

Letter from the Prelate (4 June 2017)

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

As the recent General Congress reminded us,¹ over the past decades the family has occupied a primary place among the priorities of the Church, and therefore of the Prelature. In this letter I want to focus again briefly on this apostolate that is so urgent and necessary.

It is obvious that many people today see what is God's plan for the union of man and woman as just one more model, and even question it as an archaic notion. Nevertheless, we have to be filled with hope. The light of the truth about the family is written by God on the human heart, and therefore a path to the truth is and always will be open amidst the storms.

Each family, with its effort and eagerness to go forward united, "consigns the stewardship of the world back to the covenant of man and woman with God."² In reflecting on this truth, some words of Saint Josemaría come to mind: "The task for a Christian is to drown evil in an abundance of good. It is not a question of negative campaigns, or of being *anti* anything. On the contrary, we should live positively, full of optimism, with youthfulness, joy and peace. We should be understanding with everybody, with the followers of Christ, and with those who abandon him, or do not know him at all. But understanding does not mean drawing back, or remaining indifferent, but being active."³

Let us not lose our peace and energies lamenting the difficulties so many families, and the institution of the family itself, are undergoing. Let us strive to protect and promote, with fortitude and professional outlook, the Christian family—something that is not only ours, but that belongs to God, and to present and future generations.

The family and marriage are a path to holiness. "You laugh because I tell you that you have a 'vocation for marriage'? Well, you have just that: a vocation."⁴ A vocation to holiness, which is happiness. The family is the nurturing place for love; it is the first place where the Love of God is made present in our lives, beyond anything we can do or fail to do: "We love, because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). Fatherhood and motherhood tell us who we are, each and every one of us: a gift of God, a fruit of Love. In the midst of the thousand difficulties that can arise in the life of a family, knowing that each of us and the others are a gift from God leads us to love other men and women more. And society always needs this unconditional love.

More than in other epochs, we see today, at all levels, how urgent it is to assist families with greater difficulties. A person isn't born knowing how to be a father or mother, a husband or wife; we need to learn this ourselves and help other spouses and parents to do so. Families who help other families! With the experience that family life gives, we can collaborate effectively in the immense field of the work of mercy that is *instructing the ignorant*. Without "giving lessons," with naturalness, how much can be done to prepare couples well and follow closely those who are recently married, or who are going through a bad stretch! Moreover, sometimes the family in

¹ See Pastoral Letter, 14 February 2017, nos. 21, 31.

² Pope Francis, Audience, 2 September 2015.

³ Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 864.

⁴ Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 27.

difficulty may be your own; then is the moment to open your heart and let yourself be helped, with the same simplicity with which you have helped others.

Consider also, with a big heart, how to help those who find themselves in so-called irregular situations. Pope Francis has reaffirmed that doctrine doesn't change;⁵ but he urges us to improve our care for these brothers and sisters of ours, who need to be accompanied with a closer look of welcome and discernment, which helps them overcome these situations, with God's grace.

Look at Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman (see *Jn* 4: 1-45). That woman, although far from God, began to pray without realizing it; she began to talk with God, who had come to meet her, and who led her, little by little, to reveal the truth about her life. The Samaritan woman doesn't remain alone in her wounded state; she also stands before the most loving gaze of "the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction" (2 *Cor* 1:3-4). Our Lord is calling us to be for all these people—despite our own smallness and personal misery—transmitters of his closeness and consolation.

It is important, in any case, that we try to "arrive in time." "Learning to love someone does not happen automatically . . . For every couple, marriage preparation begins at birth."⁶ I remind you that in the apostolic activities with young people it is good to highlight the beauty of apostolic celibacy, and also of the vocation to form a Christian family, finding creative ways to focus on the various aspects of engagement and matrimony:⁷ testimonies from families; courses in family development for single people, conferences, films, readings; activities for parents in the schools; collaborating in parish activities; organizing leisure activities that can give rise to future Christian marriages, etc.

Those of you who are more directly in charge of the formative activities should reflect on the fact the improving each family has a multiplying effect in society. The attractiveness of a Christian family is contagious: "By their witness as well as their words, families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, they arouse a desire for God and they reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life."⁸

Let us entrust to the silent and fruitful action of the Holy Spirit this serene and immense effort to assist the family.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Leonardo".

Rome, 4 June 2017, Solemnity of Pentecost

⁵ See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016), no. 300.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 208.

⁷ See Pastoral Letter, 14 February 2017, no. 25.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 184.