



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE FIRST LATIN AMERICAN CONGRESS ON THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY
THAT WILL TAKE PLACE FROM AUGUST 4 TO 9 IN PANAMA CITY**

Dear Brothers,

From my heart I join all the participants in this Latin American Congress on the Pastoral Care of the Family, organized by CELAM, and I congratulate you on this initiative fostering a value that is most dear and important in our nations today.

What is the family? Over and above its most pressing problems and its peremptory necessities, the family is a “centre of love”, where the law of respect and communion reigns and is able to resist the pressure of manipulation and domination from the world’s “power centres”. In the heart of the family, the person naturally and harmoniously blends into a human group, overcoming the false opposition between the individual and society. In the bosom of the family, no one is set apart: both the elderly and the child will be welcome here. The culture of encounter and of dialogue, openness to solidarity and transcendence, originates in the family.

For this, the family constitutes a great and “rich social resource” (cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 44). In this sense I would like to highlight two primary factors: stability and fruitfulness.

Relationships based on faithful love, until death, like marriage, fatherhood, being child or sibling, are learned and lived in the household. When these relationships form the basic fabric of a human society, they lend cohesion and consistency. It is therefore not possible to be part of a people, to feel as a neighbour, to take care of someone who is more distant and unfortunate if, in the heart of man, these fundamental relationships which give him security in openness toward others are broken.

Moreover, family love is fruitful, and not only because it generates new lives, but because it

broadens the horizon of existence, it creates a new world; it makes us believe, despite any discouragement and defeatism, that coexistence based on respect and trust is possible. In facing a materialistic view of the world, the family does not reduce man to sterile utilitarianism, but offers a channel for the realization of his loftiest aspirations.

Finally, I would like to tell you that, thanks to the basic experience of familial love, man also grows in his openness to God as Father. For this the Aparecida Document affirms that the family should not be considered as only the object of evangelization, but also the agent of evangelizing work (cf. nn. 432, 435). In it is reflected the image of God, who in his most profound mystery is a family and, in this manner, He allows human love to be seen as a sign and presence of divine love (Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, n. 52). Within the family, faith is absorbed together with mother's milk. For example, that simple and spontaneous gesture of requesting a blessing, which is cherished in many of our nations, perfectly reflects the biblical conviction according to which God's blessing is passed on from father to son.

Cognizant of the fact that familial love dignifies all that makes man, giving him additional value, it is important to encourage families to cultivate healthy relationships among their own members, to know how to say "sorry", "thank you", "please", to each other and to address God using the beautiful name of Father.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe obtain abundant blessings from God for America's families and make them fountains of life, harmony and robust faith, nourished by the Gospel and by good works. I ask you please, to pray for me, because I need it.

Fraternally,

FRANCIS