

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

Today we begin the year convoked by Pope Francis to highlight family love, by fostering new ways to accompany families on their path to holiness. This initiative will coincide, for a number of months, with the Year of Saint Joseph, which began last December. This overlap gives us an opportunity to turn especially to the intercession of the Holy Patriarch, so that he will look after our families and those of the whole world, and also so that many young people may discover the beauty of undertaking the path of married life, while being aware of the Christian family's evangelizing mission.

During the past months, due to measures adopted in various countries for the pandemic, many of our days may have been spent at home, with the rhythms and tasks of domestic life. The effort to live in union with our Lord has probably helped us to face painful situations with faith and hope: our own suffering and that of many family members, the deaths of loved ones, situations of loneliness, illness or stress. Hopefully we have tried to help alleviate this pain with our prayer, closeness and affection.

These circumstances have also been an opportunity to take better care of each individual—especially the young and the elderly—and to serve others in the various tasks at home. A Christian family, in the image of the home at Nazareth, requires the involvement of all its members in meeting the needs of education, care, rest, and so on. Each person provides a necessary and irreplaceable value, although the specific distribution of tasks can take various forms. Here it can help us to imagine the harmony between Joseph and Mary, assisted also by Jesus as he grew up and was able to help out at home.

This year can also provide the possibility to foster in a special way the awareness and atmosphere of a family in the centers of the Work and in all my sons' and daughters' homes. Also I encourage you to find ways to show concern for other families, as well as for people in need and the poor. I am sure that, with initiative, each family will find creative ways to be, as Saint Josemaría wanted, "sowers of peace and joy" (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 30).

For those families who have not been able to have children there also opens up a wide panorama of family apostolate. You are called, with your mutual love, to provide the example of

a bright home for those around you and also to share this home with your friends, relatives and acquaintances, and so help to transform our world into a better home.

The next World Meeting of Families with the Holy Father has as its motto “Family love: a vocation and a path to holiness.” This motto reminds us very directly of Saint Josemaría’s preaching. The meeting will take place precisely on June 26, 2022. We especially entrust to Saint Joseph the fruit of this year dedicated to the family, asking the Holy Patriarch to grant us “the grace of graces: our conversion” (Francis, Apost. Letter *Patris corde*, final prayer); and also to help us be better witnesses to God’s love in our own environment, especially in the family.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leonardo". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter 'L' being particularly large and stylized.

Rome, 19 March 2021