

Kinderen ontvangen zoals ze van God komen

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the delegation of the Forum of Family Associations



Pope Francis
16 June 2018

Extemporaneous speech of the holy father

Good morning everyone,

I thought it would be a welcome address.... But hearing Gianluigi speak, I saw that there was fire in [his words]; there was mysticism. It is a great thing. For some time now, I have not heard the family being spoken about with so much passion. And it takes courage to do so nowadays! It takes courage. And thank you for this! I had prepared a speech but after the warmth with which Gianluigi spoke, I find mine cold. I will consign it, so that he may distribute it later, and then I will publish it.

While he was speaking, many things came to my mind and heart, many things regarding the family, things that are not said, that are not normally said, or if they are said, they are said in a very polite way, as if it were a schooling on the family.... He spoke from the heart and all of you wish to speak like this. I will take something he said, and I too would like to speak from the heart and to ad-lib what came to my heart while he was speaking.

He used the expression : “to look into each other’s eyes”. The man and the woman, the husband and the bride, looked into each other’s eyes. I will tell you an anecdote. During audiences, I like to greet the couples who are celebrating their 50th, their 25th anniversary ..., also when they come to Mass at Santa Marta. There was once a couple who was celebrating their 60th anniversary. But they were young because they married when they were 18 years old, as was done in those days. In those days, people married young. Nowadays, why would a son get married? Poor mothers! But the solution is clear: stop ironing the shirts and he will marry soon, Right? I find this couple before me and they were looking at me.... I said: “Sixty years! But do you still have the same love?”. And they were looking at me; they looked at each other and then they looked at me again, and I saw that their eyes were moist. And they both said to me: “We are in love”. I’ll never forget this. “After 60 years, we are in love”. The warmth of the family that grows, love that is not the love of a romance novel. It is true love. Being in love your whole life with all the problems there are.... But being in love.

Then there is another question I would like to ask the couples who have been married for 50 or 60 years: “which one of you has had more patience?”. It’s predictable; the answer is: “both of us”. This is beautiful! This reveals a life together, a life lived as a couple. That patience of abiding one another.

And then to the young spouses who tell me: “we have been married for one month, two months...” my question is: “Have you argued?” They usually say “yes” — “Ah good, this is important. But it is also important not to end the day without making up”. Please teach this: it is normal to argue because we are free people and there are problems and we must sort them out; but not to end the day without making up. Why? Because the “cold war” of the following day is very dangerous.

With these three anecdotes I wanted to introduce what I would like to say to you.

Family life is a sacrifice but a beautiful sacrifice. Love is like making pasta: every day. Love in marriage is a challenge for the man and for the woman. What is the man's greatest challenge? To help his wife become 'more woman'. More woman. So she may grow as a woman. And what is the woman's challenge? To help her husband become 'more man'. And thus, they both move forward. They move forward.

Another thing that greatly helps in married life is patience: knowing how to wait. Waiting. There are crises in life — very serious crises, terrible crises — where there may also be times of infidelity. When the problem cannot be solved at that time, there is need for that loving patience which waits, which waits. Many women — because this pertains to women more than to men, but even men do this at times — many women have waited in silence, looking the other way, waiting for the husband to return to fidelity. And this is holiness; the holiness that forgives all, because it loves. Patience. A lot of patience, each for the other. If one is nervous and shouts, do not reply with another shout.... Keep quiet; let the storm blow over and then, at the right time, talk about it.

There are three expressions that are magical words, but words that are important in marriage. "Excuse me": do not be invasive with the other; "may I?": that respect for each other. The second expression is "I am sorry". Apologizing is something that is very important! We all make mistakes in life, all of us. "I am sorry; I did this ..."; "I'm sorry, I forgot...". And this helps us to move on. The ability to apologize helps families move forward. It is true that asking forgiveness involves some shame, but it is a holy shame! "Forgive me, I forgot...". It is something that really helps us move forward. And the third expression is "thank you": having the greatness of heart to always say thank you.

You then spoke about Amoris Laetitia, and you said "Here Amoris Laetitia is made flesh". I am happy to hear this: read, read the fourth chapter. The fourth chapter is the very heart of Amoris Laetitia. It is precisely the family's everyday spirituality. Some have reduced Amoris Laetitia to a sterile record of "this can be done, this cannot". They have not understood anything. Then, in Amoris Laetitia the problems are not hidden, problems of marriage preparation. You help engaged couples to prepare: things must be stated clearly, is that not true? Clearly. A woman in Buenos Aires once said to me: "You priests are clever..." — "Why?" — "you study eight years to become priests; you prepare for eight years. And then if after a few years it does not work, you write a nice letter to Rome; and Rome gives you permission and you can marry. Instead to us, to whom they give a lifelong Sacrament, you indulge us with three or four meetings as preparation. This is not right". And that woman was right. Preparing for marriage: yes it requires meetings, explanatory materials, but it takes men and women, friends, who speak to them and help them to grow, to mature on their journey. And we can say that today there is a need of a catechumenate for marriage as there is a catechumenate for Baptism. To prepare, to help one prepare for marriage.

Then, another problem we see in Amoris Laetitia is raising children. It is not easy to raise children. Today children are quicker than we are! In the virtual world, they know more about it than we do. But it is important to educate them about community, educate them about family life. Teach them about making sacrifices for one another. It is not easy to raise children. The difficulties are major. And you, who love the family, can help other families so much in this regard. The family is an adventure, a beautiful adventure! And today — I say this with heartache — we see that so often one thinks about starting a family and getting married as if it were a lottery: "Let's go. If it works, it works. If it doesn't work, we cancel the matter and start over". This superficiality about the greatest gift God has given to humanity: the family. Because, after the account of the creation of man, God shows that he created man and woman in his image and likeness. And when Jesus himself talks about marriage, he says: "A man shall leave his father and mother and with his wife shall become one flesh". Because they are the image and likeness of God. You are the icon of God: the family is the icon of God. Man and woman: are the very image of God. He said so, I am not saying it. And this is great; it is sacred.

Then today — it hurts to say it — we speak of ‘diversified’ families: different types of family. Yes, it is true that the word ‘family’ is an analogical term, because it refers to the ‘family’ of stars, to ‘families’ of trees, to ‘families’ of animals ... it is an analogical term. But the human family as the image of God, man and woman, is one alone. It is one alone. It may be that a man and a woman are not believers: but if they love each other and become joined in marriage, they are the image and likeness of God, even though they do not believe. It is a mystery: Saint Paul calls it the “great mystery”, the “great sacrament” (cf. Eph 5:32). A true mystery. I like everything you said and the passion with which you said it. And this is how one should speak about the family, with passion.

Once, I think a year ago, I called one of my relatives who was getting married. Forty years old. At the end I said: “Tell me a little: what church are you getting married in?” — “We don’t know yet because we are looking for a church that goes well with the dress that — and he said his fiancée’s name — will wear ... and then we have the issue of the restaurant...”. But imagine ... that was the main concern. When what is secondary takes the place of what is important. The important thing is to love each other, to receive the Sacrament, to go forth...; and then do all the celebrating you want, all of it.

Once I met a couple married for 10 years, without children. Talking about this is very delicate, because many times they want children but they do not come, isn’t it true? I did not know how to broach the subject. Then I learned that they did not want children. But these people had three dogs, two cats.... It is nice to have a dog, a cat, it’s nice.... Or when at times you hear them tell you: “Yes, yes, but we do not have children yet because we have to buy a house in the country, then travel...”. Children are the greatest gift. Children who are welcomed as they come, as God sends them, as God allows — even if at times they are sick. I have heard that it is in fashion — or at least customary — in the first months of pregnancy to have certain exams, to see whether the baby is not well, or has some problems.... The first proposal in that case is: “Shall we do away with it?”. The murder of children. And to have a nice life, they do away with an innocent.

When I was a boy, the teacher was teaching us history and told us what the Spartans did when a baby was born with deformities: they carried it up the mountain and cast it down, to maintain “the purity of the race”. And we were stunned: “But how, how could they do this, the poor babies!”. It was an atrocity. Today we do the same thing. Have you ever wondered why you do not see many dwarfs on the streets? Because the protocol of many doctors — many, not all — is to ask the question: “Will it have problems?”. It pains me to say this. In the last century the entire world was scandalized over what the Nazis were doing to maintain the purity of the race. Today we do the same thing, but with white gloves.

Family, love, patience, joy, and frittering away time with the family. You spoke about something bad: that there is no opportunity to “fritter the time away”, because to earn a living today one has to have two jobs, because the family is not taken into consideration. You also spoke about the young people who cannot get married because there is no work. The family is being threatened by unemployment.

And I would like to end with some advice that a teacher once gave me — he gave it to us at school —, a philosophy teacher, the dean. I was in the seminary, in the philosophy phase. There was the topic of human maturity; we study that in philosophy. And he asked: “What is the everyday criterion to know if a man, if a priest is mature?”. We gave some answers.... And he said: “No, a more simple one: an adult person, a priest, is mature if he is able to play with children”. This is the test. And I say to you: fritter away time with your children; fritter away time with your children; play with your children. Do not tell them: “Don’t be a nuisance!”. I once heard a young father of a family say: “Father, when I go to work they are sleeping. When I come home they are sleeping”. It is the cross of this slavery of an unjust way of working that today’s society brings us.

I said that this was the last thing. No, the penultimate. The last thing is what I will say now, because I do not

want to forget it. I spoke about children as the treasure of promise. But there is another treasure in the family: it is grandparents. Please, take care of grandparents! Have the grandparents talk; have the children speak with their grandparents. Embrace grandparents; do not distance them from the family because they are annoying, because they repeat the same things. Love grandparents, and have them talk to the children. Thank you all. Thank you for your passion; thank you for the love that you have for the family. Thanks for everything! And go onward with courage. Thank you! Now before giving you the blessing, let us pray to Our Lady: "Hail Mary..."

Prepared speech of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you and I offer a warm greeting to you and to your President, whom I thank for his words. This encounter allows me to meet your organization, the Forum of Families, up close. Founded 25 years ago, it embraces overall more than 500 associations, and is truly a network which highlights the beauty of communion and the power of sharing. It is a special "family of families", of an associative type, through which you experience the joy of co-existence and at the same time you commit yourselves to assume the burden of the common good, to be built each day both in the environment of the Forum, and that of the broader society.

The family, which you foster in various ways, is at the centre of God's plan, as the entire history of salvation shows. Through a mysterious divine plan, the complementarity and the love between man and woman make them co-operators of the Creator, who entrusts them with the task of bringing new creatures to life, taking to heart their growth and education. Jesus' love for children, his filial relationship with the heavenly Father, his defence of the marriage bond, which he declares sacred and indissoluble, fully reveals the family's place in God's plan: being the cradle of life and the first place of welcome and of love, it plays an essential role in mankind's vocation and is like a window which opens wide onto the very mystery of God, who is Love in the unity and in the trinity of the Persons.

Our world, often tempted and guided by individualistic and selfish reasoning, often loses the meaning and the beauty of stable bonds, of commitment to people, of unconditional care, of assuming responsibility for the good of the other, of gratuitousness and of self-giving. For this reason one has difficulty in comprehending the value of the family, and one ends up understanding it according to the same reasoning that privileges individual interests instead of relationships and the common good. And this is despite the fact that in the recent years of economic crisis the family has represented the most powerful shock absorber, capable of redistributing resources according to the needs of each person.

On the contrary, full recognition and appropriate support of the family should be the top priority of civil institutions, called to promote the formation of sound, serene families who attend to their children's education and who compensate for situations of weakness. Indeed, those who learn to experience authentic relationships in the sphere of the family will be better able to exercise them in the broadest contexts, from school to the world of work; and those who practice it in a spirit of respect and service at home, will be better able to practice it also in society and in the world.

Now, the objective of stronger support for families and a more appropriate appreciation of them, should be reached through a tireless effort toward raising awareness and dialogue. This is the task that the Forum has carried out for 25 years, in which you have accomplished a great deal of initiatives, establishing a relationship of trust and cooperation with the institutions. I exhort you to continue this work, by promoting projects which demonstrate the beauty of the family, and which are attractive because they are convincing, since their importance and value are evident.

Thus I encourage you to witness to the joy of love, which I explained in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, where I harvested the fruits of the providential journey of the Synod on the Family, which was carried out by the whole Church. Indeed, there is no better subject than joy which, radiating from the inside, proves the value of ideas and experience and points to the treasure that we have discovered and wish to share.

Therefore, impelled by this force, you will be ever more ready to take the initiative. The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy that “God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:7). May this be the spirit which animates you too, teaching you respect but also courage, to accept the challenge and seek out new paths, without fear. It is the style I have asked of the entire Church since my first and programmatic Apostolic Exhortation, when I used the term “primerear” [“take the initiative”], which suggests the capacity to go with courage to encounter others, not to close oneself in one’s comfort zone but to look for points of convergence with people, to build bridges by going to discover goodness wherever it may be found (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 24). God is the first to primerear with us: if we have truly met him, we cannot hide, but rather we must go out and act, using our talents.

Thank you for making the effort to do so! Thank you for your generous dedication, in line with your Statute, for the “active and responsible participation of families in the cultural, social and political life” (2.1.b), and for the “promotion of appropriate family policies that protect and support the functions of the family and its rights” (2.1.c). May you continue, moreover, in the school environment, to favour greater parental involvement and to encourage many families to a style of participation. Never tire of supporting the growth of the birth rate in Italy, by raising awareness in institutions and in public opinion of the importance of giving life to policies and structures more open to the gift of children. It is a real paradox that the birth of children, which constitutes the greatest investment for a country and the first condition of its future prosperity, often is a cause of poverty for families, due to the inadequate support they receive or to the inefficiency of many services.

These and other problems must be addressed with determination and charity, demonstrating that the sensitivity that you carry forth regarding the family is not to be labelled as confessional in order to accuse it — wrongly — of partiality. It is instead based on the dignity of the human person and therefore must be recognized and shared by all, as when, also in institutional contexts, the “Family Factor” is referred to as that element of political and operative evaluation, the multiplier of human, economic and social richness.

I thank you again for this meeting. I exhort you to continue in your commitment in service to the family and life, and I invoke upon all members of the Forum God’s blessing and the protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Please, do not forget to pray for me.