



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Festival of Families in the presence of the Holy Father

This afternoon, in the Paul VI Hall, in the presence of Pope Francis, the Festival of Families, entitled “The Beauty of Family”, took place, inaugurating the Tenth World Meeting of Families, held in Rome from 22 to 26 June on the theme: “Family love: vocation and way of holiness”.

After the greeting from His Eminence Cardinal Kevin Joseph Farrell, and testimonies from five families, the Holy Father delivered his discourse.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present at the inaugural event of the World Meeting of Families:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear families,

I am happy to be here with you, following the disturbing events that you have all recently experienced: first the pandemic and now the war in Europe, to say nothing of the other wars afflicting our human family.

I thank Cardinal Farrell, Cardinal De Donatis, the personnel of the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life, as well as those of the Diocese of Rome, whose dedication has made this meeting possible.

I would also like to thank the families present, who have come from many parts of the world, especially those who have shared their testimonies with us. Thank you so much! It is not easy to speak before so large an audience about your lives, your troubles and those gifts, wonderful but profoundly personal, that you have received from the Lord. Your testimonies have served as “amplifiers”: you have given voice to the experiences of other families in the world that, like yourselves, are sharing in the same joys and concerns, the same hardships and hopes.

For this reason, I would like to say something to those of you here present and to all the married couples and families listening to us throughout the world. I want you to feel my closeness to you, wherever you are, and to your concrete life situation. My word of encouragement is precisely this: start from where you are, and, from there, try to journey together: together as couples, together in your families, together with other families, together with the Church. I think of the parable of the Good Samaritan who meets someone wounded and in need. He draws near to him, cares for him and helps him to resume his journey. That is what I want the Church to be for all of you! A Good Samaritan that draws near to you and helps you to continue your journey and *to take a step forward*, however small. Never forget that closeness is the “style” of God, closeness and tender love. I will now try to indicate a few “steps forward” that need to be taken together, by reflecting on the testimonies we have heard.

1. “A step forward” towards marriage. Thank you, Luigi and Serena, for having told us with great honesty about your own experience, with its hardships and hopes. I think it was painful for all of us to hear you say, “We did not find a community that would support us with open arms for what we are”. That is painful! It should make us all think. We need to be converted and to journey as a welcoming Church, so that our dioceses and parishes can increasingly become “communities that support with open arms”. How much we need this, in our present-day culture of indifference! Providentially, you found support in other families, which are in fact “little churches”.

I was greatly consoled when you explained the reason that led you to baptize your children. You said something very beautiful: “Despite our noblest human efforts, we are not sufficient unto ourselves”. It is true, we can have the loveliest dreams, the loftiest ideals, but in the end, we also discover – and this is wisdom – our own limitations, which we cannot overcome by ourselves but by opening ourselves to the Father, to his love and to his grace. That is the meaning of the sacraments of baptism and of matrimony: they are the concrete helps that God gives us in order not to leave us alone, precisely because “we are not sufficient unto ourselves”. It was good to hear those words: “we are not sufficient unto ourselves”.

We can say that whenever a man and a woman fall in love, God offers them a gift; that gift is marriage. It is a marvellous gift, which contains the power of God’s own love: strong, enduring, faithful, ready to start over after every failure or moment of weakness. Marriage is not a formality you go through. You don’t get married in order to be “card-carrying” Catholics, to obey a rule, or because the Church tells you to, or to have a party... No, you get married *because you want to build your marriage on the love of Christ*, which is solid as rock. In marriage, Christ gives himself to you, so that you can find the strength to give yourselves to one another. So take heart: family life is not “mission impossible”! By the grace of the sacrament, God makes it a wonderful journey, to be undertaken together with him and never alone. The family is not a lofty ideal that is unattainable in reality. God solemnly promises his presence in your marriage and family, not only on the day of your wedding, but for the rest of your lives. And he keeps supporting you, every day of your journey.

2. “A step forward” to embrace the cross. I thank you, Roberto and Maria Anselma, because you told us the moving story of your own family, and in particular about Chiara. You spoke to us of the cross, which is part of the life of every individual and of every family. You testified that the heavy cross of Chiara’s sickness and death did not destroy your family or eliminate the serenity and peace of your hearts. We can see this in your faces. You are not downcast, desperate or angry with life. Quite the opposite! What we see in you is great serenity and great faith. You told us how “Chiara’s serenity opened for us a window onto eternity”. To see how she experienced the trial of her illness helped you to lift up your gaze, not to remain imprisoned in grief, but to be open to something greater: the mysterious plans of God, to eternity, to heaven. I thank you for this witness of faith! You also quoted something that Chiara had said: “God puts a truth in each of us and it is not possible to misunderstand it”. God put into Chiara’s heart the truth of a holy life, and so she wished to preserve the life of her child at the cost of her own life. As a wife, alongside her husband, she followed the way of the Gospel of the family, simply and spontaneously. Chiara’s heart also welcomed the truth of the cross as gift of self: hers was a life given to her family, to the Church and to the whole world. We always need great examples to look to. May Chiara be an inspiration on our own journey of holiness, and may the Lord support and make fruitful every cross that families have to bear.

3. “A step forward” towards forgiveness. Paul and Germaine, you found the courage to tell us about the crisis that you went through in your marriage, and we thank you for that, because every marriage has its moments of

crisis. We need to say this, not to hide it, and to take steps to overcome those crises. You didn't try to sweeten matters with a bit of sugar! You called every cause of the crisis by its name: insincerity, infidelity, the misuse of money, the idols of power and career, growing resentment and hardness of heart. As you were speaking, I believe that all of us relived our own experiences of pain before similar situations of broken families. To see a family break up is a tragedy that cannot leave us indifferent. The laughter of married couples disappears, children are troubled, serenity is lost. And most of the time, nobody knows exactly what to do.

That is why your story transmits hope. Paul said that at the bleakest moment of the crisis, the Lord answered his heart's deepest desire and saved his marriage. That is what happens. Deep within the heart of each person is the desire for love not to end, for the story of a love experienced together not to be cut short, for the fruits of love not to be dispersed. Everyone has this desire. No one wants a love that is short-term or is marked with an expiration date. So we suffer greatly whenever failings, negligence and human sins make a shipwreck of marriage. But even amid the tempest, God sees what is in our hearts. By his providence, you met a group of laypersons specifically committed to assisting families. That was the start of a journey of rapprochement and healing in your relationship. You began to talk to one another, to be open and sincere with each other, to acknowledge your faults, to pray together with other couples, and all those things brought you to reconciliation and forgiveness.

Brothers and sisters, forgiveness heals every wound. Forgiveness is a gift welling up from the grace that Christ showers on couples and whole families whenever we let him act, whenever we turn to him. It was wonderful that you celebrated your own "feast of forgiveness" with your children, and renewed your marriage promises at the celebration of Mass. It made me think of the feast that, in Jesus' parable, the father organized for his prodigal son (cf. Lk 15:20-24). Only this time, the ones who went astray were the parents, not the child! "Prodigal parents". Yet this too is wonderful and can be a great witness for children. Young people, as they emerge from infancy, begin to realize that their parents are not "superheroes"; they are not all-powerful, much less perfect. In you, your children saw something much more important: they saw the humility to beg forgiveness and the God-given strength to pick yourselves up after the fall. This is something that children really need! For they too will make mistakes in life and realize that they too are not perfect, but they will also remember that the Lord raises us up, that all of us are forgiven sinners, that we have to beg forgiveness from others but also be able to forgive ourselves. The lesson that they learned from you will remain in their hearts forever. It was good for us too, to hear this. Thank you for your witness of forgiveness!

4. "A step forward" towards welcome. Thank you, Iryna and Sofia, for your witness. You gave a voice to all those persons whose lives have been devastated by the war in Ukraine. In you, we see the faces and the stories of so many men and women forced to leave their homeland. We thank you, for you have not lost your trust in providence and you have seen how God is at work in your lives, not least through the flesh and blood people he led you to encounter: host families, the doctors who helped you, and other kind-hearted men and women. The war brought you face to face with cynicism and human brutality, yet you also encountered people of great humanity. *People at their worst and people at their best!* It is important for all of us not to keep dwelling on the worst, but to maximize the best, the great goodness of which every man and woman is capable, and from there to start over again.

I thank you also, Pietro and Erika, for telling your own story, and for the generosity with which you welcomed Iryna and Sofia into your already large family. You shared with us that you did so out of gratitude to God and with a spirit of faith, as a call from the Lord. Erika told us that welcoming them was a "blessing from heaven". Indeed, welcoming is a genuine "charism" of families, and especially of large families! We may think that, in a large home, it is harder to welcome other people; yet that is not the case, for families with numerous children are "trained" to make room for others. They always have room for others.

In the end, this is what family is all about. In the family, we experience what it is to be welcomed. Husbands and wives are the first to "welcome" and accept one another, as they said they would do on the day of their marriage: "I take you..." Later, as they bring a child into the world, they welcome that new life. Whereas in cold and anonymous situations, the weak are often rejected, in families it is natural to welcome them: to accept a child with a disability, an elderly person in need of care, a family member in difficulty who has no one else... This gives hope. Families are places of welcome, and woe if they were to disappear! Society would become cold and

unbearable without welcoming families. Welcome and generous families give “warmth” to society.

5. “A step forward” towards fraternity. I thank you, Zakia, for having shared your story with us. It is amazing and consoling that what you and Luca built together remains alive. Your story was born and built on the sharing of very high ideals that you described when you said: “We based our family on authentic love, with respect, solidarity and dialogue between our cultures”. Nothing of that was lost, not even after the tragedy of Luca’s death. Not only do the example and the spiritual legacy of Luca continue to live on and to speak to the consciences of many people, but also the organization that Zakia founded in some way carries on his mission. Indeed, we can say that Luca’s diplomatic mission has now become “a mission of peace” on the part of your entire family. In your story, we see clearly how what is human and what is religious can become intertwined and bring forth precious fruit. In Zakia and Luca, we find the beauty of human love, passion for life, altruism and fidelity to one’s own beliefs and religious tradition, as a source of inspiration and interior strength.

Your family expresses the ideal of fraternity. In addition to being husband and wife, you lived as brother and sister in your humanity, in your differing religious experiences, and in your commitment to society. This too is a lesson that is learned in the family. Living in the family together with others different from ourselves, we learn to be brothers and sisters. We learn to overcome divisions, prejudices and narrow-mindedness, and to build together something grand, something beautiful, on the basis of what we have in common. Lived examples of fraternity, like that of Luca and Zakia, give us hope; they help us to look with greater confidence at our world, so torn by division and hostility. Thank you for this example of fraternity!

I don’t not want to move on from Luca and you without mentioning your mother. She is here, and she has always been at your side. This is the goodness that mothers-in-law bring to families, good mothers-in-law and good mothers! I thank her for coming with you today.

Dear friends, each of your families has a mission to carry out in our world, a testimony to give. We the baptized are especially called to be “a message that the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 21). For this reason, I would like you to ask yourselves this question: What is the word that the Lord wants to speak through our life to all those whom we meet? What “step forward” is he asking of our family, my family, today? Everyone should ask this. Stop and listen. Let yourselves be changed by him, so that you too can change the world and make it “home” for all those who need to feel welcomed and accepted, for all those who need to encounter Christ and to know that they are loved. We need to live with our eyes raised to heaven: as Blessed Maria and Luigi Beltrame Quattrocchi used to say to their children, confronting the efforts and joys of life, “always looking from the roof upwards”.

I thank you for coming here. I thank you for the efforts you make in raising your families. Keep moving forward, with courage and with joy. And please, don’t forget to pray for me.
