriage is concerned. They are often led to postpone marriage because of problems of an economic nature, or because of their work, or with their studies. Sometimes for other reasons as well, such as ideological influences which devalue marriage and the family, the experience of failure of other couples which they are unwilling to risk, fear in the face of something they consider excessively sublime and sacred, social opportunities and the economic advantages which come from living together, a conception of love which is purely emotive and romantic, the fear of losing their liberty and autonomy, the rejection of an idea which is institutional and bureaucratic. The Church views with concern the distrust towards marriage on the part of many young people, and suffers because of the haste with which many believers decide to reject the commitment of marriage to replace it with something else. Young baptised people are encouraged not to hesitate before the enrichment which the sacrament of marriage will bring to their plans based on love, strengthened by the support which they derive from the grace of Christ and by the possibility of sharing fully in the life of the Church. Consequently it is essential to discern more attentively the underlying motivations of rejection and discouragement. Young people can gain greater confidence when faced with the choice of marriage thanks to those families which, within the Christian community, offer their trustworthy example of a witness which endures over time.

#### **Chapter IV**

##### **Family, affectivity and life**

**30.** “Whoever desires to give the gift of life, must himself receive it as a gift. Assuredly, a person can – as the Lord tells us – become a spring from there flow streams of living water (cf. Jn. 7:37-38). But to become such a spring, he must himself drink, ever afresh, from that original spring which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart the love of God flowed (cf. Jn.19:34) (DCE, 7). The need to take care of one’s own person, to know oneself interiorly, to live ever more in harmony with one’s own emotions and personal feelings, to look for affective relationships of quality, requires being open to the gift of another’s love and the desire to build creative mutual relationships, which are responsible and solid like those of the family. The challenge for the Church is to assist couples mature emotionally and in the development of their affectivity through the promotion of dialogue and of virtue, and trust in the merciful love of God. The total commitment to self-giving, which Christian marriage demands, is a powerful antidote to an individual existence, turned in on itself.

##### **Formation for the gift of self**

**31** The style of family relationships bears primarily on the affective formation of the young generation. The speed of change in contemporary society makes the accompaniment of a person in affective formation towards maturity extremely difficult. It requires appropriate pastoral action, imbued with a rich understanding of Scripture and Catholic teaching, and endowed with the proper educational tools. An appropriate knowledge of the psychology of the family will prove helpful in order for the Christian vision to be presented in an effective way: such an educational endeavour should start with the catechesis of Christian initiation. This formation will take care to highlight the worthiness of the virtue of chastity, understood as the integration of the affections, which encourages the gift of one’s self.



### **Fragility and immaturity**

**32.** In the contemporary world there is no shortage of cultural tendencies whose aim is to impose a sexuality without limit and which wishes to explore all its aspects, even those which are very complex. The question of affective fragility is of extreme relevance: an affective narcissism, unstable and fluctuating, does not help a person to arrive at a greater maturity. To be strongly condemned are: the widespread diffusion of pornography and the commercialisation of the body, also supported by a distorted use of the internet; forced prostitution and its exploitation. In such a context, couples are at times uncertain, hesitant, and struggle to find the correct ways to grow. Numerous are those who tend to remain at the first stages of their emotional and sexual life. The crisis affecting couples destabilises the family and, because of separation and divorce, results in dire consequences for adults, children and society, weakening the individual and social ties. The demographic decline, due to an anti-birth mentality and promoted by the worldwide politics of 'healthy reproduction', threaten the bond between the generations. A further consequence is economic impoverishment and a general loss of hope.

### **Technical and human procreation**

**33.** The bio-technological revolution in the field of human procreation has introduced the possibility of manipulative the generative act, causing it to be independent of the sexual relationship between man and woman. In this way, human life and the power to procreate have become usable and disponible entities, primarily subject to the desires of individuals or couples, not necessarily heterosexual or properly married. This phenomenon has appeared in recent time as something completely new on the human scene, and is becoming ever more widespread. All of this has profound repercussions in the dynamic of relationships, on the structures of social life and in legal systems, which attempt to intervene and regulate practices already happening and situations of a diverse kind. In this matter, the Church is aware of the necessity of offering a word of truth and of hope. It must start from the conviction that man comes from God and lives constantly in His presence: "Human life is sacred, because from its beginning it involves 'the creative action of God' and remains always in a special relationship with the Creator, its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning to its end: no one, under any circumstance, can arrogate to himself the right to directly destroy an innocent human life" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction Donum vitae*, Introd. 5; cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 53)

### **The pastoral challenge**

**34.** A proposal setting out afresh the great questions on the significance of human life finds fertile ground in the deepest aspirations of humanity. The lofty values of marriage and the Christian family are in keeping with the search which characterises human existence, even in a period marked by individualism and hedonism. It is imperative to welcome people with understanding and sensitivity in the reality of their lives, and to know how to support them in their quest for meaning. Faith nurtures the desire for God and the wish to feel fully part of the Church on the part of a person who has experienced failure, or who finds himself in extremely difficult situations. The Christian message always contains within itself the reality and the dynamic of mercy and truth, which converge in Christ: "The first truth of the Church is the love of Christ. The Church draws on this love, which extends to forgiveness and to the gift of self, and is its mediator to mankind. Therefore, wherever the Church is present, there the mercy of the Father ought to be evident" (MV 12). In formation for

married and family life, pastoral care will take account of the plurality of concrete situations. If, on the one hand, it is necessary to promote ways which guarantee the formation of young people for marriage, on the other hand, we must accompany those who live alone, or without setting up a new nuclear family, remain frequently bound to their family of origin. Also, couples who are unable to have children should be the object of special pastoral care on the part of the Church, which assists them to discover the plan of God in their situation, at the service of the whole community. Everyone needs the look of understanding, taking account the situations which are distant from the life of the Church and not always intended, but often induced and at times sudden. From the perspective of faith they are not excluded: all are loved by God and are at the heart of the Church's pastoral ministry.

## **PART II**

### **The family in the plan of God**

**35.** The discernment of the vocation of the family in the numerous situations which we have encountered in the first part, needs of a solid direction for the way and the accompaniment. Such a compass is the Word of God in history, which culminates in Jesus Christ, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" for every man and woman who set up a family. We therefore hearken to what the Church teaches on the family in the light of Sacred Scripture and Tradition. We are convinced that this Word responds to the most profound human expectations of love, truth and mercy, and evokes the potentiality of gift and welcome even in hearts that are broken and humbled. In this light, we believe that the Gospel of the family begins with the creation of man in the image of God who is love, and who calls man and woman to love in accordance with his image (cf. Gn.1:26-27). The vocation of the couple and the family to the communion of love and life persists in all stages of God's plan, despite the limits and the sins of humanity. This vocation is founded from the beginning in Christ the redeemer (cf. Eph.1:3-7). It is he who restores and perfects the marriage covenant from its beginnings (cf. Mk. 10:6), heals the human heart (cf. Jn.4:10), gives it the capacity to love just as he loves the Church, offering himself on her behalf (Eph.5:32).

**36.** This vocation receives its ecclesial and missionary form from the sacramental bond which consecrates the indissoluble conjugal relationship between the spouses. The exchange of consent, which establishes it, signifies for the spouses the commitment to mutual giving and acceptance, total and definitive in "one sole flesh" (Gn. 2:24). The grace of the Holy Spirit makes the union of the spouses a living sign of the bond between Christ and the Church. Their union becomes therefore, throughout the whole of their lives, a wellspring of countless graces: of fruitfulness and witness, of healing and forgiveness. Marriage realises itself within a community of life and love, and the family becomes evangelising. The spouses, having become his disciples, are accompanied by Jesus on the road to Emmaus, they recognise him at the breaking of bread, and return to Jerusalem in the light of his resurrection (cf. Lk. 24: 13-43). The Church proclaims to the family its bond with Christ, by virtue of the Incarnation by which he is part of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Faith recognises in the indissoluble bond of the spouses a reflection of the love of the divine Trinity, revealed in the unity of truth and mercy proclaimed by Jesus. The Synod is the interpreter of the witness of the Church, which offers to the people of God a message of clarity on the truth of the family according to the Gospel. No distance stands in the way of the family being reached by this mercy and touched by this truth.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The family in the history of salvation**

#### **The divine pedagogy**

**37.** Since the order of creation is determined by its orientation to Christ, it is essential to distinguish without separating the different stages through which God communicates to humanity the grace of the covenant. In view of the divine pedagogy, in accordance with which the plan of creation achieves fulfilment in that of redemption through successive stages, it is necessary to understand the newness of the marriage sacrament in continuity with the original natural marriage, based on the order of creation. From this perspective we can understand the manner of God's salvific action even in the Christian life. Because all things have been created through Christ and in view of him (cf. *Col 1:16*), Christians are "happy to discover and eager to respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden; at the same time they should be aware of the profound changes which are taking place among the nations" (AG, 11). The incorporation of the believer into the Church through baptism is fully accomplished with the other sacraments of Christian initiation. In this domestic Church which is his family, he undertakes that "dynamic process, which advances gradually by the progressive integration of the gifts of God" (FC 9), through a constant conversion to the love which saves from sin and bestows the fullness of life. In the present day challenges of society and culture, faith directs its gaze to Jesus Christ in contemplation and adoration of his face. He has gazed upon the women and men he met with love and tenderness, accompanying their steps with truth, patience and mercy, in proclaiming the demands of the kingdom of God. Each time we return to the wellspring of Christian experience new pathways and unthought of possibilities are opened up" (Francis, Discourse at the Vigil of prayer in preparation for the Synod on the family, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2014).

#### **The Icon of the Trinity in the family**

**38.** Scripture and Tradition gives us access to a knowledge of the Trinity, revealed with family-like traits. The family is the image of God which "in his most intimate mystery is not solitude, but rather a family, given that he possesses in himself, paternity, sonship and the essence of a family which is love" (John Paul II, Homily during Mass in the Palafoxiana Seminary of Puebla de Los Angeles, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1979). God is a communion of persons. In baptism, the voice of the Father designates Jesus as his beloved Son, and it is given to us to recognise in this love the Holy Spirit (cf. *Mk. 1:10-11*). Jesus, who has reconciled all things in himself and has redeemed man from sin, not only restored marriage to its original form, but has also raised marriage to a sacramental sign of his love for the Church (*Mt. 19:1-12; Mk. 10:1-12; Eph. 5:21-32*). In the human family, enlightened by Christ, "the image and likeness" of the Most Holy Trinity is restored (*Gn.1:26*), the mystery from which all true love flows. From Christ, through the Church, marriage and the family receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, to bear witness to the love of God until the completion of the Covenant on the last day at the feast of the marriage of the Lamb (cf. *Rev. 19:9*; John Paul II, Catechesis on human love). The covenant of love and fidelity, which the Holy Family of Nazareth lived, sheds light on the beginning which gives shape to every family and renders it capable of dealing better with the vicissitudes of life and history. On this foundation, every family, even in its weakness, can become a light in the world's darkness. "Here we understand what it is to live in a family. Nazareth

reminds us what is a family, what is a communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, its sacred and inviolable character; it makes us see how sweet and irreplaceable is the upbringing in a family, it teaches us its natural place in the social order” (Paul VI, Discourse at Nazareth, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1964).

### **The family in Sacred Scripture**

**39.** Man and woman, with their fruitful and generative love, continue the creative work and collaborate with the Creator in the history of salvation through succeeding generations (cf. *Gn* 1:28; 2:4; 9,17; 10; 17,2.16; 25:11; 28:3; 35:9,11; 47:27; 48:3-4). The real nature of marriage in its exemplary form is sketched in the book of Genesis, to which Jesus also refers in his vision for married love. Man feels he is incomplete because he lacks a helper “corresponding to” himself, who “stands before him” (*Gen.* 2: 18,20) in a dialogue of equality. The woman shares therefore in the very same reality as man, represented symbolically by the rib, or the same flesh, as sung by the man in his song of love: “this is indeed flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone” (*Gen.*2:23). The two become, therefore, “one flesh” (cf. *Gen.*2:24). This foundational reality of the marriage experience is exalted in the formula of reciprocal belonging, present in the confession of love uttered by the woman in the Song of Songs. The words retrace that of the covenant between God and his people (cf. *Lv.* 26:12): “my beloved is mine and I am his....I belong to my beloved and my beloved is mine” (*Song of Songs*, 2:16; 6:3). The constant interweaving in the Canticle of sexuality, eros and love, like a bodily encounter in tenderness, feeling, passion, spirituality and total surrender. Conscious that there can be a night of absence and an interruption of the dialogue between him and her (*Ct.* 3 & 5), the certainty of love’s power over every obstacle remains: “love is as strong as death” (*Ct.*8:6). Biblical prophecy, in celebrating the covenant of love between God and his people, has recourse not only to the symbolism of marriage (cf. *Is* 54; *Jer* 2:2; *Ez* 16), but to the whole family experience, as the prophet Hosea witnesses in a particularly intensive way. His dramatic marriage and experience of family life (cf. Hosea 1-3) becomes a sign of the relationship between the Lord and Israel. The people’s unfaithfulness does not cancel out the invincible love of God whom the prophet depicts as a father, who guides and binds to himself “with strings of love” his own son (cf. Hosea 11:1-4).

**40.** In the words of eternal life which Jesus left to his disciples, with his teaching on marriage and the family, we can recognise three basic stages in the plan of God. At the beginning there is the original family, when God the creator established the primordial marriage between Adam and Eve, as a solid foundation of the family. God not only created the human being masculine and feminine (cf. *Gn.* 1:27), but also blessed them to be fruitful and multiply (cf. *Gn* 1:28). Through this, “the man will leave his father and his mother, be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (*Gn.* 2:24). This union, subsequently wounded by sin, has undergone different fluctuations within the tradition of Israel: between monogamy and polygamy, between stability and divorce, between mutuality and the subordination of woman to man. The concession on repudiation granted by Moses (cf. *Dt* 24:1ff), which pertained at the time of Jesus, is to be understood within this framework. Finally, the reconciliation of a fallen world with the coming of the Saviour, not only restores the original divine plan, but leads the history of the People of God forward to a new fulfilment. The indissolubility of marriage (cf. *Mk* 10:2-9), is not so much to be seen as a burden laid on people but rather as a gift given to persons joined in marriage.

### **Jesus and the family**

**41.** The example of Jesus is programmatic for the Church. The Son of God entered this world through a family. In his thirty years of hidden life at Nazareth – on the social, religious and cultural periphery of the Empire (cf. *Jn* 1:46) – Jesus saw in Mary and Joseph fidelity lived out in love. He inaugurated his public life with a sign at Cana, performed at a wedding banquet (cf. *Jn* 2:1-11). He proclaimed the gospel of marriage as the fullness of revelation which restores the original design of God (cf. *Mt* 19:46). He shared occasions of friendship each day with the family of Lazarus and his sisters (cf. *Lk* 10:38) and with Peter’s family (cf. *Mt* 8:14). He heard the grief of parents for their children, restoring them to life (cf. *Mk* 5:41; *Lk* 7:14-15) and showed the true meaning of mercy which implies the restoration of the Covenant (cf. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 4). This appears clearly in his encounters with the Samaritan woman (cf. *Jn* 4:1-30) and the woman taken in adultery (cf. *Jn* 8:1-11), in whom the awareness of sin is awakened in the presence of the gratuitous love of Jesus. Conversion “is an ongoing commitment for the Church which ‘embraces sinners in her midst’ and, “holy and at the same time in need of purification, applies herself ceaselessly to penance and renewal” (CCC, 1428). This striving for conversion is not a human activity alone. It is the dynamism of a “contrite heart” drawn and moved by grace in response to the merciful love of God who has loved us first (CCC, 1428). God offers the free gift of his forgiveness to anyone who is open to the action of his grace. This takes place through penance, allied to the intention of directing one’s life in accordance with the will of God, the effect of his mercy through which he has reconciled us to himself. God puts into our heart the capacity to be able to follow the way of the imitation of Christ. The teaching and the attitude of Jesus clearly show that the Kingdom of God is the horizon within which every relationship is defined (cf. *Mt* 6:33). The familiar family bonds, although fundamental, “are not however absolute” (CCC, 2232). In a startling way for those who heard him, Jesus relativized family ties in the light of the Kingdom of God (cf. *Mk* 3:33-35; *Lk* 14:26; *Mt* 10:34-37; 19:29; 23:9). This revolution of the affections introduced by Jesus into the human family amounts to a radical claim to universal brotherhood. No one remains outside the new community united in the name of Jesus, because all called to become part of the family of God. Jesus demonstrates how the divine condescension accompanies humanity’s journey with his grace, transforms the hardened heart with his mercy (cf. *Ez* 36:26), and directs it to its fulfilment through the paschal mystery.

## **Chapter II**

### **The family in the Magisterium of the Church**

#### **The teachings of the Second Vatican Council**

**42.** On the basis of which she has received from Christ, the Church has developed through the ages a rich teaching on marriage and the family. One of the most sublime expressions of this Magisterium has been proposed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, in the pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which devotes a whole chapter to the dignity of marriage and the family (cf. *GS*, 47-52). It defines marriage and the family in this way: “the covenant, or irrevocable personal consent, of marriage sets up an intimate sharing of married life and love as instituted by the creator and regulated by God’s laws. Thus, the human action in which spouses give themselves to each other and accept each other results in an institution which is stable by divine ordinance and also in the eyes of society” (*GS*, 48). The “true love between husband and wife” (*GS* 49) implies mutual self-giving, it includes and integrates the sexual and affective dimension, in keeping with the divine plan (cf. *GS* 48-49). This illustrates clearly that marriage, and the conjugal love animating it, “are ordered by their nature to the procreation and upbringing of offspring” (*GS* 50).

Furthermore, the rootedness of the spouses in Christ is emphasised: Christ the Lord “comes to meet Christian spouses in the sacrament of marriage” (*GS* 48) and remains with them (*sacamentum permanens*). He assumes human love, purifies it, brings it to its fullness, and gives to spouses, with his Spirit, the capacity to live it, permeating their whole life of faith, hope and charity. In this way the spouses, as it were, are consecrated and, through the mediation of a specific grace, build up the Body of Christ and constitute a domestic Church (cf. *LG* 11), so the Church in order to comprehend fully its mystery, looks upon the Christian family, which reveals it in a real way.

### **Paul VI**

**43.** Blessed Paul VI, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, developed the teaching on marriage and the family. In particular, with the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, he highlighted the intrinsic bond between conjugal love and the generation of life; “conjugal love requires from the spouses that they recognise in an appropriate way their mission of responsible parenthood, which today is rightly stressed and that it be precisely understood. ...the responsible exercise of parenthood entails therefore that the spouses acknowledge their own duties to God, to themselves, and to society, in a correct hierarchy of values” (*HV* 10). In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Paul VI pointed out the rapport between the family and the Church: “In the area of the apostolate proper to the laity, it is impossible not to stress the evangelical action of the family. It has well deserved at different times in the history of the Church, the beautiful definition of “domestic Church”, approved by the Second Vatican Council. This means that, in every Christian family, different aspects of the whole Church ought to be discerned. Moreover, the family, like the Church, ought to be a forum where the Gospel is passed on and from where the Gospel shines out” (*EN*, 71).

### **John Paul II**

**44.** Saint John Paul II devoted particular care to the family through his catecheses on human love and on the theology of the body. In these he has offered to the Church a richness of reflections on the spousal meaning of the human body and on God’s plan regarding marriage and the family from the beginning of creation. In particular, when dealing with conjugal charity, he had described the way in which the spouses, in their mutual love, receive the gift of Christ’s Spirit and live out their calling to holiness. In the letter to families *Gratissimam Sane* and above all in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul has pointed out the family as “the way of the Church”, has set out an integrated vision of man and woman’s vocation to love, has proposed the fundamental outlines for the pastoral care of the family and for the presence of the family in society. Within marriage and the family a network of interpersonal relationships comes into being – nuptials, fatherhood-motherhood, sonship, fraternity – through which every human being is introduced into the “human family” and into the “family of God” (*FC* 15).

### **45. Benedict XVI**

Benedict XVI in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, took up the subject of the truth of the love between man and woman, which only receives its full light in the light of the love of Christ crucified (cf. *DCE*, 2). He reasserts that “marriage based on an exclusive and definitive love becomes an icon of the relationship between God and his people, and viceversa: the way of the love of God is a measure of human love” (*DCE*, 11). Furthermore, in the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, he stresses the importance of family love as a principal of life in society, the place where the

experience of the common good is learned. “The social imperative has therefore arisen, and even economic, to propose afresh to the new generations the beauty of the family and of marriage, how such institutions correspond to the most profound aspirations of the heart and the dignity of the person. From this perspective, countries are called to launch a politic promoting the central nature and integrity of the family, based on the marriage between a man and a woman, the first and vital cell of society, bearing the burdens of its economic and financial problems, respecting its relational nature” (CiV, 44).

### **Francis**

**46.** Pope Francis, in the Encyclical *Lumen Fidei* addresses the link between the family and faith in this way: “the primary ambience in which faith throws light on the human city is to be found in the family. I am thinking first of all on the stable union of a man and woman in marriage....To promise a love which is forever is possible when the great plan of one’s own personal aims is discovered” (LF, 52). In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope recalls the centrality of the family in the midst of the present day cultural challenges: “The family is passing through a cultural crisis of a profound kind, like all communities and social groupings. In the case of the family, the fragile nature of the relationships becomes particularly serious because we are dealing with the basic cell of society, the place where living together with difference is taught, and belonging to others, and where parents pass on the faith to the children. Marriage tends to be seen as a mere form of affective gratification which can establish itself in any way and undergo change according to the sensibility of each person. Yet the indispensable contribution of marriage to society surpasses the level of emotions and the contingent requirements of the couple” (EG, 66). Pope Francis has further devoted an organic cycle of catecheses to subjects pertaining to the family, developing the subjects, experiences and the phases of life.

## **Chapter III**

### **The family in Christian teaching**

#### **Marriage in the order of creation and sacramental fullness**

**47.** The order of redemption sheds light on and completes the order of creation. Natural marriage, therefore, receives its full understanding in the light of its sacramental completion: it is only by fixing one’s gaze on Christ that the truth of human relationships is revealed in all its depths. “In fact, it is only in the mystery of the Word incarnate that light is shed on the mystery of humankind...Christ, the last Adam, who fully discloses humankind to itself and unfolds its noble calling by revealing the mystery of the Father and the Father’s love” (GS 22). Consequently, it particularly timely to understand, in a christological key, the natural properties of marriage, which constitute the wellbeing of the spouses (*bonum conjugum*), embracing unity, openness to life, faithfulness and indissolubility. In the light of the New Testament, according to which everything has been created through Christ and for him (cf. Col 1:16; Jn 1:1ff), it was the wish of the Second Vatican Council to express appreciation for natural marriage and for the positive elements present in other religions (LG 16; NA 2) and in the different cultures, in spite of limitations and deficiencies (cf. RM 55). The discernment of the presence of “*semina Verbi*” in other cultures (cf. AG 11), is also applicable the reality of marriage and family life. Beyond a true natural marriage, positive elements are present in marriage practices of other traditional religions. These practices, - based therefore on a stable and genuine

relationship between a man and a woman – are, we maintain ordered to the sacrament. With its gaze directed to the human wisdom of peoples, the Church acknowledges this family also as a necessary and fundamental fruitful cell for human co-habitation.

#### **48. Indissolubility and fruitfulness of the marriage union**

God's irrevocable faithfulness to the covenant is the foundation of the indissolubility of marriage. The total and profound love between spouses is not based on human capacities alone: God sustains this covenant with the power of his Spirit. The choice which God has made in our regard is reflected in a certain way in the choice of the spouse: just as God keeps his promise even when we fail, in the same way marital love and faithfulness hold good "in good times and in bad". Marriage is the gift and promise of God, who hears the prayer of those who seek his help. The hardness of the human heart, its limitations and fragility in the face of temptation pose a great challenge to a life in common. The witness of couples who live a faithful marriage highlights the value of this indissoluble union and stirs up the desire to renew continually their faithful commitment. Indissolubility corresponds to the deep desire for a love that is mutual and enduring which the Creator has placed in the human heart, and is a gift which he himself bestows on every couple: "what God has joined together, let no man divide" (*Mt* 19:6; cf. *Mk* 10:9). Man and woman welcome this gift and cherish it so that their love may be forever. In the face of present day sensibilities and of the real difficulties of maintaining commitments that last, the Church is called to set out the demands and the plan of life of the Gospel of the family and Christian marriage. "Saint Paul, speaking of new life in Christ, says that Christians – all – are called to love just as Christ loved them, that is, 'be subject to one another' " (*Eph.* 5:21), which means service of one another. And he introduces here the analogy between the husband - wife and that of Christ – Church. It is clear that this is an imperfect analogy, yet we must draw the spiritual meaning which is most profound and revolutionary, and at the same time simple, important for each man and woman who entrust themselves to the grace of God" (Francis, General Audience, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2015). It is once more an announcement of hope!

#### **The blessings of the family**

**49.** Marriage is the "life-long community of life, by its nature ordered to the good of the spouses and to the begetting and upbringing of children" (*CIC*, can. 1055 – 1). Through their mutual acceptance, those entering marriage promise a total gift of themselves, faithfulness and openness to life. In faith and with the grace of Christ, they recognise the gifts which God is offering them and they commit themselves in his name in the presence of the Church. God consecrates the spouses' love and strengthens its indissolubility, by offering them his grace to live in fidelity, mutual integration and openness to life. We thank God for marriage, because by means of a community of life and love, the Christian spouses come to know happiness and know from experience that God loves them personally, with passion and tenderness. Man and woman, individually and as a couple – Pope Francis has recalled – "are the image of God). Their difference "is not by way of opposition, or subordination, but through communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God" (General Audience, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015). The unitive end of marriage is a constant summons to grow and develop this love. In their union of love the spouses come to experience the beauty of fatherhood and motherhood; they share their aims and tasks, desires and worries; they learn mutual care and forgiveness. In this love they



celebrate their times of joy and support each other in the difficult phases of their life's journey.

**50.** The fruitfulness of the spouses, in the fullest sense, is spiritual: they are living sacramental signs, wellsprings of life for the Christian community and for the world. The generative act, which demonstrates the “unbreakable connection” between the unitive and creative value – highlighted by Blessed Paul VI (cf. *HV*, 12) – must be understood from the standpoint of the responsibility of parents in the commitment for the care and Christian upbringing of children. These are the most precious fruits of married love. From the time that the child becomes a person, he transcends those who have begotten him. “To be a son and daughter, in fact, according to the plan of God means to carry within oneself the memory and the hope of a love which has realised its very self by setting the life of another human being on fire, original and new. And for the parents every child, if the same, is different and other” (Francis, General Audience, 11<sup>th</sup> February 2015). The beauty of the mutual and gratuitous gift, the joy for a life just born and the loving care of all the members, from young to old, are some of the fruits which make the response to the vocation of the family unique and irreplaceable. Family relationships dovetail in a decisive way with the firm and fraternal construction of human society, irreducible to the inhabitants of an area or citizens of a State merely living together.

### **The truth and beauty of the family**

**51.** With profound joy and a deep sense of consolation, the Church looks on families who remain faithful to the teachings of the Gospel, thanking and encouraging them for the witness that they give. Thanks to them, the beauty of an indissoluble and faithful marriage which endures becomes credible. There matures within the family the first ecclesial experience of communion between persons, in which through grace is reflected the mystery of the love of the Holy Trinity. “it is here that the toil and joy of work is learned, fraternal love, the generosity of forgiveness, always renewed, and above all divine worship through prayer and the offering of one’s own life” (*CCC* , 1657). The Gospel of the family nurtures even those seeds which await maturity, and ought to show care for those trees which have withered and of necessity must not be overlooked (cf. *Lk* 13:6-9. The Church, reliable teacher and caring mother that she is, although conscious that among the baptised there is not other marriage bond than the sacramental one, and that every rupture contravenes the will of God, is equally conscious of the fragility of many of her children who struggle on the road of faith. “Therefore, without diminishing the value of the gospel ideal , there is need to accompany with mercy and patience the possible stages of people’s growth which they construct from day to day...A small step, in the midst of huge human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which is exteriorly correct and which passes its days without facing significant difficulties. The consolation and the stimulus of God’s saving grace, at work mysteriously in every person, ought to touch everyone, away and beyond their failings and falls” (*EG* , 44). This truth and beauty must be safeguarded. In the face of difficult situations and wounded families, it is always essential to recall a general principle: “Shepherds should know, that through love of the truth, they are obliged to discern situations carefully” (*FC* , 84). The level of responsibility is not equal in all cases, and factors can exist which curtail the capacity to make a decision. While the teaching, therefore, is to be set forth with clarity, judgements are to be avoided which fail to take account of different situations, and it is necessary to be attentive to the way in which people live and suffer because of their condition.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Towards the ecclesial fullness of the family**

#### **The intimate bond between the Church and family**

**52.** The blessing and the responsibility of a new family, sealed in the sacrament of the Church, entails with the Christian community the willingness to be upholders and promoters of this fundamental covenant between man and woman. This willing disposition, within the context of social ties, the generation of children, protection of the weakest, communal life, brings a responsibility which has the right to be supported, recognised and valued. By virtue of the sacrament of marriage each family in all its aspects becomes a source of good for the Church. From this perspective will assuredly be a priceless gift, for the Church of today, to reflect on the reciprocity between the family and the Church: the Church is a source of good for the family, and the family a source of good for the Church. Safeguarding the sacramental gift of the Lord involves not only the individual family, but the whole Christian community itself, in a manner which belongs to it. In the face of emerging difficulties, even serious ones, in preserving the marriage union, the discernment of respective achievements and of relative failures ought to be explored by the couple with the help of Pastors and the community.

#### **The grace of conversion and its accomplishment**

**53.** The Church remains close to married couples whose relationship has been so weakened that there is a risk of separation. In the case where a relationship has ground to a sad end, the Church feels the obligation of accompanying this time of suffering, in such a way that at least destructive opposing positions between the spouses are not inflamed. Special attention should be given to the children, who are the first to be affected by the separation, so that they suffer as little as possible: “when it goes wrong with father and mother, the soul of the little ones suffer grievously” (Francis, General Audience, 24<sup>th</sup> June 2015). The gaze of Christ, whose light enlightens every person (cf. *Jn* 1:9; *GS*, 22) is the inspiration for the pastoral solicitude of the Church towards those faithful who simply live together and have contracted a civil marriage or are divorced and remarried. From the perspective of the divine pedagogy, the Church looks with love on those who share in her life in an imperfect way: it invokes upon them the grace of conversion, encourages them to do good, to care for one another with love and to put themselves at the service of the community in which they live and work. It is desirable that Dioceses promote courses of discernment and the involvement of such persons, as a help and encouragement towards the maturing of a conscious and coherent choice. Couples should be made aware of the possibility of recourse to the process of a declaration of nullity of their marriage.

**54.** Whenever a union attains a noteworthy stability through a public bond – and is marked by deep affection, responsibility towards offspring, by the ability to overcome trials – it can be seen as an opportunity for accompaniment towards the sacrament of marriage, wherever that is possible. It is a different case when the cohabitation has not been arranged with a view to a possible future marriage, and in the absence of an intention to stabilise an institutional relationship. The reality of civil marriages between a man and a woman, traditional marriages and, given the due difference, also of those cohabiting, is an emerging phenomenon in many countries. Moreover,

the situation of the faithful who have established a new union demands special pastoral care: “In these decades...there has been an increased awareness of the necessity for a fraternal and careful welcome, in love and truth, towards those baptised who have established a new cohabitation following the failure of a sacramental marriage; in effect, these people are not de facto excommunicated” (Francis, General Audience, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2015).

### **Mercy at the heart of revelation**

**55.** The Church starts from the real life situations of present day families, all in need of mercy, beginning with those who suffer most. With the merciful heart of Jesus, the Church must accompany its more fragile children, marked by a wounded and confused love, restoring confidence and hope, like the light of a lighthouse in the harbour or a torch borne aloft to enlighten people who have lost their way in the middle of a storm. Mercy is “the centre of the revelation of Jesus Christ” (*MV*, 25). In it the sovereignty of God shines out, with it he remains ever faithful to his being, which is love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:8), and to his pledge. “It is above all by his mercy that God manifests his almighty power” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summae Theologiae*, II-II, q.30, art.4; cf. Roman Missal, Collect for XXVI Sunday in Ordinary Time). To proclaim the truth with love is an act of mercy in itself. In the Bull, *Misericordia Vultus*, Pope Francis declares: “Mercy is not opposed to justice but expresses the attitude of God to the sinner”. And he continues: “God does not reject justice. But he encircles and surpasses it in a higher event where love is experienced as the foundation of a true justice” (*MV*, 21). Jesus is the face of God the Father’s mercy: “God loved the world so much...so that the world might be saved through Him (the Son)” cf. *Jn* 3:16-17).

## **PART III**

### **The mission of the family**

**56.** Right from the beginning of history God has been extravagant in love towards his children (cf. *LG*, 2), so that they could have the fullness of life in Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn* 10:10). Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, God invites families to initiate themselves into this life, to proclaim and communicate it to others) cf. *LG*, 41). As Pope Francis emphatically reminds us, the mission of the family always reaches out in the service of our brothers and sisters. It is the mission of the Church to which each family is called to share in a unique and privileged way. “By virtue of the baptism they have received, every single member of the People of God becomes a missionary disciple” (*EG*, 120). Throughout the world, in the reality of families, we can see so much happiness and joy, but also a great deal of suffering and grief. We want to look at this reality with the eyes with which Christ also looked when he walked among the people of his time. Our attitude ought to be one of humble understanding. Our desire is to accompany each and every family so that they can discover a better way to overcome the difficulties which they encounter on their journey. The Gospel is always a sign of contradiction. The Church never forgets that the paschal mystery is central to the Good News which we proclaim. It desires to assist families to recognise and to welcome the cross when it appears before them, so that they can bear it with Christ on the road to the joy of the resurrection. This task demands “a pastoral and missionary conversion, which cannot leave things as they are” (*EG*, 25). Conversion therefore has a profound bearing on style and on language. It is essential to adopt a language which is meaningful. The proclamation ought to provide the experience that the Gospel of the family is a response to the deepest expectations of the human person: to their dignity and to the full realisation in

mutuality, in communion, and in fruitfulness. It is not a question of setting out a norm, but of announcing the grace which gives the capacity to live in accordance with the blessings of the family. The transmission of the faith makes a language more imperative than ever today capable of reaching everyone, in particular young people, to communicate the beauty of family love and to grasp the meaning of terms such as giving, conjugal love, faithfulness, fruitfulness, procreation. The need for a new and fully adequate language arises above all when introducing children and young people to the theme of sexuality. Many parents and numerous others committed to pastoral work experience difficulty in finding an appropriate language which at the same time is respectful, which as well as setting the nature of biological sexuality with the complementarity which is mutually enriching, with friendship, with love, and with the self-giving of man and woman.

## **Chapter I**

### **The formation of the family**

#### **The preparation for marriage**

**57.** Christian marriage cannot be reduced to a cultural tradition or to a mere legal convention: it is a genuine call of God which requires careful discernment, constant prayer and appropriate maturity. For this to happen, courses in formation are required which accompany the person and the couple in a manner which, together with the communication of the contents of the faith, there is aligned the experience of life offered by the entire ecclesial community. The effectiveness of this help requires also an improvement in the pre-marriage instruction – often weak in content – which is an integral part of normal pastoral ministry. Furthermore, the pastoral care of those getting married should be inserted into the general commitment of the Christian community to set forth in a convincing and adequate manner the gospel message on the dignity of the person, his liberty and respect for his rights. The stages indicated in *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 66) should occupy a preeminent place: remote preparation, which passes through the handing on of the faith and of Christian values; the proximate preparation, which coincides with the catechetical itineraries and formative experiences lived within the ecclesial community; the immediate preparation for marriage, part of the much broader way under the rubric of the vocational aspect.

**58.** Within the prevailing cultural transformation models are regularly presented which contrast the Christian vision of the family. Sexuality is often detached from the context of genuine love. In some countries formative programmes are even imposed by public authority which call into question the freedom of the Church to give its own teaching and the right of conscientious objection on the part of educators. On the other hand, the family notwithstanding that it remains the primary pedagogical forum, cannot be the only place for sexual education. For this reason it is essential to make use of true and genuine supportive pastoral courses, directed both to individuals and to couples, with particular attention to the age of puberty and adolescence, in which there is help to discover the beauty of sexuality in love. Christianity declares that God has created humanity, male and female, and has blessed them so as to form one flesh and transmit life (cf. *Gn.* 1:27-28; 2:24). Their difference, equal in personal dignity, is the seal of God's good creation. According to the Christian principle, soul and body, biological sex as well and the social-cultural role of the sex (gender), can be distinguished, but not separated. The need emerges therefore for an expansion of formative topics in the pre-marriage courses, so that these become courses of education to the faith and to love, integrated into the

journey of Christian initiation. In this light, it is necessary to recall the importance of the virtues, among which is chastity, the precious condition for the genuine growth of interpersonal love. The formative itinerary should assume the physiognomy of a way orientated to personal vocational discernment and that of the couple, ensuring that there is an improved synergy between the different pastoral areas. Marriage preparation course should be led also by married couples in a position to accompany those about to be married before the actual marriage and in the first years of married life, so enhancing the value of married ministry. The pastoral appreciation of personal relationships will favour the gradual opening of minds and hearts to the fullness of God's plan.

### **The celebration of marriage**

**59.** The marriage liturgy is a unique event, which takes place within a family and social context in a festive setting. The first of Jesus's signs took place at the wedding feast of Cana: the good wine of the Lord's miracle, which gave joy to the birth of a new family, is the new wine of the Covenant of Christ with the men and women of every age. The marriage preparation takes up the attention of those to be married for a long period of time. It is a valuable time for them, their families and their friends, which ought to be enriched by its appropriate spiritual and ecclesial dimension. The marriage celebration is a propitious occasion for inviting many to the celebration of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The Christian community, through a heartfelt and joyful participation, will welcome the new family into its midst, as a domestic Church, so that it may feel part of the ecclesial family. The nuptial liturgy ought to be prepared by a mystagogic catechesis which leads the couple to the realisation that the celebration of their covenant is completed "in the Lord". The celebrant frequently has the opportunity to address a gathering made up of people who share little in the life of the Church or who belong to another Christian confession or religious community. It is a question of a valuable opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, which can stir up, in the families who are present, the rediscovery of the faith and love which come from God.

### **The first years of married life**

**60.** The first years of married life are a vital and sensitive time during which the couple grow in the awareness of their vocation and mission. Here arises the need of pastoral accompaniment which continues after the celebration of the sacrament. The parish is the place where experienced couples can be put at the disposition of these young people, with the eventual gatherings of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities. It is essential to encourage in the spouses a basic attitude of welcome to the great gift of children. We emphasise the importance of a family spirituality, of prayer, and of participation in the Sunday Eucharist, inviting the couple to come together regularly to advance growth in the spiritual life and solidarity in the concrete demands of life. The personal encounter with Christ through reading the Word of God, in community and in homes, particularly under the form of "lectio divina" constitutes an inspired source for daily living. Liturgies, devotional practices and Eucharists celebrated for families, above all on the wedding anniversary, nourish the spiritual life and the missionary witness of the family. Not infrequently, in the first years of married life, a certain introversion on the part of the couple takes place, with the consequent isolation from the community setting. The consolidation of a network of relationships between the couples and the creation of meaningful bonds are essential in order for the Christian family to mature. Ecclesial movements and groups regularly guarantee such times of growth and formation. The

local Church, by integrating such supports, takes the initiative in coordinating the pastoral care of young families. In the initial stages of married life frustration with the desire to have children can cause dejection. Often there transpires, as a result grounds of crisis, which quickly end in separation. For such reasons the closeness of the community to the young spouses is also very important, by means of affective and discreet support from trustworthy families.

### **The formation of priests and other pastoral workers**

**61.** A renewal of pastoral ministry is essential in the light of the Gospel of the family and the teaching of the Magisterium. For this to take place, it is necessary to provide an extremely appropriate formation of priests, deacons, religious men and woman, catechists and other pastoral workers, who ought to promote the integration of families within the parish community, most of all on the occasion of their formative journey towards the Christian life, with the sacraments in view. Seminaries in particular, on their paths of human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation should prepare future priests to become apostles of the family. In their formation for the ordained ministry their affective and psychological development must not be overlooked, by taking part even directly in the appropriate courses. Ways and courses of formation intended specifically for pastoral workers will make them suitable for insertion along the same preparatory path to marriage within the wider dynamic of ecclesial life. During their time of formation, candidates for the priesthood should live with their own family for a suitable period and be guided to experience family pastoral life, so as to acquire an adequate knowledge of the real situation of families. The presence of lay people and of families, in particular the female presence, in priestly formation enhances the appreciation of the diversity and complementarity of the different vocations within the Church. The dedication of this invaluable ministry can receive vitality and solidity from a renewed alliance between the two different forms of the vocation to love: that of marriage, which blossoms within the Christian family, based on love and on choice, and that of the consecrated life, image of the communion of the Kingdom, which starts with the unconditional acceptance of the as a gift of God. In the communion of vocations there is activated a fruitful exchange of gifts, which gives life and enriches the ecclesial community (cf. Ac. 18:2). The spiritual direction of families can be viewed as one of the parish ministries. The suggestion has been made that the diocesan Office for the family and the other pastoral Offices should intensify their cooperation in this area. In the ongoing formation of the clergy and pastoral workers, it is desirable that attention be given, with appropriate means, to the maturity of the affective and psychological aspects, which will be indispensable to them in the pastoral accompaniment of the family, as well as in view of particular situations of emergency caused by cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

## **Chapter II**

### **Family, generativity, upbringing**

#### **The transmission of life**

**62.** The presence of numerous families in the Church is a blessing for the Christian community and for society, since openness to life is an intrinsic demand of conjugal love. In this regard, the Church expresses sincere thanks to families who welcome, bring up, surround with affection and pass on the faith to their children, in a special way to those who are fragile and marked by disabilities. These children, born with special needs, evoke the love of Christ and ask the Church to protect them as a blessing. Unfortunately there is a widespread mentality which diminishes the

begetting of life, simply due to the individual gratification of the couple. Factors of an economic, cultural and educational kind impose a weight, at times decisive, resulting in a sharp decline in the birthrate, which weakens the social framework, calls into question the relationship between the generations and causes one to look at the future with uncertainty. In this regard, it is important to begin by listening to people and to offer reasons for the beauty and truth of an unconditioned openness to life, as that needed by human love to live life in its fullness. We see the necessity here of a wider dissemination of the teaching statements of the Church's Magisterium which promote the culture of life. The pastoral care of the family ought to increasingly involve Catholic experts in bio-medical issues in pre-marriage courses and in the accompaniment of couples.

### **Generative responsibility**

**63.** In accordance with the order of creation the conjugal love between a man and woman and the transmission of life are ordered one to the other (cf. *Gn.* 1:27-28). In this way the Creator has made man and woman sharers in his work of creation, and at the same time made them instruments of his love, entrusting to their responsibility the future of humanity through the transmission of human life. The spouses open themselves to life, forming a right judgement "with an eye to their own good and that of their children, whether those already born or those foreseen, discerning the material and spiritual conditions of the times and their condition of life, and bearing in mind the good of the family community, of human society and of the Church" (*GS* 50; cf. *VS*, 54-66). In keeping with the personal and wholly human character of conjugal love, the correct way to family planning is that of a consensual dialogue between the spouses, respect for the times and consideration for the dignity of the partner. In this context, the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (cf. 10-14) and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 14; 28-35) should be looked at again for the purpose of reawakening the disposition to life in contrast to a mentality often opposed to life. In this way the openness to life can grow in the family, in the Church and in society. Through her many institutions for children the Church can contribute to creating a society, but a community of faith as well, which have the child as a yardstick. The courage to transmit life is notably strengthened where an atmosphere is created suitable for children, in which help and accompaniment are offered in the task of the upbringing of children (cooperation between parishes, parents and families).

The responsible choice in begetting children presupposes the formation of conscience, which is "the most intimate centre and sanctuary of a person, in which he or she is alone with God whose voice echoes within them" (*GS*, 16). The more spouses strive to listen to God and his commandments in their conscience (cf. *Rom.* 2:15), and are accompanied spiritually, the more will their decision be intimately freed from a subjective decision and from adaptation to the ways of living of their environment. Out of love for this dignity of conscience the Church rejects with all its strength coercive interventions on the part of the State favouring contraception, sterilization or downright abortion. Recourse to methods based on "natural rhythms of fertility" need encouragement. This will highlight that "these methods respect the spouses' body, encourage tenderness between them and favour upbringing of an authentic kind" (*CCC*, 2370). There is enduring evidence that children are a wonderful gift of God, a joy for parents and for the Church. Through them the Lord renews the world.

### **The value of life in all its phases**

**64.** Life is a gift of God and a mystery which transcends us. Therefore in no way should the beginnings of life be disposed of, nor the final stage. On the contrary, it is essential to devote special care to these phases. Today, much too easily “the human being is considered in itself to be a consumer item, which can be used and then thrown away. We have allowed a culture of “waste” to develop, which is even being promoted” (*EG*, 53). In this regard, it falls to the family, supported by the whole of society, to welcome nascent life and to care for it in its final stages. As far as the drama of abortion is concerned, the Church above all affirms the sacred and inviolable character of human life and commits itself to determined action in its favour (cf. *EV*, 58). Thanks to its institutions, she offers counselling to those who are pregnant, supports teenage mothers, comes to the aid of abandoned infants, and is close to those who have undergone abortions. She reminds workers in the health sectors of the moral obligation to object in conscience. At the same time, the Church not only senses the urgency of affirming the right to a natural death, shunning a therapeutic relentlessness and euthanasia, but rather cares for the elderly, protects people who have disabilities, assists the terminally ill, comforts the dying, and firmly rejects the death penalty (cf. *CCC*, 2258).

### **Adoption and fostering**

**65.** The adoption of children, orphans and those abandoned, accepted like one’s own children, in the spirit of faith, takes on the role of an authentic apostolate of the family (cf. *AA*, 11), and has been called for and encouraged many times by the Magisterium (cf. *FC*, 41; *EV*, 93). The choice to adopt and to foster is an expression of a particular kind of fruitfulness, above and beyond cases sadly marked by infertility. Such a choice is an eloquent sign of a generative welcome, a witness of faith and the fulfilment of love. It restores a reciprocal dignity to a bond which has been sundered: to spouses who have no children and to children who have no parents. Therefore all initiatives aimed at making adoption procedures easier are to be supported. The trafficking of children between countries and continents can be stopped by legal measures and State controls. The continuity of the generative relationship and that of upbringing has as a necessary foundation the sexual difference between man and woman, as in procreation. In the face of those situations where the child is sought at all costs as a right of personal fulfilment, adoption and fostering, rightly understood, point up an important aspect of being a parent and being a child, in as much as they help to acknowledge that children, whether natural, adopted or fostered, are another in themselves, and so must be welcomed, loved, taken care of, and not just put into the world. The overriding interest of the child must always inspire the decision to adopt or to foster. As Pope Francis has recalled: “children have the right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother” (Audience to those taking part in an international Colloquium on the complementary nature of man and woman, promoted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2014). Nevertheless, the Church is duty bound to proclaim that, wherever possible, children have a right to grow up in the family of their birth with the greatest possible support.

### **The upbringing of children**

**66.** One of the fundamental challenges confronting present day families is undoubtedly that of upbringing, made all the more demanding and complex by the prevailing cultural reality and the powerful influence of the media. Due consideration must be given to the demands and the expectations of families, capable of being in their everyday life places of growth, of the solid and essential transmission of the



faith, of spirituality and of the virtues which give shape to life. The family of origin is often the womb of a vocation to the priesthood and religious life: parents are therefore urged to ask the Lord for the inestimable gift of a vocation for one of their children. In the field of education, the right of parents should be safeguarded so as to choose freely the kind of education to give their children in accordance with their convictions, available possibilities, and quality. They must be helped to live an affective life, even within the married relationship, as a way towards maturity, in the ever deeper acceptance of the other and ever fuller self-giving. In this sense the necessity is reasserted of offering formative ways which nourish married life, and the importance of a laity who can provide accompaniment by the fact of a living witness. Of great help is the example of a faithful and profound love, arising from tenderness, respect, capable of growing over time, and in its firm openness to generating life comes to experience a mystery which transcends us.

**67.** Within different cultures it is the adults of the family who play an indispensable role in upbringing. However, in many situations, we are witnessing a progressive weakening of the part played by parents in the rearing of children, due to the invasive presence of the media within the family sphere, as well as the tendency to depute or reserve to others this task. On the other hand, the media (the social media in particular) can keep family members united over time. Besides all this, the media can be an opportunity for evangelising young people. The Church is asked to encourage and sustain families in their vigilant and responsible task of taking part in scholastic and educational programmes which are of interest to their children. There is unanimous agreement in reaffirming that the first school of education is the family and that the Christian community is well placed in the support and integration of this irreplaceable formative role. It is necessary to set spaces apart and times of meeting to encourage the formation of parents and for the sharing of experiences among families. Important also is the close involvement of parents in the preparation for the sacraments of Christian initiation, in view of the fact that they are the first instructors and witnesses of faith for their children.

**68.** Catholic schools play a vital role in assisting parents in their duty of educating their children. Catholic education facilitates the role of the family: it ensures a sound preparation, educates in the virtues and values, instructs in accordance with the teachings of the Church. Catholic schools should be encouraged in their mission of helping their alumni to grow as mature adults, able to view the world through the gaze of the love of Jesus, and understand life as a call to serve God. It follows therefore that Catholic schools are important for the evangelising mission of the Church. In many regions the only schools are Catholic, guaranteeing genuine opportunities for the children of poor families, especially for the youth, offering them an alternative to poverty and a way to make a true contribution to the life of society. Catholic schools must be encouraged to carry forward their activity in the most impoverished communities, at the service of the less fortunate and most vulnerable members of our society.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Family and pastoral accompaniment**

#### **Complex situations**

**69.** The sacrament of marriage, as the faithful and unbreakable union between a man and a woman, called to reciprocal acceptance and to the acceptance of life, is a great grace for the human family. The Church has the joy and the duty of announcing

this grace to every person in every situation. It is aware today, in an ever more urgent manner, of the responsibility to bring the baptised to rediscover how the grace of God is at work in their lives – even in the most difficult of situations – to bring them to the fullness of the sacrament. The Synod, while appreciating and encouraging those families which honour the beauty of Christian marriage, intends to advance pastoral discernment of those situations in which the acceptance of this gift struggles to be appreciated, or in some circumstances compromised. It is a serious responsibility to maintain a lively pastoral dialogue with such believers, to agree to the maturing of a coherent openness to the Gospel of marriage and the family in its fullness. Pastors ought to identify those elements which can favour evangelisation and the human and spiritual growth of those entrusted by the Lord to their care.

**70.** Pastoral concern should clearly set out the gospel message and gather the positive elements present in those situations which do not yet correspond to it, or not at all. In many countries a growing number of couples live together, without marriage, neither canonical nor civil. In some countries traditional marriage exists, arranged between families and often celebrated in different stages. Simple cohabitation is often chosen because of a mentality generally opposed to institutions and definite commitments, but also in expectation of an existential security (work or fixed salary). In other countries, finally, *de facto* unions have proliferated, not only through rejection of family values and marriage, but also because getting married is seen as a luxury, due to social conditions, with the result that social deprivation impels *de facto* unions. All of these situations are to be met in a constructive way, seeking to transform them as occasions for a way of conversion towards the fullness of marriage and the family in the light of the Gospel.

**71.** The choice of civil marriage, or in different cases, of simple cohabitation, is very often not motivated by prejudices or resistance in the face of a sacramental union, but by cultural or contingent considerations. In many circumstances, the decision to live together is a sign of a relationship which in effect wants to move towards the direction of stability. Such a wish, which finds expression in an enduring bond, trustworthy and open to life, can be seen as a commitment on which to construct a way towards the nuptial sacrament, discovered as the plan of God for their own life. The path towards growth, which can lead to sacramental marriage, will be encouraged by recognising true features of a generous and enduring love: the desire to seek the good of the other before that of one's self; the experience of forgiveness asked and received; the aspiration to build a family not closed in on itself and open to the good of the ecclesial community and society as a whole. Along this pathway those signs of love will be given their value, which in a real way correspond to the reflection of God's love in an authentic marriage undertaking.

**72.** The problems relating to mixed marriages require specific care. Marriages between Catholics and other baptised Christians “offer, at least from their particular physiognomy, many elements which it is good to appreciate and value, whether because of their intrinsic worth, or for the contribution they make to the ecumenical movement”. With such an aim “the cordial collaboration should be sought between the Catholic and non-Catholic minister, from the time of marriage preparation and of the marriage” (*FC*, 78). On the question of Eucharistic sharing it is recalled that “the decision to admit or not the non-Catholic party to Eucharistic communion should be taken in accordance with the prevailing general norms, both for Eastern Christians and other Christians, and taking into account this particular situation, that those who

receive the sacrament of marriage are two baptised Christians. Even if the spouses of a mixed marriage have the sacraments of baptism and marriage in common, the sharing of the Eucharist cannot be but exceptional and, in every case, the regulations which have been laid down are to be observed...” (Pontifica Council for the Unity of Christians, Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms for Ecumenism, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1993, 159-160).

**73.** Marriages with disparity of cult provide a privileged place for interreligious dialogue in everyday life, and can be a sign of hope for religious communities, particularly in situations of tension. The members of couples share their respective spiritual experiences, or the path of religious quest if one of the two is a non-believer (cf. *1 Cor* 7:14). Marriages with disparity of cult pose some special difficulties, both with regard to the Christian identity of the family, and the religious upbringing of the children. The spouses are called to regularly transform the initial feeling of attraction into the sincere desire for the good of the other. This openness also transforms the different religious attachment into an opportunity for enriching the spiritual quality of the relationship. The number of families from a marital union with disparity of cult, increasing in mission territories as well as in countries with a long Christian tradition, calls for the need to provide a differentiated pastoral care according to the different social and cultural contexts. In some countries, where religious liberty does not exist, the Christian spouse is obliged to pass over to another religion so as to marry, and is unable to celebrate a marriage of disparity of cult or have the children baptised. We must therefore reassert the imperative of respect for religious liberty in dealings with everyone.

**74.** Mixed marriages and marriages with disparity of cult offer aspects of fruitful promise and an array of critical points with no easy solution, more at the pastoral rather than the normative level, such as the religious education of the children, participation in the liturgical life of the spouse, the sharing of spiritual experiences. To address in a constructive way the differences in the order of faith it is essential to give particular attention to the persons who are joined in such a marriage, not only in the period preceding the nuptials. Particular challenges face the couple and the familie in which one partner is a Catholic and the other a non-believer. In such cases it is necessary to bear witness to the capacity of the Gospel to reach the depths of these situations so as to make possible the upbringing of the children in the Christian faith.

**75.** Situations of particular difficulty concern the access to baptism of persons who find themselves in a complex marriage position. It is a question of people who have contracted a stable marriage union at a time when at least one of them did not know the Christian faith. In these cases, Bishops are called to exercise pastoral discernment appropriate to their spiritual good.

**76.** The Church shapes its outlook on the Lord Jesus who, in a love without limit, offered himself for every person without exception (*MV*, 12). In dealing with families who live the experience of having within them persons of homosexual inclinations, the Church reasserts that every person, irrespective of their personal sexual tendency, deserves respect in their dignity and to be welcomed with respect, taking care to avoid “any slur of unjust discrimination” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations dealing with the aims for legal recognition of the union of homosexual persons, 4). A particular care should be reserved the accompaniment of

families in which persons of homosexual inclinations live. Regarding the plans on the equal standing of the marriage of a union between homosexual persons, “there is no basis for comparing or establishing analogies, even remotely, between homosexual unions and the plan of God for marriage and the family” (*Ibidem*). The Synod maintains that it is totally unacceptable in every case that the local Churches yield to pressure in this matter, and that international organisations attach conditions to financial aid to poor countries with the introduction of laws establishing marriage between persons of the same sex.

### **Accompaniment in different situations**

**77.** The Church makes her own, in an affective sharing, the joys and the hopes, the pain and the anxieties of every family. To stand close to a family as a companion on the way means, for the Church, adopting an attitude which is wisely nuanced: at times it is necessary to stay around and to listen in silence; at other times, it ought to go ahead to point the way that is to be taken; again, at other times, it is opportune to follow, support and encourage. “The Church must initiate her members – priests, religious and laity – in this “art of accompaniment”, so that all can learn to take off their sandals before the sacred ground of another (cf. *Ex.* 3:5). We should give our path a salutary rhythm of closeness, with a respectful gaze and full of compassion, but at the same time heal, set free, and encourage maturity in the Christian life” (*EG*, 169). The parish offers the principal pastoral care to the family, which is a family of families, in which the contribution of small communities, movements and ecclesial associations unite in harmony. Accompaniment requires specially trained priests, the establishment of specialist institutions where, priests, religious and laity learn to care for every family, with special attention to those in difficulty.

**78.** A ministry devoted to those whose marriage relationship has broken down appears to be extremely urgent. The drama of separation often comes at the end of long periods of conflict, which cause the greatest suffering to fall upon the children. The isolation of the abandoned spouse, who is often constrained to break up a life together marked by continuous and serious maltreatment, calls for particular care on the part of the Christian community. Prevention and care in cases of domestic violence demand close cooperation with the justice authorities to take action against those responsible and give adequate protection to the victims. Besides, it is essential to promote the protection of minors from sexual abuse. It would also seem opportune to bear in mind families in which some members pursue activities which make particular demands, like those in the military, who live in a state of material separation and of prolonged physical absence from the family, with all the consequences that this entails. On their return from war zones they are not infrequently affected by post-traumatic syndrome, and are troubled in conscience which raises grave moral questions for them. A particular kind of pastoral care is necessary here.

**79.** The experience of a failed marriage is always painful for everyone. On the other hand, that same failure can become an occasion for reflection, conversion and trust in God: taking cognisance of one's own responsibility, each person can find in themselves trust and hope. “From the heart of the Trinity, from the most intimate depths of the mystery of God, there springs us and runs without cease the great river of mercy. This fount can never be exhausted for all who draw near to it. Every time one has the need, he can approach it, because the mercy of God is endless” (*MV* 25). The forgiveness of an injustice suffered is not easy, but it is a way made possible by

grace. From here arises the necessity of a pastoral ministry of conversion and of reconciliation, even through specialised centres of listening and of mediation to be established in Dioceses. In any case, justice is to be promoted in the case of all the parties involved in the breakdown of a marriage (spouses and children). The Christian community and its Pastors have the obligation to request of separated and divorced spouses to treat one another with respect and mercy, above all for the good of the children, on whom further suffering should not be imposed. The children cannot be an object of contention, and the best means should be sought so that they can overcome the trauma of the family split and grow up in the most possible serene way. In every case, the Church must always underline the injustice which very often comes as a situation arising from divorce.

**80.** Single parent families have different causes: a biological mother or father did not ever want to be integrated into family life, situations of violence from which a parent has had to flee with the children, the death of one of the parents, the abandonment of the family on the part of the parents, and other situations. Whatever may be the cause, the parent who lives with the child ought to find support and comfort from other families who make up the Christian community, also from the parish pastoral structures. These families are often in the last analysis afflicted by the seriousness of economic problems, by the uncertainty of precarious work, by the difficulty of maintaining the children, by the lack of a house. The same pastoral solicitude ought to be demonstrated with regard to widowed people, teenage mothers and their children.

**81.** Whenever spouses experience problems in their relationships, they should be able to count on the help and accompaniment of the Church. Experience shows that with appropriate assistance and with the reconciling action of the grace of the Holy Spirit a large percentage of matrimonial crises are satisfactorily overcome. To know how to forgive and to feel oneself forgiven is a basic experience of family life. Forgiveness between spouses permits the discovery of the truth of a love which is forever and does not end (cf. *1Cor* 13:8). In the area of personal relationships the necessity of reconciliation is practically a daily occurrence. The misunderstandings due to relations with the families of origin, the conflict between cultural customs and different religions, differences on the upbringing of children, the worry over economic difficulties, the tensions which arise following the loss of a job – these are some of the recurrent causes of tensions and conflict. The laborious art of reconciliation, which requires the help of grace, needs the generous cooperation of parents and friends, and sometimes even external assistance. In the more painful cases, like that of marital infidelity, a true and sincere work of reparation is necessary, to put oneself in the right frame of mind. A wounded pledge can be healed: right from the beginning of marriage preparation there should be instruction on this hope. The action of the Holy Spirit is fundamental in the care of families and people who have been wounded, the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and the necessity of spiritual journeys accompanied by skilled ministers.

**82.** For large numbers of the faithful who have had the experience of an unhappy marriage, the declaration of the invalidity of the marriage represents a path to follow. The recent *Motu Proprio Mitis Iudex Dominus Jesus* and *Mitis et Misericors Jesus* have led to a simplification of the processes for the eventual declaration of matrimonial nullity. With these texts, the Holy Father wished also “to make clear that the Bishop himself in his Church, of which he has been appointed pastor and

head, is by this very fact judge among the faith entrusted to him” (*MI*, preamble, III). The implementation of these documents constitutes a serious responsibility for diocesan Ordinaries, called to give judgement on some of their cases, to ensure an easier access of the faith to justice. This entails the preparation of sufficient personell, composed of clerics and laity, who devote themselves to this ecclesial service as a priority. It will therefore be imperative to place at the disposal of separated persons or couples in crisis, an information service, of counsel, and of mediation, linked to the pastoral care of the family, which can even receive people in view of a preliminary investigation of the matrimonial process.

**83.** The witness of those who even in difficult situations do not undertake a new union, remaining faithful to the sacramental bond, deserves the appreciation and support on the part of the Church. It wants to demonstrate to them the face of a God faithful to his love and always ready to restore strength and hope. Separated persons or divorced but not remarried, are witnesses to marital fidelity, and are to be encouraged to find in the Eucharist the food which sustains their state.

### **Discernment and integration**

**84.** Those baptised and are divorced and have remarried should be integrated more fully into the Christian community in the different ways possible, avoiding every occasion of scandal. The logic of integration is the key of their pastoral accompaniment, in order for them to know that not only do they belong to the Body of Christ which is the Church, but they can have a joyful and fruitful experience of it. They have been baptised, they are brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit has poured into them gifts and charisms for the good of all. Their participation can find expression in different ecclesial services: it is important to discern what different forms of exclusion presently in force in the liturgical, pastoral, educative and institutional ambit can be overcome. Not only must they not feel they are excommunicated, but they can live and mature as living members of the Church, perceiving her to be a mother who welcomes them always, who cares for them with affection, and encourages them on the journey of life and of the Gospel. This integration is necessary even for the care and Christian upbringing of their children, who ought to be considered the most important. For the Christian community, taking care of such persons is not a weakening of one’s own faith and witness regarding the indissolubility of marriage: rather, with such care the Church is giving genuine expression to its charity.

**85.** St. John Paul II has offered a comprehensive criterion, which remains the basis for the evaluation of these situations: “Let Pastors know that, for love of the truth, they are obliged to discern carefully situations. There is in fact a difference who genuinely tried to save their first marriage and have been abandoned altogether unjustly, and those who through their grave fault destroyed a canonically valid marriage. There are those, finally, who have contracted a second union in view of the upbringing of their children, and at times are subjectively certain in their conscience that the preceding marriage, irreparably broken, was never valid” (*FC*, 84). It is therefore incumbent on priests to accompany interested persons on the path of discernment in accordance with the teaching of the Church and the directions of the Bishop. In this process it will be useful to make an examination of conscience, through periods of reflection and penance. The divorced and remarried should ask themselves how they have behaved towards their children when their union entered into crisis; if they attempted reconciliation; how is the situation of the abandoned

partner; what are the consequences of the new relationship on the rest of the family and the community of the faithful; what example does this give to young people who ought to be preparing for marriage? A sincere reflection can strengthen trust in the mercy of God which is not denied to anyone. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that in some circumstances “the imputability and the responsibility of an action can be lessened or nullified” (CCC, 1735) by reason of different conditions. Consequently, the judgement on an objective situation should not lead to a judgement on “subjective imputability” (Pontifical Council for legislative texts, Declaration of 24<sup>th</sup> June 2000, 2a). In determined circumstances people experience considerable difficulty in acting in a different way. Therefore, although upholding a general norm, it is necessary to recognise that the responsibility in respect to determined actions or decisions is not the same in all cases. Pastoral discernment, even taking into consideration of people’s conscience correctly formed, ought to take account of these situations. Even the consequences of actions performed are not necessarily the same in all cases.

**86.** The course of accompaniment and discernment orientates these faithful to an examination of conscience of their situation before God. A conversation with a priest, in the internal forum, leads to the formation of a correct judgement on what poses an obstacle for a fuller sharing in the life of the Church and the steps to progress and further its growth. Given that in the same law there is no graduality (cf. *FC*, 34), such a discernment can never prescind from the demands of the truth and charity of the Gospel which are set out by the Church. For this to take place, there must be guaranteed the necessary conditions of humility, confidentiality, love of the Church and its teaching, in the sincere search for the will of God and with the sincere desire to reach the best possible response to it.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Family and evangelisation**

#### **The spirituality of the family**

**87.** The family, in its vocation and mission, is a true treasure of the Church. However, as St. Paul affirms with regard to the Gospel, “We carry this treasure in vessels of clay” (2 *Cor* 4:7). On the front door of family life, declares Pope Francis, “three words are written... ‘please?’, ‘thanks’, ‘excuse me’”. In point of fact these words open up the way for a family to live well. They are simple words, but not so simple to put into practice! They contain a great power: the power to safeguard the house, even through a thousand difficulties and trials; instead, their absence opens bit by bit cracks which can eventually result in collapse” (Francis, General Audience, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2015). The teaching of the Popes invites us to deepen the spiritual life of the family, starting with the rediscovery of prayer within the family and listening together to the Word of God, from which springs the commitment to charity. The Eucharist is the principle source of nourishment for the spiritual life of the family, particularly on the Lord’s day, which is a sign of being deeply rooted in the ecclesial community (cf. John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 52-66). Domestic prayer, participation in the liturgy and the practice of popular and Marian devotions are effective means of encounter with Jesus Christ and the evangelisation of the family. This underlines the special vocation of the spouses to make their holiness a reality through their married life, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, sharing also in the mystery of Christ’s cross, which transforms the difficulties and sufferings into an offering of love.

**88.** Affection is the bond which unites parents with one another and these with their children. Affection means to give with joy and to stir up in the other person the feeling of being loved. It finds expression in a particular manner in viewing the limitations of the other with sensitive care, especially when they become very evident. Treating with sensitivity and respect denotes healing wounds and restoring hope, in a way that renews confidence in the other person. Affection in family relationships is the everyday virtue which assists in overcoming internal and relational conflicts. In this instance, Pope Francis invites us to ponder: “Have we the courage to welcome with sensitivity the difficult situations and problems which surround us, or do we opt instead for impersonal solutions, efficient indeed but lacking the warmth of the Gospel? How greatly today’s world stands in need of sensitivity! The Patience of God, the nearness of God, the tenderness of God” (Homily at Christmas Midnight Mass, 24<sup>th</sup> December 2014).

### **The family as the subject of pastoral ministry**

**89.** If the Christian family wishes to remain faithful to its mission, it must understand from where that springs: it cannot evangelise without being evangelised itself. The mission of the family embraces the union of the spouses, the upbringing of children, the witness of the sacrament, the preparation of other couples for marriage and the friendly accompaniment of those couples or families encountering difficulties. From this arises the importance of an evangelical and catechetical power directed within the family. In this regard, care should be given to appreciate couples, mothers and fathers, as active subjects of catechesis, especially when dealing with the children, in collaboration with priests, deacons, consecrated persons and catechists. This power begins from the first serious meeting of the couple. Family catechesis is of great assistance in so far as it is an effective way to form young parents and make them conscious of their evangelising mission in regard to their own family. Moreover, it is essential to stress the link between family experience and Christian initiation. The whole Christian community should be a place where families are born, where they come together and engage with one another, journeying in the faith and sharing ways of growth and mutual exchange.

**90.** The Church ought to give families a sense of of ecclesial belonging, a sense of “we” in which no member is forgotten. Let each one be encouraged to develop their personal capacities in bringing to fruition the plan for their own life at the service of the Kingdom of God. Let every family, integrated into the ecclesial setting, rediscover the joy of communion with other families in serving the common good of society, in the promotion of a politic, an economy and a culture at the service of the family, even through the use of the social network and the media. The hope is for the possibility of creating small communities of families as living witnesses of gospel values. There is a felt need to prepare, form and make responsible some families which can accompany others to live in a Christian manner. Those families are noted and encouraged who make themselves available to live the mission “*ad gentes*”. Finally, the importance is highlighted of combining pastoral youth ministry with the pastoral care of the family.

### **The relationship with cultures and institutions**

**91.** The Church “living in various conditions of history has adopted discoveries of various cultures to spread and explain the news of Christ in its preaching to all nations, to explore it and understand it more deeply, and to express it better in liturgical celebration and in the life of the varied community of the faithful” (GS, 58). It is important, therefore, to take account of these cultures and to respect each one of



them in their uniqueness. It is even appropriate to recall what Blessed Paul VI wrote: “The rupture between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our age, as it was of others. We need to marshal all our forces with the aim of a generous evangelisation of culture, more precisely of cultures” (*EN*, 20). The pastoral ministry of marriage and the family requires an assessment of those positive elements which are encountered in the different religious and cultural experiences, which represent a “*praeparatio evangelica*”. In the encounter with cultures, however, an evangelisation attentive to the demands of a human promotion of the family cannot avoid outrightly denouncing the cultural, social, political and economic conditions. The increasing hegemony of market forces, which seriously affects the spaces and times of an authentic family life, contributes also to the increase of discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence. Among the different families who live in conditions of economic need through unemployment or precarious work conditions, or the lack of social-health assistance, not infrequently does it happen that some, unable to gain access to credit, find themselves victims of usury and are seen at times forced to abandon their home, and even their children. In this context, it is suggested that economic structures be set up, adequate to assist such families or capable of promoting family and social solidarity.

**92.** The family is the first and vital cell of society (*AA*, 11). It ought to discover its vocation to sustain its life in society in all its aspects. It is indispensable for families, through their association, to find methods of interacting with the political, economic and cultural institutions, with the aim of constructing a more just society. For this reason, dialogue and cooperation are to be developed with the social institutions, and the laity be encouraged and supported to commit themselves, as Christians, in the social-political area. Politics should respect in a particular way the principle of subsidiarity and not curtail the rights of families. It is essential in this regard to reflect on the “Charter of the rights of the Family” (cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1983) and the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (10<sup>th</sup> December 1948). For Christians who are active in politics, the commitment to life and to the family must take priority, since a society which disregards the family has forfeited its openness to the future. Family associations, with a commitment to working together alongside other Christian traditions, have among their principal tasks, the promotion and defence of life and the family, the freedom to educate and religious liberty, the harmonisation between work and time for the family, the defence of women and obedience to conscience.

### **Openness to mission**

**93.** The family of the baptised is by its nature missionary, and increases its own faith through the act of giving it to others, first of all to its own children. The very fact of living the communion of the family is the first form of proclamation. In reality, evangelisation starts with the family, in which not only is physical life transmitted, but also the spiritual life. The role of grandparents in handing on the faith and religious practices ought not to be forgotten: they witness to the links between the generations, are guardians of wise traditions, prayer, and good example. The family is thus established as the subject of pastoral action through the explicit proclamation of the Gospel and the inheritance of multiple forms of witness: solidarity towards the poor, openness to the differences between people, guardianship of creation, moral and material solidarity towards other families, especially the neediest, commitment also to the promotion of the common good, through the transformation of unjust

social structures, beginning from the area in which they live, engaging in spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

### **Conclusion**

**94.** We, the Synod Fathers, in the course of this Assembly, gathered in unity around Pope Francis, have felt the affection and the prayer of the whole Church, we have walked as disciples of Emmaus and recognised the presence of Christ in the breaking of bread at the Eucharistic table, in fraternal communion, in the sharing of pastoral experiences. We wish that the fruit of this work, now given into the hands of the Successor of Peter, will give hope and joy to countless families throughout the world, direction to pastors and pastoral workers, and impetus to the work of evangelisation. In bringing this Relatio to a conclusion, we humbly request the Holy Father that he will evaluate this opportunity to offer a document on the family, so that in it, the domestic Church, Christ the light of the world may shine ever more brightly.

### **Prayer to the Holy Family**

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
in you we contemplate the face of true love,  
to you we turn with confidence.  
Holy Family of Nazareth,  
make our families also  
places of communion and cenacles of prayer,  
genuine schools of the Gospel  
and little domestic Churches,  
Ever increasingly, families are experiencing  
violence, breakdown and division:  
let whoever is wounded or scandalised  
quickly know consolation and healing.  
Holy Family of Nazareth,  
revive in all the awareness  
of the family's sacred and inviolable character,  
its beauty in the design of God.  
Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
listen, hearken to our supplication.  
Amen.

### **Voting results on each number of the final Relatio Synodi of the Bishops with Francis, the Holy Father**

Number of Fathers present: 277

(two thirds: 177)

Abstentions aren't indicated

<b>Numero</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1	260	0
2	257	0
3	255	1
4	256	2
5	256	3
6	249	9
7	248	9

8	245	9
9	254	4
10	253	7
11	256	1
12	253	5
13	255	5
14	256	5
15	255	5
16	254	8
17	259	1
18	258	1
19	255	5
20	257	3
21	256	4
22	252	4
23	253	4
24	255	5
25	242	15
26	256	2
27	251	9
28	257	4
29	249	8
30	250	7
31	253	7
32	249	6
33	246	12
34	245	11
35	259	2
36	256	3
37	252	6
38	251	5
39	255	3
40	255	6
41	253	7
42	257	2
43	254	6
44	247	11
45	249	6
46	254	5
47	246	11
48	253	6
49	253	5
50	252	6
51	250	11
52	252	5
53	244	15
54	236	21
55	243	14
56	248	10
57	257	2
58	247	14

59	258	3
60	259	1
61	254	7
62	259	0
63	237	21
64	247	11
65	252	7
66	258	0
67	259	0
68	253	3
69	236	21
70	213	47
71	218	42
72	229	29
73	236	24
74	223	36
75	205	52
76	221	37
77	247	11
78	250	8
79	246	14
80	253	6
81	253	7
82	244	16
83	248	12
84	187	72
85	178	80
86	190	64
87	255	3
88	252	4
89	257	2
90	255	5
91	248	12
92	256	4
93	255	2
94	253	5

***(Translated from the original Italian into English as a Working Translation by Bishop Michael G Campbell OSA of the Catholic Diocese of Lancaster, England on 7 November 2015).***



**The Catholic Diocese of Lancaster**