



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 7 January 2015*

[Multimedia]

The family - 2. The mother

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning. Today we continue with catecheses on the Church and we will reflect on Mother Church. The Church is mother. Our Holy Mother Church.

In these days the Church's liturgy sets before our eyes the icon of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. The first day of the year is the Feast of the Mother of God, followed by the Epiphany, commemorating the visit of the Magi. The Evangelist Matthew writes: "going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him" (Mt 2:11). It is the Mother who, after giving birth to him, presents the Son to the world. She gives us Jesus, she shows us Jesus, she lets us see Jesus.

Let us continue with the catecheses on the family, and in the family there is *the mother*. Every human person owes his or her life to a mother, and almost always owes much of what follows in life, both human and spiritual formation, to her. Yet, despite being highly lauded from a symbolic point of view — many poems, many beautiful things said poetically of her — the mother is rarely listened to or helped in daily life, rarely considered central to society in her role. Rather, often the readiness of mothers to make sacrifices for their children is taken advantage of so as to "save" on social spending.

It also happens that in Christian communities the mother is not always held in the right regard, she is barely heard. Yet the centre of the life of the Church is the Mother of Jesus. Perhaps mothers, ready to sacrifice so much for their children and often for others as well, ought to be listened to more. We should understand more about their daily struggle to be efficient at work and attentive

and affectionate in the family; we should better grasp what they aspire to in order to express the best and most authentic fruits of their emancipation. A mother with her children always has problems, always work. I remember there were five of us children at home, and while one was doing one thing, the other wanted to do another, and our poor mama went back and forth from one's side to another, but she was happy. She gave us so much.

Mothers are the strongest antidote to the spread of self-centred individualism. "Individual" means "what cannot be divided". Mothers, instead, "divide" themselves, from the moment they bear a child to give him to the world and help him grow. It is they, mothers, who most hate war, which kills their children. Many times I have thought of those mothers who receive the letter: "I inform you that your son has fallen in defense of his homeland...". The poor women! How a mother suffers! It is they who testify to the beauty of life. Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero said that mothers experience a "maternal martyrdom". In the homily for the funeral of a priest assassinated by death squads, he said, recalling the Second Vatican Council: "We must be ready to die for our faith, even if the Lord does not grant us this honour.... Giving one's life does not only mean being killed; giving one's life, having the spirit of a martyr, it is in giving in duty, in silence, in prayer, in honest fulfilment of his duty; in that silence of daily life; giving one's life little by little. Yes, like it is given by a mother, who without fear and with the simplicity of the maternal martyrdom, conceives a child in her womb, gives birth to him, nurses him, helps them grow and cares for them with affection. She gives her life. That's martyrdom". End quote. Yes, being a mother doesn't only mean bringing a child to the world, but it is also a life choice. What does a mother choose, what is the life choice of a mother? The life choice of a mother is the choice to give life. And this is great, this is beautiful.

A society without mothers would be a dehumanized society, for mothers are always, even in the worst moments, witnesses of tenderness, dedication and moral strength. Mothers often pass on the deepest sense of religious practice: in a human being's life, the value of faith is inscribed in the first prayers, the first acts of devotion that a child learns. It is a message that believing mothers are able to pass on without much explanation: these come later, but the seed of faith is those early precious moments. Without mothers, not only would there be no new faithful, but the faith would lose a good part of its simple and profound warmth. And the Church is mother, with all of this, she is our mother! We are not orphans, we have a mother! Our Lady, mother Church, is our mom. We are not orphans, we are children of the Church, we are children of Our Lady, and we are children of our mothers.

Dearest mothers, thank you, thank you for what you are in your family and for what you give to the Church and the world. And to you, beloved Church, thank you, thank you for being mother. And to you, Mary, Mother of God, thank you for letting us see Jesus. And thank you for all the mammas present here: let us salute them with a round of applause!

Greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, including the various groups from Ireland, Finland, Indonesia, Australia and the United States of America. In the joy of this Christmas season, I invoke upon you and your families grace and peace in the Lord Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, our Mother. God bless you all!

Dear faithful, in this Christmas season, looking to Mary, Mother of God, I would like to address all mothers. Dearest moms, thank you, thank you for what you are in the family and for what you give to the Church and the world. May the blessing of God be with you always. Praised be Jesus Christ.

First of all, I would like to thank the people from the circus who have come here. Here's a thought: "Let's go to the circus, we'll have a little fun...". Yes, that's true, the circus is a spectacle and we have a good time there. We also see men and women perform unusual feats, who have great balance: yes, this is true, we've seen it. There they are, let's all greet them! But they also teach us something more. People who perform in the circus create beauty, they are creators of beauty. And this is good for the soul. How much we need beauty! It's true, our life is very practical, we make things, we keep working, it has to be done: making, the language of hands, making. But our life is also thinking, reasoning. And this is important because we are animals who think; we don't think like animals! We are animals who think. Thinking, the language of the mind, is important. We are also people who love, who have the capacity to love: the language of the heart. There is the language of the mind, thinking; the language of the heart, loving; the language of hands, making. And these three languages all join together to create the harmony of the person. And that's where beauty is; and these people who performed this spectacle today are creators of harmony, creators of beauty, who teach the best way to beauty. God is certainly truth, God is certainly good, God certainly knows how to make things, he created the world. But above all, God is beautiful! The beauty of God. So often we forget about beauty! Mankind thinks, feels, makes, but is in such need today of beauty. Let's not forget this and thank these people: skilled performers, skilled at balance, skilled showpeople, but most of all skilled at creating beauty. Thank you all so much.

I extend cordial wishes of hope and peace for the new year to all Italian-speaking pilgrims present at this first General Audience of 2015. I greet the Merciful Sisters and the Ursuline Sisters of the Holy Family, here for their respective General Chapters, and I exhort them to pass down, through the witness of their life, the joy of faithful correspondence to the divine call. I greet you, members of Liana Orfei's Golden Circus; and I encourage you to be not only bringers of smiles and messengers of solidarity among peoples and nations, but most of all creators of beauty, we need it!

I address a special thought to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. I call the *newlyweds* courageous because today it takes courage to get married! They are good. After the Solemnity of the Epiphany, let us, too, continue to look to the star that the Magi followed. Dear *young people*, may you be enthusiastic witnesses to the light of Christ for your peers; dear *sick people*, may you

draw courage from this light in your pain; and you, dear *newlyweds*, may you be signs of the luminous presence of God with your faithful love.