



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 25 October 2013*

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I welcome you on the occasion of the 21st Plenary Assembly and I thank the President, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, for the words with which he introduced our meeting. Thank you.

1. The first point which I would like to consider is this: *the family is a community of life which has its own autonomous consistency*. As Blessed [John Paul II](#) wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation [Familiaris Consortio](#), the family is not merely the sum of persons belonging to it, but a “community of persons” (cf. nn. 17-18). And a community is more than the sum total of persons that belong to it. It is the place where one learns to love, it is the natural centre of human life. It is made up of faces, of people who love, dialogue, make self-sacrifices for one another and defend life, especially of the most vulnerable and the weakest. One could say, without exaggeration, that the family is the driving force of the world and of history. Our personality develops in the family, by growing up with our mom and dad, our brothers and sisters, by breathing in the warmth of the home. The family is the place where we receive our name, it is the place of affection, the space of intimacy, where one acquires the art of dialogue and interpersonal communication. In the family the person becomes aware of his or her own dignity and, especially if their upbringing is Christian, each one recognizes the dignity of every single person, in a particular way the sick, the weak and the marginalized.

The family-community is all of this and it needs to be recognized as such, and more urgently today when the protection of individual rights prevail. And we must defend the right of this community: the family. In this regard you have done well to pay special attention to the *Charter of the Rights of*

the Family presented exactly 30 years ago on 22 October 1983.

2. We come to the second point – they say Jesuits always speak in threes: three points: one, two, three. The second point: *the family is founded on marriage*. Through their free and faithful act of love, Christian spouses testify to the fact that marriage, insofar as it is a sacrament, is the foundation of the family and strengthens spousal union and the couple's mutual gift of self. It is as though matrimony were first a human sacrament, where the person discovers himself, understands himself in relation to others and in a relationship of love which is capable of receiving and giving. Spousal and familial love also clearly reveals the vocation of the person to love in a unique way and forever, and that the trials, sacrifices and crises of couples as well as of the family as a whole represent pathways for growth in goodness, truth and beauty. In marriage we give ourselves completely without calculation or reserve, sharing everything, gifts and hardship, trusting in God's Providence. This is the experience that the young can learn from their parents and grandparents. It is an experience of faith in God and of mutual trust, profound freedom and holiness, because holiness presumes giving oneself with fidelity and sacrifice every day of one's life! But there are problems in marriage. Always different points of view, jealousy, arguing. But we need to say to young spouses that they should never end the day without making peace. The Sacrament of marriage is renewed in this act of peace after an argument, a misunderstanding, a hidden jealousy, even a sin. Making peace gives unity to the family; and tell young people, young couples, that it is not easy to go down this path, but it is a very beautiful path, very beautiful. You need to tell them!

3. I would now like to at least mention two stages of family life: *childhood and old age*. Children and the elderly are the two poles of life and the most vulnerable as well, often the most forgotten. When I hear the confession of a young married man or woman and in the confessional when some reference is made to a son or a daughter, I ask: but how many children do you have? And they tell me, maybe they expect another question after this one. But this is always my second question: And tell me, Mr or Mrs, do you play with your children? "Excuse me, Father?". Do you spend time with your children? Do you play with your children? "Well no, you know, when I leave the house in the morning", the man tells me, "they are still asleep and when I come home they are in bed. Availability, the availability of a father or mother to their children, is so important: "spend time" with your children, play with your children. A society that neglects children and marginalizes the elderly severs its roots and darkens its future. And you have been assessing what our culture today is doing, haven't you? Every time a child is abandoned and an elderly person cast out, not only is it an act of injustice, but it also ensures the failure of that society. Caring for our little ones and for our elders is a choice for civilization. And also for the future, because the little ones, the children, the young people will carry society forward by their strength, their youth, and the elderly people will carry it forward by their wisdom, their memory, which they must give to us all.

And it makes me rejoice that the [Pontifical Council for the Family](#) has designed this new icon of the family, taking up the image of the Presentation of the Jesus in the Temple with Mary and

Joseph carrying the Child in fulfillment of the Law, and the elderly Simeon and Anna who, moved by the Holy Spirit, welcome him as the Saviour. The title of the icon is meaningful: *“And His mercy is from generation to generation”*. The Church that cares for children and the elderly becomes the mother of generations of believers and, at the same time, serves human society because a spirit of love, familiarity and solidarity helps all people to rediscover the fatherhood and motherhood of God.

And when I read this Gospel passage, I like to think about the fact that those young people, Joseph and Mary, as well as the Child, abide by the Law. Four times St Luke says: in fulfillment of the Law. They are obedient to the Law, the young people! And the two Elders, they are the ones to make noise! Simeon at that moment invents his own liturgy and praises, he praises God. And the old woman goes and talks, she preaches through her chatter: “Look at him!”. They are so free! And three times it states that the Elders are led by the Holy Spirit. The young by the law, the Elders by the Holy Spirit. Look to our elderly people who have this spirit within them, listen to them!

The “Good News” of the family is a very important part of evangelization, which Christians can communicate to all, by the witness of their lives; and already they are doing so, this is evident in secularized societies: truly Christian families are known by their fidelity, their patience, their openness to life, and by their respect for the elderly... the secret to this is the presence of Jesus in the family. Let us therefore propose to all people, with respect and courage, the beauty of marriage and the family illuminated by the Gospel! And in order to do this let us approach with care and affection those families who are struggling, forced to leave their homeland, broken, homeless or unemployed, or suffering for any reason; let us approach married couples in crisis or separated. Let us be close to everyone through the proclamation of this Gospel of the family, the beauty of the family.

Dear friends, your work during this Plenary can be a valuable contribution to the next Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, which will be dedicated to the family. For this, too, I thank you. I entrust you to the Holy Family of Nazareth and with all my heart I impart my Blessing.