



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 25 March 2015 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Prayer for the Synod of Bishops on the Family

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

In our series of catecheses on the family, today's is a special step: it will be a pause in prayer.

Indeed, on 25 March in the Church we solemnly celebrate the Annunciation, the mystery of the Incarnation begins. The Archangel Gabriel visits a humble girl in Nazareth and proclaims to her that she will conceive and bear the Son of God. With this Annunciation the Lord illuminates and strengthens Mary's faith, as He will also do for her spouse Joseph, so that Jesus *could be born into a human family*. This is very beautiful: it shows us how deeply the mystery of the Incarnation, as God desired, encompasses not only conception in the mother's womb, but also acceptance in a real family. Today I would like to contemplate with you the beauty of this bond, the beauty of God's condescension; and we can do this by reciting the *Hail Mary* together, the first part of which takes up the words of the Angel, those he addressed to the Virgin. I invite you to pray together:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

And now a second aspect: on 25 March, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, in many countries the *Day for Life* is celebrated. That is why, 20 years ago, St [John Paul II](#) on this day signed the Encyclical [Evangelium Vitae](#). In order to commemorate this anniversary there are many followers of the Pro-Life Movement present in the Square today. In [Evangelium Vitae](#), *the family occupies a central place*, as it is the womb of human life. The word of my venerable Predecessor reminds us that *a human couple was blessed from the beginning to form a community of love and life, entrusted with the mission to generate life*. Christian spouses, celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage, make themselves open to honour this blessing, with the grace of Christ, for their whole lives. The Church, for her part, is solemnly committed to care for the family that is born, as a gift of God for her life, in good times and in bad: *the bond between the Church and the family is sacred*

and inviolable. The Church, as a mother, never abandons the family, even when it is downhearted, wounded and humiliated in so many ways. Neither when it falls into sin nor moves away from the Church; she will always do everything to try to care for and heal it, to call it to conversion and to reconcile it to the Lord.

If this then is the task, it is clear *how much prayer the Church needs* in order to be able, in every age, to carry out this mission! Prayer full of love for the family and for life. Prayer that can rejoice with the rejoicing and suffer with the suffering.

Here then is what I, together with my co-workers, have thought to offer today: *renewal of prayer for the Synod of Bishops on the Family*. We relaunch this commitment until this coming October, when the Ordinary Synodal Assembly dedicated to the family will take place. I would like this prayer, as the whole journey of the Synod, to be animated by the compassion of the Good Shepherd for his flock, especially for people and families who, for different reasons, are “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36). Thus, sustained and animated by the grace of God, the Church can be ever more committed, and ever more united, in the witness of the truth of the love of God and of his mercy for the world’s families, none excluded, both within the fold and without.

I ask you, please do not fail to pray. Everyone — the pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, men and women religious, lay faithful — we are all called to pray for the Synod. This is what is needed, not gossip! I also call to prayer those who feel distant or who are no longer used to it. This *prayer for the Synod on the Family* is for the good of everyone. I know that this morning you were given a holy card, which you are holding in your hands. I invite you to keep it and carry it with you, so that in the coming months you can recite it often, with holy persistence, as Jesus asked us to. Now let us recite it together:

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendour of true love, to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic Churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division: May all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth, may the approaching Synod of Bishops make us more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the family, and its beauty in God’s plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer. Amen.

Special greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, including those from England, the Channel Islands, Denmark, Germany, Malta, Qatar, Indonesia, Australia and the United States of America. I greet in particular the representatives of the Hindu Community of Kerala. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke an abundance of joy and peace in the Lord. God bless you all!

I greet with special affection workers from the Province of Vibo Valentia, who are living in a grave economic situation. I would like to join the interventions of their Bishop, Luigi Renzo, in expressing my concern and closeness to those facing these problems. I address a heartfelt appeal that the logic of profit not prevail, but rather that of solidarity and justice. At the centre of every situation, especially work-related, should be the person and his or her dignity: that is why employment is a matter of justice, and it is an injustice not to have work! When people do not earn their bread, they lose their dignity! And this is the drama of our times, especially for young people, who, without work, have no prospects in their future and can so easily become prey to criminal organizations. Please, let us fight for this: the justice of work.

The path of charity and love is the only way to defeat the terror of the Islamic State. This was the appeal of the relatives of David Haines and Alan Henning, two British citizens who were decapitated by the Islamic State in Syria on 13 September and 3 October 2014, respectively. Mike Haines, David's brother, and Barbara Henning, Alan's wife, wished to meet the Pope in order to "bear witness together", which they previously expressed in a joint letter calling churches, mosques and synagogues to "open their doors and welcome people of all faiths". Accompanying them at the audience was the British Ambassador to the Holy See, Mr Nigel Baker, and London-based Imam Shah Nawaz Haque.

"My brother", said Mike Haines, "was passionate about his work as a humanitarian aid worker: he helped everyone without regard for race or religion". A veteran of the Royal Air Force, he decided to dedicate himself full-time to volunteer work. After serving in the Balkans, he worked in Lebanon, and South Sudan. Then the husband and father of two left for Syria "full of joy and with the desire to stand beside the poorest of the poor". That same spirit inspired Alan Henning, recalled his wife, also on behalf of his two children: "It's up to us to prevent that the violent actions of a few people hinder the unity of peoples of all religions". They described to Pope Francis their commitment to promoting charity in order to defeat hate: "The murderers will not stop believing in what led to the death of our loved ones: serving those in need".