



The Holy See

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

Wednesday, 20 May 2015

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The family - 15. Education

Today, dear brothers and sisters, I would like to welcome you because I saw among you many families, Good morning to all the families! Let us continue to reflect on the family. Today we will pause to reflect on an essential characteristic of the family, the natural vocation to *educate children* so they may grow up to be responsible for themselves and for others. What we heard from the Apostle Paul, at the start, is very beautiful: “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Col 3:20-21). This is a wise rule: children should be raised to listen to their parents and obey their parents, who, in turn, should not order them around in a negative way, so as not to discourage the children. Children, indeed, must grow without becoming discouraged, step by step. If you parents say to your children: “Let’s climb this ladder” and you take them by the hand and, step by step, help them climb, things will go well. But if you say: “Go up!” — “But I can’t” — “Go!”, this is called provoking your children, asking them to do things they don’t have the ability to do. That is why the relationship between parents and children must be one of wisdom, of a great balance. Children, obey your parents, this pleases God. And you parents, don’t provoke your children by asking of them things they can’t do. And this needs to be done so that children can grow up to be responsible for themselves and for others.

It would seem like an obvious statement, there are difficulties still in our times. It is hard to educate when parents only see their children in the evening, when they come home tired from work. Well, those who are fortunate enough to work! It is even more difficult for parents who are separated, who are weighed down by their condition: the poor dears, they have had real hardships, they have separated and frequently the child is taken hostage and the father speaks ill of the mother, and the mother speaks ill of the father, and so much harm is done. But I say to separated parents: never, never, never take your child hostage! You separated because of many difficulties and reasons, life has given you this trial, but the children should not be the ones to carry the weight of this

separation, they should not be used as hostages against the other spouse, they should grow up hearing their mother speak well of their father, even though they are not together, and the father speak well of their mother. For separated parents this is very important and very difficult, but they can do it.

Above all, the question is: how should we educate? What tradition do we have today to pass on to our children?

Intellectual “critics” of every kind have silenced parents in countless ways, in order to protect the younger generations from the damage — real or presumed — of family education. The family stands accused, among other things, of being authoritarian, of favoritism, of conformism, of the emotional repression that generates conflict.

In fact, a rift has opened up between the family and society, between the family and school, the educational pact today has been broken; and thus, the educational alliance between society and the family is in crisis because mutual trust has been undermined. There are many symptoms. For example, at school relationships between parents and teachers have been compromised. At times there is tension and mutual distrust; and naturally, the consequences fall on the children. On the other hand, the number of so-called “experts” has multiplied, and they have assumed the role of parents in even the most intimate aspects of education. With regard to emotional life, personality and development, rights and duties, these “experts” know everything: objectives, motivations, techniques. And parents must simply listen, learn and adapt. Deprived of their role, they often become overly apprehensive and possessive of their children, to the point of never correcting them: “You cannot correct the child”. They tend to entrust them more and more to the “experts”, even in the most delicate and personal aspects of their lives, putting themselves alone in a corner; and thus parents today run the risk of excluding themselves from the lives of their children. And this is very grave! Today there are cases like this. I am not saying that it always happens, but there are cases. The teacher will admonish the child at school and send a note to the parents. I remember a personal anecdote. Once, when I was in the fourth grade, I said a bad word to the teacher and the teacher, being a good woman, called my mom. She came the next day, they spoke together, and then I was called. And my mother explained to me in front of the teacher that what I had done was bad, that I shouldn’t have done it; but my mother did it with such sweetness and she asked me to apologize to the teacher in front of her. I did it and then I was glad that I did: the story had a happy ending. But that was only the first chapter! When I got home, the second chapter began... Imagine today if a teacher were to do something of the kind, the next day the parents, or one of the two, would seek to admonish her, because the “experts” say that children should not be reproached like this. Things have changed! That is why parents should not exclude themselves from their children’s education.

It is clear that this approach is not good: it is not harmony, it is not dialogue, and rather than fostering cooperation between the family and other educational agencies, schools, gymnasiums...

it counteracts it.

How did we get to this point? There is no doubt that parents or, better yet, certain past educational models had their limitations, there is no doubt. But it is also true that there are mistakes that only parents are allowed to make, because they can compensate for them in a way that is impossible for anyone else. On the other hand, as we well know, life has become stingy with the time for talking, reflecting and facing oneself. Many parents are “sequestered” by work — mom and dad have to work — and by worries, uncomfortable with the new needs of their children and with the complexity of modern life — which is the way it is and we must accept it as it is — and they find themselves as if paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake. The problem, however, is not just talking. Superficial “dialogue” does not lead to a true meeting of mind and heart. Let us ask instead: do we seek to understand “where” our children really are in their journey? Where is their soul, do we really know? And above all: do we want to know? Are we convinced that they, in reality, aren’t waiting for something else?

Christian communities are called to offer support to the educational mission of families, and they do this first of all with the light of the Word of God. The Apostle Paul recalls the reciprocity of duties between parents and children: “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Col 3:20-21). At the foundation of everything is love, that which God gives us, which “is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but ... bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:5-7). Even the best families need support, and it takes a lot of patience to support one another! But such is life. Life is not lived in a laboratory, but in reality. Jesus himself experienced a family upbringing.

Also in this case, the grace of the love of Christ leads to the fulfillment of what is inscribed in human nature. How many astounding examples we have of Christian parents filled with human wisdom! They show that a good family upbringing is the backbone of humanity. Its radiance in society is the source that allows us to fill in the gaps, wounds and voids in parenthood that affect less fortunate children. This radiance can work real miracles. And in the Church these miracles happen every day!

I hope that the Lord bestows on Christian families the faith, freedom and courage necessary for their mission. If family education rediscovers the pride of its leadership, many things will change for the better, for uncertain parents and for disappointed children. It is time for fathers and mothers to return from their exile — for they have exiled themselves from their children’s upbringing — and to fully resume their educational role. We hope that the Lord gives this grace to parents: to not exile themselves from the education of their children. And this can only be done with love, tenderness and patience.

Special greetings:

Brothers and sisters, this coming Sunday we will celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost. Let us pray to God that he send the gifts of his Spirit so that we may become courageous witnesses of Christ and of his Gospel. From my heart I bless you all.

APPEAL

On the 24 May, the Catholics in China will implore with devotion Our Lady Help of Christians, venerated in the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai. In the statue, which towers above the Shrine, we see Mary who holds her Son high, presenting him to the world with arms opened wide in a gesture of love and mercy. We too will ask Mary to help Catholics in China to be always credible witnesses of this merciful love among their fellow citizens and to live spiritually united to the rock of Peter upon whom the Church is built.

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The Italian Bishop's Conference has proposed throughout the dioceses, on the occasion of the eve of Pentecost, remembrance of our many brothers and sisters who have been exiled or killed for the sole fact that they are Christian. They are martyrs. I hope that this moment of prayer increases awareness that religious freedom is an inalienable human right, and increases sensitivity for the drama of persecuted Christians in our time and that there will be an end to this unacceptable crime.

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I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, including those from Great Britain, Finland, Norway, South Africa, China, India, Korea, Canada and the United States of America. In a special way, I greet these young musicians, you played well! Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke an abundance of joy and peace in the Lord Jesus. God bless you all!

I address a special thought to *young people*, the *sick* and *newlyweds*. Today we celebrate the liturgical memory of St Bernardino of Siena. May his love for the Eucharist point you, dear *young people*, to the centrality of God in your life; may it encourage you, *sick people*, to face moments of suffering with serenity; and stimulate you, dear *newlyweds*, to found your family on the love of God.
