



# The Holy See

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

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## The family - 26. Community

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today I would like to focus our attention on *the connection between the family and the Christian community*. This bond is natural, so to speak, because the Church is a spiritual family and the family is the domestic Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 9).

The Christian community is the home of those who believe in Jesus as the font of brotherhood among all human beings. The Church journeys among her people, in the history of men and women, of fathers and mothers, of sons and daughters: this is the history that matters to the Lord. The great events of worldly powers are written in history books, and there they will remain. But the history of human feelings is written directly in the heart of God; and that is the history that will endure for eternity. This is where life and faith are located. The family is the place of our irreplaceable and indelible initiation into this history... into this history of life in its fullness, which will culminate in heaven with the contemplation of God for all eternity, but which begins in the family! And that is why the family is so important.

The Son of God learned the human story in this way, and he walked in it to the very end (cf. Heb 2:18; 5:8). It is beautiful to contemplate Jesus and the signs of this bond! He was born into a family and there "he learned about the world": one shop, four homes or so, a tiny village. Yet, living for 30 years there, Jesus absorbed the human condition, welcoming it in his communion with the Father and in his apostolic mission. Then, when he left Nazareth and began his public ministry, Jesus formed around him a community, an "*assembly*", that is, a con-vocation of people. This is the meaning of the word "church".

In the Gospels, the assembly of Jesus takes the form of a family and of a *hospitable family*, not an exclusive, closed sect: there we find Peter and John, but also the hungry and the thirsty, the stranger and the persecuted, the sinner and the tax collector, the pharisee and the multitude. And Jesus never stops accepting and speaking to everyone, even those who no longer expect to

encounter God in this life. That is an important lesson for the Church! The disciples were chosen to care for this assembly, for this family of God's guests.

In order to maintain this reality of the assembly of Jesus in today's situation, it is indispensable to renew the covenant between the family and the Christian community. We could say that *the family and the parish* are the two places where the communion of love, which finds its ultimate source in God, takes place. A Church truly according to the Gospel cannot but take the form of a *hospitable home*, with its doors open, always. Churches, parishes, institutions with closed doors must never be called churches, they should be called museums!

And today, this covenant is crucial. "Against the ideological, financial and political 'centres of power', we place our hopes in these centres of evangelizing love, rich in human warmth, based on solidarity and participation" (Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Teachings of J.M. Bergoglio-Pope Francis on the Family and Life 1999-2014*, LEV 2014, 189), and also on forgiveness among us.

Strengthening the bond between the family and the Christian community today is indispensable and urgent. Certainly, there is need for generous faith in order to rediscover the understanding and courage to renew this covenant. Families at times draw back, saying that they cannot live up to this: "Father, we are a poor family and even a little worse for the wear", "We aren't able", "We already have so many problems at home", "We don't have the strength". This is true. But no one is worthy, no one is able to live up to it, no one has the strength! Without the grace of God, we can do nothing. Everything is given to us, given freely! And the Lord never comes into a new family without working some miracle. Let us remember what he did at the wedding of Cana! Yes, if we place ourselves in his hands, the Lord will work miracles for us — but they are miracles of every day life! — when the Lord is there, present in the family.

Naturally, the Christian community must also do its part. For example, overcoming attitudes that give too much advice or are too managerial, in order to foster interpersonal dialogue and awareness and mutual esteem. May families take the initiative and feel the responsibility for bringing their precious gifts to the community. We must all be aware that the Christian faith is played on an open field of life shared with all. The family and the parish must work the miracle of a more communal life for the whole of society.

At Cana, there was the Mother of Jesus, the "mother of good counsel". Let us listen to her words: "Do whatever he tells you" (cf. Jn 2:5). Dear families, dear parish communities, let us allow ourselves to be inspired by this Mother, let us do whatever Jesus tells us and we will find the source of all miracles, of every day miracles! Thank you!

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**Special greetings:**

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, including those from England, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, South Africa, China, the Philippines, Singapore and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke an abundance of joy and peace in the Lord Jesus. God bless you all!

I address a special thought to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. Today we are celebrating the liturgical memory of the Jesuit St Peter Claver, Patron of missions in Africa. Dear *young people*, may his inexhaustible service to the least spur you to choices of solidarity towards the neediest; may his spiritual vigour help you, dear *sick people*, to face your cross with courage; may his love for Christ be a model for you, dear *newlyweds*, that love may be the centre of your new family.