



# The Holy See

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. POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** *Saint Peter's Square*

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## **The family - 9. The children (II)**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,*

In this series of Catecheses on the family, today we are completing our reflection on children, who are the most beautiful gift and blessing that the Creator has given to man and woman. We have already spoken about the great gift that children are. Today sadly we must speak about the “passions” which many of them endure.

From the first moments of their lives, many children are rejected, abandoned, and robbed of their childhood and future. There are those who dare to say, as if to justify themselves, that it was a mistake to bring these children into the world. This is shameful! Let's not unload our faults onto the children, please! Children are never a “mistake”. Their hunger is not a mistake, nor is their poverty, their vulnerability, their abandonment — so many children abandoned on the streets — and neither is their ignorance or their helplessness... so many children don't even know what a school is. If anything, these should be reasons to love them all the more, with greater generosity. How can we make such solemn declarations on human rights and the rights of children, if we then punish children for the errors of adults?

Those who have the task of governing, of educating, but I would say all adults, we are responsible for children and for doing what we can to change this situation. I am referring to “the passion” of children. Every child who is marginalized, abandoned, who lives on the street begging with every kind of trick, without schooling, without medical care, is a cry that rises up to God and denounces the system that we adults have set in place. And unfortunately these children are prey to criminals who exploit them for shameful trafficking or commerce, or train them for war and violence. But even in so-called wealthy countries many children live in dramatic situations that scar them deeply because of crises in the family, educational gaps and at times inhuman living conditions. In every case, their childhood is violated in body and soul. But none of these children are forgotten by the Father who is in heaven! Not one of their tears is lost! Neither is our responsibility lost, the social responsibility of people, of each one of us, and of countries.

Once Jesus rebuked his disciples because they sent away the children whose parents brought them to Him to be blessed. It is a moving Gospel narrative: “Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people; but Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.’ And he laid his hands on them and went away” (Mt 19:13-15). How beautiful is this trust of the parents and Jesus’ response! How I would like this passage to become the norm for all children! It is true that by the grace of God children in grave difficulty are often given extraordinary parents, ready and willing to make every sacrifice. But these parents should not be left alone! We should accompany them in their toil, and also offer them moments of shared joy and lighthearted cheer, so that they are not left with only routine therapy.

When it comes to children, no matter what, there should be no utterance of those legal defense-like formulas: “after all, we are not a charity”, or, “in private, everyone is free to do as he or she wishes”, or even, “we’re sorry but we can’t do anything”. These words do not count when it comes to children.

Too often the effects of a life worn down by precarious and underpaid work, unsustainable hours, bad transport rebound on the children.... Children also pay the price for immature unions and irresponsible separations: they are the first victims; they suffer the outcome of a culture of exaggerated individual rights, and then the children become more precocious. They often absorb the violence they are not able to “ward off” and before the very eyes of adults are forced to grow accustomed to degradation.

Also in our age, as in the past, the Church sets her motherhood at the service of children and their families. To parents and children of this world of ours, she bears the blessing of God, motherly tenderness, a firm reproach and strong condemnation. Children are no laughing matter!

Think what a society would be like if it decided, once and for all, to establish this principle: “It’s true, we are not perfect and we make many mistakes. But when it comes to the children who come into the world, no sacrifice on the part of adults is too costly or too great, to ensure that no child believe he or she was a mistake, is worthless or is abandoned to a life of wounds and to the arrogance of men”. How beautiful a society like this would be! I say that for such a society, much could be forgiven, innumerable errors. Truly a great deal.

The Lord judges our life according to what the angels of children tell him, angels who “always behold the face of the Father who is in heaven” (cf. Mt 18:10). Let us always ask ourselves: what will the children’s guardian angels tell God about us?

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**Special greetings:**

I offer an affectionate greeting to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, including those from England, Ireland, Sweden, Nigeria, Japan, Thailand, Canada and the United States. May the Risen Lord confirm you in faith and make you witnesses of his love and mercy to all people. May God bless you!

I send out a special thought to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. May the Easter message continue to make the hearts in our chests burn, like the disciples at Emmaus: dear *young people*, only the Lord Jesus can respond completely to your hopes for happiness and for the good of your life; dear *sick people*, there is no more beautiful consolation to your suffering than the certainty of Christ's Resurrection; and you, dear *newlyweds*, live out your marriage in concrete adhesion to Christ and to the teachings of the Gospel.