

Pope Francis and the Priority of Strengthening the Family

- Introduction
 - During his recent trip to Cuba, the US and the UN, there were many important themes covered, but the biggest theme of all, his highest priority in coming, was the family.
 - When he became the first pope ever to speak to a joint session of Congress, he said, “It is my wish that throughout my visit the family should be a recurrent theme.”
 - At the White House, he said he had come to “celebrate and support the institutions of marriage and the family at this ... critical moment in the history of our civilization.”
 - In Philadelphia, when he met with bishops present for the World Meeting on Families, he said, “For the Church, the family is not first and foremost a cause for concern, but rather the joyous confirmation of God’s blessing upon the masterpiece of creation. Every day, all over the world, the Church can rejoice in the Lord’s gift of so many families who, even amid difficult trials, remain faithful to their promises and keep the faith!”
 - “I would say,” he added, “that the foremost pastoral challenge of our changing times is to move decisively towards recognizing this gift. For all the obstacles we see before us, gratitude and appreciation should prevail over concerns and complaints. The family is the fundamental locus of the covenant between the Church and God’s creation, with that creation which God blessed on the last day with a family. Without the family, not even the Church would exist. Nor could she be what she is called to be, namely “a sign and instrument of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race.” And so, he said in the city of Brotherly love, that he had come to proclaim “emphatically” the “Gospel of the Family.”
 - In Philadelphia, Pope Francis came to proclaim “emphatically,” as he said in Philadelphia, that blessing, namely, the “Gospel of the Family,”
 - As John Paul II stressed, the family as the way of the Church and the future of humanity passes by way of the family. That’s only become clearer over the course of Time.
 - When we look at Pope Francis’ attention to the Gospel of the Family, we can see that it is his major concern. It’s something that he speaks about regularly in his daily homilies and trips within Italy and around the world. It was his priority in his trip to Cuba, the US and the UN. It was the theme he chose for the first Synod of Bishops he would hold — “The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world” — and it was so important to him that he changed the structure, to prepare for it with an extraordinary session last Fall and then an ordinary one this Fall. And while there clearly was a Franciscan flavor to the deliberations of the Synod and to its Relatio Finalis, probably the easiest place to see Pope Francis’ attention to the family and his thoughts about proclaiming the Gospel of the Family has been in his ongoing series — now 31 editions and counting — of Wednesday catecheses. He began the series last December 17 and introduced it by framing it within the context of the Synod journey: “I would also like the customary meditations of the Wednesday Audiences to be included in this common journey. I have therefore decided to reflect with you, this year, precisely on the family, on this great gift that the Lord has made to the world from the very beginning.” I think it’s worthwhile at the beginning of this conference, before we start analyzing some takeaways, to give a quick survey of the themes to which he’s dedicated this catechesis:
 - 1. Learning from **the Holy Family**
 - 2. The **crucial role of mothers** in children’s lives and in civilization
 - 3a and b. **The importance of fathers**
 - 4. **Children-as-gift** are the joy of family and society
 - 5. **Fraternity** between siblings

- 6. The struggles of the **elderly**
- 7. The value and importance of **grandparents** in the family
- 8 & 9. **Children** are a great gift for humanity (again)
- 10 & 11. The importance of the **complementarity between male and female**
- 12 & 13. The **beauty** of Christian marriage
- 14. The importance of **three expressions, “May I?,” “Thank you,” and “Pardon me”** for familial peace
- 15. **Education** as an essential and natural vocation of the family
- 16. **Engagement** as a period of mutual learning, refinement, and hard work
- 17. The trial of **poverty** in the family
- 18. The family as the hospital of **illness and suffering**
- 19. The faithful, familial consolation at **death and grieving** within the family
- 20 & 21. The **wounds** that take place within the family
- 22. The family as a place of celebrating **work** well done and rest from it
- 23. The family as a **school of work** that maintains the family
- 24. The importance of **prayer** in the family
- 25. **The mission of the family** to counteract the desertification of society
- 26. The connection between the **family and the Christian Community**
- 27. The family as a **blessing to all nations**
- 28. The need for a **family spirit** throughout society
- 29. The importance of **keeping promises to children**
- 30. The family lives off the **promise of love and fidelity**
- 31. The Family as the **School of Forgiveness**
- Pope Francis, as we come to see, is nowhere near as systematic in his *munus docendi* as John Paul II or Benedict XVI. But we can see through what he’s covered so far that he is looking at the family from nearly every possible angle and looking at the reality of the Church and the world from a familial key.
- As I’ve done in the other talks, I’d like to try to limit the nearly infinite buffet of food on the family to a manageable ten things on our plate that I think it behooves us to digest. I think this could be not only “talking points” but contemplation points.
- (ONE) The family is God’s masterpiece
 - Pope Francis’ whole thought on the family begins with the family being the summit of God the Creator’s work
 - 4.29.15: “This reminds us of the Book of Genesis, when God completes his work of creation and makes his masterpiece; the masterpiece is man and woman. And here at a marriage, at a wedding feast, Jesus begins his own miracles with this masterpiece: a man and a woman. Thus Jesus teaches us that the masterpiece of society is the family: a man and a woman who love each other! This is the masterpiece!”
 - Philadelphia, Vigil: “God created the world. God made this wonderful world in which we live and which, since we are not too smart, we are now in the process of destroying. But the most beautiful thing God made – so the Bible tells us – was the family. He created man and woman. And he gave them everything. He entrusted the world to them: “Grow, multiply, cultivate the earth, make it bear fruit, let it grow”. All the love he put into that marvelous creation, he entrusted to a family.”
 - Philadelphia, Vigil, written: “The family is the living symbol of the loving plan of which the Father once dreamed. To want to form a family is to resolve to be a part of God’s dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga of building a world where no one will feel alone, unwanted or homeless.”
 - Everything starts with the family’s original goodness, of God’s dream that he wants to give the graces to bring about.
- (TWO) At the same time, the family is in crisis.
 - From the first family at the beginning of time to every family today, the family is under attack.

- Before Congress, after stressing how essential the family has been to the building up of the United States, he added, “I cannot hide my concern for the family, which is threatened, perhaps as never before, from within and without. Fundamental relationships are being called into question, as is the very basis of marriage and the family.”
- In EG 66, Pope Francis stressed: “The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children.”
- The first section of the *Relatio Finalis* of the recently complete Synod details the challenges at various levels:
 - Socio-cultural
 - “Bisogna egualmente considerare gli sviluppi di un individualismo esasperato che snatura i legami familiari, facendo prevalere l’idea di un soggetto che si costruisce secondo i propri desideri, togliendo forza ad ogni legame. ... La loro fedeltà non è onorata se non si riafferma una chiara convinzione del valore della vita familiare, in particolare facendo affidamento alla luce del Vangelo anche nelle diverse culture.”
 - Anthropological
 - “Nelle diverse culture, non pochi giovani mostrano resistenza agli impegni definitivi riguardanti le relazioni affettive, e spesso scelgono di convivere con un partner o semplicemente di avere relazioni occasionali. La diminuzione della natalità è il risultato di vari fattori, tra cui l’industrializzazione, la rivoluzione sessuale, il timore della sovrappopolazione, i problemi economici, la crescita di una mentalità contraccettiva e abortista. La società dei consumi può anche dissuadere le persone dall’avere figli anche solo per mantenere la loro libertà e il proprio stile di vita. Alcuni cattolici hanno difficoltà a condurre le loro vite in accordo con l’insegnamento della Chiesa cattolica sul matrimonio e la famiglia, e a vedere in tale insegnamento la bontà del progetto creativo di Dio per loro. I matrimoni in alcune parti del mondo diminuiscono, mentre le separazioni e i divorzi non sono rari.”
 - Cultural contradictions
 - “Le tensioni indotte da una esasperata cultura individualistica del possesso e del godimento generano all’interno delle famiglie dinamiche di insofferenza e di aggressività. Si può menzionare anche una certa visione del femminismo, che denuncia la maternità come un pretesto per lo sfruttamento della donna e un ostacolo alla sua piena realizzazione. Si registra poi la crescente tendenza a concepire la generazione di un figlio come mero strumento per l’affermazione di sé, da ottenere con qualsiasi mezzo.”
 - “Una sfida culturale odierna di grande rilievo emerge da quell’ideologia del “gender” che nega la differenza e la reciprocità naturale di uomo e donna. Essa prospetta una società senza differenze di sesso, e svuota la base antropologica della famiglia. Questa ideologia induce progetti educativi e orientamenti legislativi che promuovono un’identità personale e un’intimità affettiva radicalmente svincolate dalla diversità biologica fra maschio e femmina. L’identità umana viene consegnata ad un’opzione individualistica, anche mutevole nel tempo.”
 - On this point of the problems with gender ideology, we can mention what Pope Francis said in lengthy catecheses on April 15 and April 22 this year.
 - 4.15.15: “Man and woman alone are made in the image and likeness of God: the biblical text repeats it three times in two passages (26-27): man and woman are the image and likeness of God. This tells us that it is not man alone who is the image of God or woman alone who is the image of God, but man and woman as a couple who are the image of God. The difference between man and woman is not meant to stand in opposition, or to

subordinate, but is for the sake of communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God.”

- 4.15.15: “I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution. In order to resolve the problems in their relationships, men and women need to speak to one another more, listen to each other more, get to know one another better, love one another more. They must treat each other with respect and cooperate in friendship. On this human basis, sustained by the grace of God, it is possible to plan a lifelong marital and familial union.”
- 4.15.15: “The great responsibility of the Church, of all believers, and first of all of believing families, which derives from us, impels people to rediscover the beauty of the creative design that also inscribes the image of God in the alliance between man and woman. The earth is filled with harmony and trust when the alliance between man and woman is lived properly. And if man and woman seek it together, between themselves, and with God, without a doubt they will find it. Jesus encourages us explicitly to bear witness to this beauty, which is the image of God.”
- 4.22.15: “This was how man was, he lacked something to reach his fullness; reciprocity was lacking. Woman is not a replica of man; she comes directly from the creative act of God. The image of the “rib” in no way expresses inferiority or subordination, but, on the contrary, that man and woman are of the same substance and are complimentary and that they also have this reciprocity. And the fact that — also in that parable — God moulds woman while man sleeps means precisely that she is in no way man’s creation, but God’s.”
- 4.22.15: “The social devaluation for the stable and generative alliance between man and woman is certainly a loss for everyone.”
- Social conflicts and tensions
 - La qualità affettiva e spirituale della vita familiare è gravemente minacciata dalla moltiplicazione dei conflitti, dall’impoverimento delle risorse, dai processi migratori. Violente persecuzioni religiose, particolarmente nei riguardi delle famiglie cristiane devastano zone intere del nostro pianeta, creando movimenti di esodo e di immense ondate di rifugiati che esercitano grandi pressioni sulle capacità delle terre di accoglienza. Le famiglie provate in questo modo, molto spesso, sono forzate allo sradicamento e condotte alla soglia della dissoluzione. La fedeltà dei cristiani alla loro fede, la loro pazienza e il loro attaccamento ai paesi di origine è sotto ogni aspetto ammirevole. Gli sforzi di tutti i responsabili politici e religiosi per diffondere e proteggere la cultura dei diritti dell’uomo sono ancora insufficienti. Bisogna ancora rispettare la libertà di coscienza e promuovere la coesistenza armoniosa tra tutti i cittadini fondata sulla cittadinanza, l’uguaglianza e la giustizia. Il peso di politiche economiche e sociali inique, anche nelle società del benessere, incide gravemente sul mantenimento dei figli, sulla cura dei malati e degli anziani. La dipendenza dall’alcol, dalle droghe o dal gioco d’azzardo è talora espressione di queste contraddizioni sociali e del disagio che ne consegue nella vita delle famiglie. L’accumulo di ricchezza nelle mani di pochi e la distrazione di risorse destinate al progetto familiare accrescono l’impoverimento delle famiglie in molte regioni del mondo.
- The response to it:
 - 3.25.15: “Renewal of prayer for the Synod of Bishops on the Family. ... I would like this prayer, as the whole journey of the Synod, to be animated by the compassion of the Good Shepherd for his flock, especially for people and families who, for different reasons, are “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt

9:36). Thus, sustained and animated by the grace of God, the Church can be ever more committed, and ever more united, in the witness of the truth of the love of God and of his mercy for the world's families, none excluded, both within the fold and without.

- (THREE) The Family is a school that has to be strengthened
 - Family as a school of humanity
 - RF: “Grembo di gioie e di prove, la famiglia è la prima e fondamentale “scuola di umanità” (cf. GS, 52).”
 - Santiago, Cuba: “The family is a school of humanity, a school that teaches us to open our hearts to others’ needs, to be attentive to their lives. When we live together life as a family, we keep our little ways of being selfish in check – they will always be there, because each of us has a touch of selfishness – but when there is no family life, what results are those ‘me, myself and I’ personalities who are completely self-centered and lacking any sense of solidarity, fraternity, cooperation, love and fraternal disagreements. Amid all the difficulties troubling our families in our world today, please, never forget one thing: families are not a problem, they are first and foremost an opportunity. ... They are a blessing.”
 - Family is a school of fidelity
 - 10.21.15: “It is necessary to restore social honour to the fidelity of love: restore social honour to the fidelity of love! It is necessary to remove from concealment the daily miracle of millions of men and women who reconstitute its foundation in the family, of which every society lives, without being able to guarantee it in any other way. It is no accident that this principle of fidelity to the promise of love and of life is written in God’s creation as a perennial blessing, to which the world is entrusted.”
 - Family as a school of love and mercy
 - Forgiveness. 11.4.15: “The capacity to forgive and to seek forgiveness is part of the vocation and the mission of the family. Practicing forgiveness not only saves families from divisiveness, but makes them capable of helping society to be less heartless and less cruel. Yes, each act of forgiveness fixes the cracks in the house and strengthens its walls.”
 - The family is a school of communion and fruitfulness
 - “The family,” Pope Francis stressed on Sept 30, “is the answer to the great challenge of our world. That challenge is two-fold: fragmentation and standardization. ... The family is the answer because it is the cell of a society that balances the personal and the communal dimensions.” He said that the family is the model for sustainable development and the principal agent of an integral ecology, because it “contains within it the two foundational principles of human civilization on the earth: the principle of communion and the principle of fruitfulness.”
 - “Without family, without the warmth of home,” the Pope said in Santiago Cuba, “life grows empty. There is a weakening of the networks that sustain us in adversity, the networks which nurture us in daily living and motivate us to build a better future. The family saves us from ... division and uniformity. In both cases, people turn into isolated individuals, easy to manipulate and to rule. Then in our world we see societies that are divided, broken, separated or rigidly uniform. These are a result of the breakup of family bonds, the loss of those relationships that make us who we are, that teach us to be persons. ...
 - Philadelphia, final Mass: “May our children find in us models and incentives to communion, not division!”
 - The family as a school for all of society
 - 10.7.15: “For the whole of society, the family opens a much more human prospect: it opens its sons and daughters’ eyes — and not only sight but also all the other senses — to life, representing a vision of the human relationship built on the free covenant of love. The family posits the need for the bonds of loyalty, sincerity, trust, cooperation and respect. It encourages its members to plan an inhabitable world and belief in trusting relationships, even in difficult conditions; it teaches them to honour one’s word, to respect each individual,

to share within one's personal limitations and those of others. We are all aware of the irreplaceable attention of the family for the littlest, most vulnerable, most wounded, and even the most debilitated members, in living their lives. In society, those who practice these attitudes have assimilated them from the family spirit, certainly not through competition and the desire for self-fulfillment. ... One could say that the "family spirit" is a constitutional charter for the Church: this is how Christianity must appear, and this is how it must be. ... The Church is and must be the family of God."

- (FOURTH) The importance of preparation for people to be good teachers in that school in adequate marriage preparation.
 - 5.27.15: Pre-marriage courses are a special expression of preparation. And we see so many couples, who perhaps come to the course somewhat reluctantly: "But these priests make us take a course! But why? We already know..." and they go reluctantly. But afterwards they are happy and grateful, because they have found there the opportunity — sometimes the only one — to reflect on their experience in non-trivial terms. Yes, many couples are together a long time, perhaps also in intimacy, sometimes living together, but they don't really know each other. It seems curious, but experience shows that it's true. Therefore engagement needs to be re-evaluated as a time of getting to know one another and sharing a plan. The path of preparation for marriage should be implemented from this perspective, also with the benefit of the simple but intense witness of Christian spouses. And also by focusing on the essentials: the Bible, by consciously rediscovering it together; prayer, in its liturgical dimension, but also in "domestic prayer" to live out in the home, the Sacraments, the Sacramental life, Confession, ... where the Lord comes to abide in the engaged couple and prepare them truly to receive one another "with the grace of Christ"; and fraternity with the poor and those in need, who lead us to live soberly and to share. ... It is a path of maturation. The steps of the journey should not be rushed. This is how we mature, step by step. ... The time of betrothal can truly become a time of initiation"
 - RF 57. Il matrimonio cristiano non può ridursi ad una tradizione culturale o a una semplice convenzione giuridica: è una vera chiamata di Dio che esige attento discernimento, preghiera costante e maturazione adeguata. Per questo occorrono percorsi formativi che accompagnino la persona e la coppia in modo che alla comunicazione dei contenuti della fede si unisca l'esperienza di vita offerta dall'intera comunità ecclesiale. L'efficacia di questo aiuto richiede anche che sia migliorata la catechesi prematrimoniale — talvolta povera di contenuti — che è parte integrante della pastorale ordinaria. Anche la pastorale dei nubendi deve inserirsi nell'impegno generale della comunità cristiana a presentare in modo adeguato e convincente il messaggio evangelico circa la dignità della persona, la sua libertà e il rispetto per i suoi diritti. Vanno tenute ben presenti le tre tappe indicate da Familiaris Consortio (cf. 66): la preparazione remota, che passa attraverso la trasmissione della fede e dei valori cristiani all'interno della propria famiglia; la preparazione prossima, che coincide con gli itinerari di catechesi e le esperienze formative vissute all'interno della comunità ecclesiale; la preparazione immediata al matrimonio, parte di un cammino più ampio qualificato dalla dimensione vocazionale. ... Emerge dunque l'esigenza di un ampliamento dei temi formativi negli itinerari prematrimoniali, così che questi diventino dei percorsi di educazione alla fede e all'amore, integrati nel cammino dell'iniziazione cristiana. In questa luce, è necessario ricordare l'importanza delle virtù, tra cui la castità, condizione preziosa per la crescita genuina dell'amore interpersonale. L'itinerario formativo dovrebbe assumere la fisionomia di un cammino orientato al discernimento vocazionale personale e di coppia, curando una migliore sinergia tra i vari ambiti pastorali. I percorsi di preparazione al matrimonio siano proposti anche da coppie sposate in grado di accompagnare i nubendi prima delle nozze e nei primi anni di vita matrimoniale, valorizzando così la ministerialità coniugale. La valorizzazione pastorale delle relazioni personali favorirà l'apertura graduale delle menti e dei cuori alla pienezza del piano di Dio.
 - Much talk about a matrimonial catechumenate. Can't be something done in a weekend. Just like seminary formation has had to change because of the fact that the faith isn't being transmitted as effectively such that there need to be remedial classes on the catechism, so we need to look at preparing couples adequately as well.
- (FIFTH) Confronting the Crisis of Commitment

- Philadelphia, Bishops: “Here too, we need a bit of holy parrhesia on the part of bishops. “Why aren’t you married?” “Yes, I have a fiancée, but we don’t know... maybe yes, maybe no... We’re saving some money for the party, for this or that...” The holy parrhesia to accompany them and make them grow towards the commitment of marriage.”
- (May 4, 2013 Rosary at St. Mary Major) A good mother not only accompanies her children in their growth, without avoiding the problems and challenges of life; a good mother also helps them to make definitive decisions with freedom. This is not easy, but a mother knows how to do it. But what does freedom mean? It is certainly not doing whatever you want, allowing yourself to be dominated by the passions, to pass from one experience to another without discernment, to follow the fashions of the day; freedom does not mean, so to speak, throwing everything that you don’t like out the window. No, that is not freedom! Freedom is given to us so that we know how to make good decisions in life! Mary as a good mother teaches us to be, like her, capable of making definitive decisions; definitive choices, at this moment in a time controlled by, so to speak, a philosophy of the provisional. It is very difficult to make a lifetime commitment. And she helps us to make those definitive decisions in the full freedom with which she said “yes” to the plan God had for her life (cf. Lk 1:38). Dear brothers and sisters, it is so hard in our time to make final decisions! Deciding everything with the total freedom with which she answered “yes” to God’s plan for her life (cf. Lk 1:38). Dear brothers and sisters, how difficult it is make a final decision in our time. Temporary things seduce us. We are victims of a trend that pushes us to the provisional... as though we wanted to stay adolescents. There is a little charm in staying adolescents, and this for life! Let us not be afraid of life commitments, commitments that take up and concern our entire life! In this way our life will be fruitful! And this is freedom: to have the courage to make these decisions with generosity.
- (SIXTH) The importance of children as hope.
 - UN last week on what to do about the demographic crisis.
 - George Weigel, *The Cube and the Cathedral*.
 - 2.11.15: “However, even a society with a paucity of generations, which does not love being surrounded by children, which considers them above all a worry, a weight, a risk, is a depressed society. Let us consider the many societies we know here in Europe: they are depressed societies, because they do not want children, they are not having children, the birth rate does not reach one percent. Why? Let each of us consider and respond. ... Not to have children is a selfish choice. Life is rejuvenated and acquires energy by multiplying: it is enriched, not impoverished!
- (SEVENTH) The importance of giving preferential care to the young and the elderly in the family
 - Philadelphia, Vigil: “I did want to stress two little points about the family. I would ask you to think about them. We have to care in a special way for children and for grandparents. Children and young people are the future; they are our strength; they are what keep us moving forward. They are the ones in whom we put our hope. Grandparents are a family’s memory. They are the ones who gave us the faith, they passed the faith on to us. Taking care of grandparents and taking care of children is the sign of love – I’m not sure if it is the greatest, but for the family I would say that it is the most promising – because it promises the future. A people incapable of caring for children and caring for the elderly is a people without a future, because it lacks the strength and the memory needed to move forward.”
 - In his first World Youth Day he has constantly spoken about caring for these two on the margins. During the time with the media on the plane from Rome to Rio, he spoke in introduction of the trip and brought up the elderly:
 - This first journey is about meeting the young people, but not in isolation from their lives – I would rather meet them within their social context, in society. Because when we isolate the young, we do them an injustice; we take away their “belonging”. The young do belong, they belong to a family, to a homeland, to a culture, to a faith. They belong in all sorts of ways, and we must not isolate them! But in particular, we must not isolate them from the whole of society! They really are the future of a people: it is true. But not only they: they are the future because they have the strength, they are young, they will go forward. But at the other end of life, the elderly, they too are the future of a people. A people has a future if it goes forward with both elements: with the young, who have the strength, and things move forward

because they do the carrying; and with the elderly because they are the ones who give life's wisdom. And I have often thought that we do the elderly an injustice, we set them aside as if they had nothing to offer us; they have wisdom, life's wisdom, history's wisdom, the homeland's wisdom, the family's wisdom. And we need all this! That is why I say that I am going to meet the young, but within their social context, principally with the elderly."

- (EIGHTH) The crisis of fatherhood
 - Cardinal Ratzinger:
 - In a March 15, 2000 speech at the Cathedral of Palermo, Sicily, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said, **"The crisis of fatherhood we are living today is an element, perhaps the most important, threatening man in his humanity."**
 - The crisis of the family, the crisis of society that comes from the building block of the family, the crisis of poverty, the crisis in the identity of men and women, the crisis of a lack of hope, the crises that lead to bellicosity and war, the crisis even in the Church — all of these, the future Pope Benedict implied, flow from the crisis of fatherhood, which he believed was the most important element threatening the human person.
 - The crisis of fatherhood not only has obvious ramifications at the level of women, children and social policy, but has enormous anthropological and spiritual consequences as well.
 - The future Pope said that the crisis comes from a true **"dissolution of fatherhood,"** flowing from reducing fatherhood to a merely biological phenomenon — as an act of generation, sometimes even carried out in a laboratory — without its human and spiritual dimensions. That reduction leads in turn to the **"dissolution of what it means to be a son or a daughter," but, on a spiritual plane, impedes our relationship to relate to God as he is and revealed himself.** God, Cardinal Ratzinger said, "willed to manifest and describe himself as Father." Human fatherhood provides us an analogy to understand the fatherhood of God, but "when human fatherhood has dissolved, all statements about God the Father are empty."
 - **The crisis of fatherhood, therefore, leaves the human person lost, confused about who God is, confused about who he is, confused about where he has come from and where he is going.** That's why Cardinal Ratzinger says the crisis of paternity is perhaps the most important element threatening man.
 - Pope Francis has likewise pondered this crisis and sketched out lines to respond to it.
 - 1.28.15: "Today, however, one has reached the point of claiming that our society is a "society without fathers". In other words, particularly in Western culture, the father figure would be symbolically absent, paled, removed. ... In our day, the problem no longer seems to be the invasive presence of the father so much as his absence, his inaction. Fathers are sometimes so concentrated on themselves and on their work and at times on their career that they even forget about the family. And they leave the little ones and the young ones to themselves. ... The absent father figure in the life of little ones and young people causes gaps and wounds that may even be very serious. And, in effect, delinquency among children and adolescents can be largely attributed to this lack, to the shortage of examples and authoritative guidance in their everyday life, a shortage of closeness, a shortage of love from the father. And the feeling of orphanhood that so many young people live with is more profound than we think. ... They are orphaned in the family, because their fathers are often absent, also physically, from the home, but above all because, when they are present, they do not behave like fathers. They do not converse with their children. They do not fulfill their role as educators. They do not set their children a good example with their words, principles, values, those rules of life which they need like bread. ... Sometimes it seems that fathers don't know what their role in the family is or how to raise their children. So, in doubt, they abstain, they retreat and neglect their responsibilities, perhaps taking refuge in the unlikely relationship as "equals" with their children."
 - 2.4.15: "Every family needs a father. ... The first need, then, is precisely this: that a father be present in the family. That he be close to his wife, to share everything, joy and sorrow, hope

and hardship. And that he be close to his children as they grow: when they play and when they strive, when they are carefree and when they are distressed, when they are talkative and when they are silent, when they are daring and when they are afraid, when they take a wrong step and when they find their path again; a father who is always present. To say “present” is not to say “controlling”! Fathers who are too controlling cancel out their children, they don't let them develop. ... A good father knows how to wait and knows how to forgive from the depths of his heart. Certainly, he also knows how to correct with firmness: he is not a weak father, submissive and sentimental. The father who knows how to correct without humiliating is the one who knows how to protect without sparing himself.”

- (NINTH) The necessity of caring for those who have entered into a new union
 - This is a pressing concern for Pope Francis. There are so many in this circumstance. They are one of the main classes of people to reach in the new evangelization, geared toward the bringing the baptized back to the life of the Gospel.
 - This has been the obsession of the media and of some Catholic leaders. We clearly have not done an adequate job in helping them to integrate within the life of the Church. Many feel judged more than loved and valued, and even though we can't ignore their situation or its potential spiritual and eschatological consequences, we can better include them in our parish family with the warmth we normally would treat them if they were in our personal family.
 - Pope Francis' own thoughts were expressed at length in August:
 - 8.5.15: The Church is fully aware that such a situation is contrary to the Christian Sacrament. ... [Careful discernment needs to be made concerning] the difference between one subjected to separation compared to one who has caused it. ... How can we encourage these parents to do everything possible to raise their children in the Christian life, to give them an example of committed and exercised faith, if we keep them at arm's length from the life of the community, as if they are excommunicated? ... It is necessary to have a fraternal and attentive welcome, in love and in truth, of the baptized who have established a new relationship of cohabitation after the failure of the marital sacrament; in fact, these persons are by no means excommunicated — they are not excommunicated! — and they should absolutely not be treated as such: they are still a part of the Church. ... Here the repeated call to Pastors to openly and consistently demonstrate the community's willingness to welcome them and encourage them, so they may increasingly live and develop their membership in Christ and in the Church through prayer, by listening to the Word of God, by attending the liturgy, through the Christian education of their children, through charity and service to the poor, through the commitment to justice and peace. ... “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open”.... No closed doors! No closed doors! “Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community”.... The Church “is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.”
- (TENTH) The mission of the family
 - RF 93. La famiglia dei battezzati è per sua natura missionaria e accresce la propria fede nell'atto di donarla agli altri, prima di tutto ai propri figli. Il fatto stesso di vivere la comunione familiare è la sua prima forma di annuncio. In effetti, l'evangelizzazione comincia dalla famiglia, nella quale non si trasmette soltanto la vita fisica, ma anche la vita spirituale. Il ruolo dei nonni nella trasmissione della fede e delle pratiche religiose non deve essere dimenticato: sono i testimoni del legame tra le generazioni, custodi di tradizioni di saggezza, preghiera e buon esempio. La famiglia si costituisce così come soggetto dell'azione pastorale attraverso l'annuncio esplicito del Vangelo e l'eredità di molteplici forme di testimonianza: la solidarietà verso i poveri, l'apertura alla diversità delle persone, la custodia del creato, la solidarietà morale e materiale verso le altre famiglie soprattutto verso le più bisognose, l'impegno per la promozione del bene comune anche mediante la trasformazione delle strutture sociali ingiuste, a partire dal territorio nel quale essa vive, praticando le opere di misericordia corporale e spirituale.
 - 4.29.15: “The most persuasive testimony of the blessing of Christian marriage is the good life of Christian spouses and of the family. There is no better way to speak of the beauty of the sacrament!

A marriage consecrated by God safeguards that bond between man and woman that God has blessed from the very creation of the world; and it is the source of peace and goodness for the entire lifetime of the marriage and family. For example, in the first ages of Christianity, this great dignity of the bond between man and woman overcame an abuse then held normal, namely the husbands' right to repudiate their wives, even for reasons based on pretext or to humiliate. The Gospel of the family, the Gospel which proclaims this very Sacrament overcame this culture of customary repudiation."

- Summary

- Perhaps the best way to summarize and synthesize Pope Francis' proclamation of the Gospel of the Family that he's asking the Church to echo would be to look at a footnote in his address at the Conclusion of the Synod, in which he gave an acrostic on the word family in Italian. This points to the pastoral challenge that faces us.
 - **Forming new generations** to experience love seriously, not as an individualistic search for a pleasure then to be discarded, and to believe once again in true, fruitful and lasting love as the sole way of emerging from ourselves and being open to others, leaving loneliness behind, living according to God's will, finding fulfilment, realizing that marriage is "an experience which reveals God's love, defending the sacredness of life, every life, defending the unity and indissolubility of the conjugal bond as a sign of God's grace and of the human person's ability to love seriously" and, furthermore, enhancing marriage preparation as a means of providing a deeper understanding of the Christian meaning of the sacrament of Matrimony;
 - **Approaching others**, since a Church closed in on herself is a dead Church, while a Church which does leave her own precincts behind in order to seek, embrace and lead others to Christ is a Church which betrays her very mission and calling;
 - **Manifesting and bringing God's mercy to families in need**; to the abandoned, to the neglected elderly, to children pained by the separation of their parents, to poor families struggling to survive, to sinners knocking on our doors and those who are far away, to the differently able, to all those hurting in soul and body, and to couples torn by grief, sickness, death or persecution;
 - **Illuminating consciences often assailed by harmful and subtle dynamics** that even attempt to replace God the Creator, dynamics which must be unmasked and resisted in full respect for the dignity of each person;
 - **Gaining and humbly rebuilding trust in the Church**, which has been gravely weakened as a result of the conduct and sins of her children – sadly, the counter-witness of scandals committed in the Church by some clerics have damaged her credibility and obscured the brightness of her saving message;
 - **Labouring intensely to sustain and encourage those many strong and faithful families** which, in the midst of their daily struggles, continue to give a great witness of fidelity to the Church's teachings and the Lord's commandments;
 - **Inventing renewed programs of pastoral care for the family** based on the Gospel and respectful of cultural differences, pastoral care which is capable of communicating the Good News in an attractive and positive manner and helping banish from young hearts the fear of making definitive commitments, pastoral care which is particularly attentive to children, who are the real victims of broken families, pastoral care which is innovative and provides a suitable preparation for the sacrament of Matrimony, rather than so many programs that seem more of a formality than training for a lifelong commitment;
 - **Aiming to love unconditionally all families, particularly those experiencing difficulties**, since no family should feel alone or excluded from the Church's loving embrace, and the real scandal is a fear of love and of showing that love concretely.