



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN ROME'S DIOCESAN CONFERENCE ENTITLED:
"A PEOPLE WHO GENERATES ITS CHILDREN, COMMUNITIES AND
FAMILIES IN THE GREAT STAGES OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION"**

Monday, 16 June 2014

Video

First of all, good afternoon everyone!

I am glad to be among you.

I thank the Cardinal Vicar for the warm and trusting words that he addressed to me on your behalf. I also thank Fr Giampiero Palmieri and the two catechists Ada and Pierpaolo, who illustrated the situation. I said to them: "You've said it all! I will just give the blessing and leave". They were very good.

I would like to say one thing without hesitation: I really liked that you, Fr Giampiero, mentioned [Evangelii nuntiandi](#). Still to this day it is the most important post-Conciliar pastoral document, which hasn't been surpassed. We should always go back to it. That Apostolic Exhortation is a great source of inspiration. And it was the work of the great [Paul VI](#), of his own hand. Because after that Synod, they couldn't decide whether they should do an Exhortation or not...; and finally the relator — it was [St John Paul II](#) — took all the papers and just handed them to the Pope, as if to say: "You handle it, brother!". Paul VI read them all and, with that patience of his, began to write. To me that is truly the pastoral testament of the great Paul VI. And it hasn't been surpassed. It is a wealth of resources for pastoral life. Thank you for having mentioned it, and may it always be a point of reference!

In the course of this year while visiting several parishes, I had the opportunity to meet many people who often, fleetingly but with great confidence, expressed to me their hopes and expectations as well as their struggles and problems. Also, in the many letters that I receive every day I read about men and women who feel disoriented, for often life is tiring and it can be difficult to find meaning and value in it. It goes by too quickly! I imagine how hectic the day of a dad or a mom is; they get up early, take their children to school, then they go to work, often in places where there are tensions and conflicts, as well as places that are far away. Before coming here, I went to the kitchen to have a coffee, the cook was there and I asked him: "how long does it take you to get home?". "About an hour and a half...". An hour and a half! And when he gets home, there are the children, his wife.... And they have to cross Rome in traffic. It often happens to us all that we feel alone like this. We feel weighed down by a crushing weight, and we ask ourselves: is this life? The question stirs in our heart: What can we do so that our children, our kids, can give meaning to their lives? Because they also feel that our way of living is sometimes inhuman, and they do not know what direction to take so that life can be beautiful and so they're happy to get up in the morning.

When I confess young married people and they tell me about their children, I always ask this question: "Do you have time to play with your children?". And so often I hear from the dad: "But, Father, when I go to work in the morning, they are sleeping, and when I come back in the evening, they are in bed sleeping". This is not life! It's a difficult cross. It's not human. When I was Archbishop in the other diocese and I had more opportunities than I do today to speak with kids and young people and I realized that they are suffering from *orfandad*, that is orphanhood. Our children, your kids are suffering like orphans! I believe that the same thing is happening in Rome. Young people are orphans with a safe road to travel, with a teacher in whom they trust, with ideals that warm the heart, with hopes that sustain the exhaustion of daily life. They are orphans, but they keep the desire for all that alive in their hearts! This is a society of orphans. Let's think about this, it's serious. Orphans, without the memory of their families: because, for example, grandparents are far away or in a retirement home, they don't have that familial presence, that familial memory. Orphans, without affection today, or with a kind of affection that is frantic: dad is tired, mom is tired, they go to bed.... And they are left orphans. Orphans of gratuitousness: what I was saying before, the generosity of a dad and a mom who know how to waste time just playing with their children. We need that sense of gratuitousness: in families, in parishes and in society as a whole. And when we think of how the Lord is revealed to us through the free gift, that is, Grace, it's a much more important thing. That need for human gratuitousness, which is how we open our hearts to the grace of God. Everything is free: He comes and grants us his grace. But if we don't have a sense of gratuitousness in the family, at school, in the parish, it will be very difficult for us to understand what the grace of God is, the grace that isn't sold, that isn't bought, but a present, a gift from God: it is God himself. And that is why they are orphans of gratuitousness.

Jesus made a great promise to us: "I will not leave you orphaned" (Jn 14:18), because he is the way to go, the teacher to listen to, the hope that does not disappoint. How can we not feel a burning desire in our heart and say to all, especially the youth: "You are not orphans! Jesus Christ

revealed to us that God is Father and wants to help you, because he loves you". This is the profound meaning of Christian initiation: being born in the faith means proclaiming that we are not orphans. For society also rejects her children! For example, almost 40% of Italian young people are unemployed. What does this mean? "You don't matter to me! You are trash. I'm sorry, but that's life". Society also orphans young people. Think about what it means that 75 million young people in this European society, youth 25 and under, have no work.... This civilization leaves them orphans. We are a people who wants to raise our children with the certainty of having a father, of having a family, of having a mother. Our technological society — Paul VI already said it — multiplies *ad infinitum* the opportunities for pleasure, distraction, curiosity, but it cannot lead man to true joy. So much convenience, so many beautiful things, but where is the joy? In order to love life we don't need to fill it up with things, which then become idols; we need only that Jesus watch over us. It is his gaze that tells us: it is good that you are alive, your life is not useless, because you have been entrusted with a great duty. This is true wisdom: a new outlook on life that comes from encounter with Jesus.

Cardinal Vallini spoke about this path of pastoral and missionary conversion. It is a path that one takes and one must take and we still have the grace to be able to take it. Conversion is not easy, because it means changing one's life, changing one's ways, changing so many things, even changing the soul. But this path of conversion will give us the identity of a people who knows how to bear children, not a sterile people! If we, like the Church, do not know how to bear children, something is not working! The great challenge for the Church today is to become mother: mother! Not a perfectly organized non-profit, with so many pastoral plans.... We need them, sure... But that is not essential, it is just a help. A help to what? To the motherhood of the Church. If the Church is not mother, it is sad to say that she becomes a spinster, but she does become a spinster! That's how it is: she bears no fruit. The Church not only makes children, but it is part of her identity to make children, that is, to evangelize, as Paul VI says in *Evangelii nuntiandi*. The Church's identity is this: to evangelize, that is, to make children. I think of our mother Sarah, who grew old without children; I think of Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharius, old without children; I think of Noemi, another old woman without descendents... And these barren women did bear children, they were given descendents: the Lord is capable of doing that! That is why the Church must do something, must change, must convert in order to become mother. She must be fruitful! Fruitfulness is a grace that we today need to ask from the Holy Spirit, so that we can go forward in our pastoral and missionary conversion. This is not a question of seeking to proselytize, no, no! To go ring the bell: "Would you like to come to this association called the Catholic Church?...". We need to make a card, another member... The Church — *Benedict XVI* told us — does not grow through proselytism, she grows through attraction, maternal attraction, offering her motherhood: she grows through tenderness, her maternity, the witness that generates ever more and more children. She is a little aged, our Mother Church... We shouldn't call her "Grandma Church", but still she is a little older... We must rejuvenate her! We must rejuvenate her, but not by taking her to the plastic surgeon, no! This is not the true rejuvenation of the Church, it doesn't work. The Church grows younger when she is capable of generating more children; she grows younger the more she becomes mother.

This is our mother, the Church and our love for children. To be in the Church is to be at home, with mom; at mom's house. This is the grandeur of revelation.

The process of aging is... I believe... — I don't know if Fr Giampiero or the Cardinal — spoke of an escape from community life, this is true: individualism leads us to flee from community, and this makes the Church grow old. Let's visit an institution that is no longer a mother, it will give us certain identity, like a football team: "I am on this team, I cheer for the Catholics!". And this happens when there is a flight from community life, a flight from the family. We must recover our memory, the memory of the Church that is the people of God. Today we lack a sense of history. We are afraid of time: no time, no roadmap, no, no! Everything now! We are in the reign of the present, of the situation. Only this space, this space, this space, and no time. Also in communication: lights, the moment, the cell phone, the message... abbreviated language, reduced. Everything is done in a hurry, because we are slaves of the moment. To recover our memory in the patience of God, who did not hurry his history of salvation, who has accompanied us throughout history, who preferred a long history for us, of many years, walking with us.

As for the present — I will speak about it after, if I have time — I have only one word to say: welcome. This is it, welcome. And another that you said: tenderness. A mother is tender, she knows how to caress. But when we see the poor people who go to the parish, and they don't know how to move in this setting, because they don't often go to the parish, and they find a secretary who yells, who closes the door: "No, for you to do this, you have to pay this, this and this much! And you have to do this and this Take this form and you have to...". These people don't feel like they are at their mother's house! They might feel like they are at the secretary's office but not at their mother's house. And these secretaries, the new "ostiaries" of the Church! Being parish secretary means opening the front door of the mother's home, not closing it! And one can close the door in many ways. In Buenos Aires there was a famous parish secretary: they called her the "tarantula"... I'll say no more! To know how to open the door in the moment: welcome and tenderness.

Priests, pastors and assistant pastors also have so much work to do and I understand that at times they are a little tired; but a parish priest who is too impatient does no good! Sometimes I understand, I understand.... Once I had to listen to a humble woman, very humble, who had left the Church when she was young; now she was the mother of a family, she came back to the Church and said: "Father, I left the Church because in the parish, as a little girl" — I don't know if she was in confirmation class, I am not sure — "a woman with a baby came and asked the pastor to perform the Baptism..." — this was a long time ago and not here in Rome, in another place — "and the parish priest said yes, but she would have to pay... 'But I have no money!'. 'Go home, take whatever you have, bring it to me and I will baptize the child'". And that woman was speaking to me in the presence of God! This happens.... This does not signify welcome, this is closing the door! In the present: tenderness and welcome.

And for the future, hope and patience. To bear witness of hope, let us go forth. And the family? It is patience. What St Paul tells us: support one another. Let us support one another. That's it.

But let us return to the text. The person who comes knows, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, that the Church guards the treasure of Jesus' gaze. And we must offer it to everyone. When they come to the parish — maybe I am repeating myself, because I digressed and got away from the text — what attitude should we take? We must always welcome everyone with a big heart, as in a family, asking the Lord to make us capable of participating in the difficulties and the problems that often children and young people encounter in their lives.

We must have the heart of Jesus, who “when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36). Seeing the crowds, he feels compassion for them. I like to dream of a Church who lives the compassion of Jesus. Compassion is to “suffer with”, to feel what the others feel, to accompany them emotionally. It is Mother Church, who caresses her children with compassion like a mother. A Church that has a heart without borders, and not only the heart: also the gaze, the sweetness of Jesus' gaze, which is often much more eloquent than so many words. People expect to find in us the gaze of Jesus, sometimes without even knowing it, that serene gaze, a happiness that seeps into the heart. But — as your representatives said — it takes a whole parish to be a welcoming community, not just the priests and catechists. The whole parish! Welcome...

We must rethink how welcoming our parishes are: whether the hours of activities encourage the participation of young people; whether we are capable of speaking their language, of reaching out by other means (as for example sports, new technologies) for opportunities to proclaim the Gospel. Let us become bold in exploring new ways with which our communities can be homes where the door is always open. An open door! And it is important that the welcome is followed by a clear proposal of the faith; many times a proposal of the faith may not be explicit, but is conveyed by attitude, by witness: in this institution called the Church, in this institution called the parish one breathes the air of faith, because one believes in the Lord Jesus.

I will ask you to study carefully these things that I have said: this orphanhood, and to study how to recover the memory of the family; how to bring warmth and gratuitousness to the parish, so that it won't be an institution tied solely to the conditions of the moment. No, let it have a history, let it be on a journey of pastoral conversion. Let it know how to welcome with tenderness in the present, and how to send forth her children with hope and patience.

I truly appreciate priests, because being a pastor is not easy. It's easier to be a bishop than a pastor! Because we bishops always have the option of stepping back, or hiding behind “His Excellency”, and that is our defence! But to be a pastor, when they knock on your door: “Father this, here father, there father...”. It's not easy! When someone comes to you to speak about family problems, or about a deceased person, or when the so-called “charity girls” come to gossip about

the so-called “catechesis girls”... It’s not easy being a pastor!

But I would like to say one thing, I have said it before: the Italian Church is very strong thanks to parish priests! These priests who — now will have another system — slept by the telephone on the sofa and rose at whatever hour to go to those who are ill.... No one died without the Sacraments.... Close! Close pastors! And then? They passed on the memory of evangelization....

Let us think of the Church as mother and let us say to our Mother Church what Elizabeth said to Mary when she became a mother, expecting the son: “Happy are you, because you believe!”

We want a Church of faith, one that believes that the Lord is capable of making her a mother, of giving her many children. Our Holy Mother Church. Thank you!