



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE *Saint Peter's Square*

Wednesday, 22 April 2015 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

The family - 11. Male and female (II)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the [preceding catechesis](#) on the family, I meditated on the first narrative of the creation of the human being, in the first chapter of Genesis, where it is written: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (1:27).

Today, I would like to complete the reflection with the second narrative, which we find in the second chapter. Here we read that the Lord, after having created heaven and earth, “formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (2:7). This is the culmination of creation. But something is missing: then God places man in the most beautiful garden that he might cultivate and look after it (cf. 2:15).

The Holy Spirit, who inspired the whole of the Bible, momentarily evokes the image of man alone — something is missing — without woman. And the Holy Spirit evokes God’s thoughts, even His emotion, as He gazes at Adam, observing him alone in the garden. He is free, he is a lord... but he is alone. And God sees that this “is not good”: as if what is missing is communion, he lacks communion, the fullness is lacking. “It is not good”, God says, and adds: “I will make him a helper fit for him” (2:18).

And so God brings all the animals to man; man gives to each its name — and this is another image of man’s dominion over creation — but he sees that not one of the animals is like himself. Man continues alone. When finally God presents woman, man exultantly recognizes that this creature, and this creature alone, is a part of him: “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (2:23). Finally, there is a reflection, a reciprocity. When a person — to give an example to help us understand — wants to shake hands with another, he must have that person before him: if he holds out his hand and no one is there... his hand remains outstretched, there is no reciprocity.

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. He also suggests another point: in order to find woman — and we could say to find love in woman — man first must dream of her and then find her. God’s faith in man and in woman, those to whom he entrusted the earth, is generous, direct and full. He trusts them. But then the devil introduces suspicion into their minds, disbelief, distrust, and finally, disobedience to the commandment that protected them. They fall into that delirium of omnipotence that pollutes everything and destroys harmony. We too feel it inside of us, all of us, frequently.

Sin generates distrust and division between man and woman. Their relationship will be undermined by a thousand forms of abuse and subjugation, misleading seduction and humiliating ignorance, even the most dramatic and violent kind. And history bears the scar. Let us think, for example, of those negative excesses of patriarchal cultures. Think of the many forms of male dominance whereby the woman was considered second class. Think of the exploitation and the commercialization of the female body in the current media culture. And let us also think of the recent epidemic of distrust, skepticism, and even hostility that is spreading in our culture — in particular an understandable distrust from women — on the part of a covenant between man and woman that is capable, at the same time, of refining the intimacy of communion and of guarding the dignity of difference.

If we do not find a surge of respect for this covenant, capable of protecting new generations from distrust and indifference, children will come into the world ever more uprooted from the mother’s womb. The social devaluation for the stable and generative alliance between man and woman is certainly a loss for everyone. We must return marriage and the family to the place of honour! The Bible says something beautiful: man finds woman, they meet and man must leave something in order to find her fully. That is why man will leave his father and mother to go to her. It’s beautiful! This means setting out on a new path. Man is everything for woman and woman is everything for man.

The responsibility of guarding this covenant between man and woman is ours, although we are sinners and are wounded, confused and humiliated, discouraged and uncertain; it is nevertheless for us believers a demanding and gripping vocation in today’s situation. The same narrative of creation and of sin ends by showing us an extremely beautiful icon: “The Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (Gen 3:21). It is an image of tenderness towards the sinful couple that leaves our mouths agape: the tenderness God has for man and woman! It’s an image of fatherly care for the human couple. God himself cares for and protects his masterpiece.

Special greetings:

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

I address a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims. I am pleased to welcome the young sisters gathered for the formative conference at the USMI, [Italian Union of Superiors Major] the religious of the Most Holy Sacrament and the seminarians from various Italian dioceses: I hope you are able to bear joyful witness of the vocation received, knowing that missionary commitment does not depend on our efforts alone, but above all on the grace that the Lord extends with both hands.

Today Earth Day is being celebrated. I urge all to look at the world through the eyes of the Creator: the Earth is an environment to protect and a garden to cultivate. May the relationship between man and nature not be driven by greed, to manipulate and exploit, but may the divine harmony between beings and creation be conserved in the logic of respect and care, so as to be placed at the service of brothers and sisters, of future generations as well.

I offer a special thought to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. May you learn from the Virgin Mary to live this Easter Season allowing space for listening to the Word of God and the practice of charity, experiencing with joy belonging to the Church, the family of disciples of the Risen Christ.