



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS AT THE OPENING OF THE PASTORAL CONGRESS OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME

*Basilica of Saint John Lateran
Thursday, 16 June 2016*

[Multimedia]

Good evening!

The five naves are full! Good! One can see you are ready to work.

“*The joy of love: the journey of the families of Rome*” is the theme of your Diocesan Conference. I shall not begin by speaking of the Exhortation, since you will make it a topic of study in the various working groups. I should like to review along with you a few ideas/key-tensions that emerged during the course of the Synod, which can help us to better understand the spirit that is reflected in the Exhortation. It is a Document that can direct your reflections and your dialogue, and thus offer “help and encouragement to families in their daily commitments and challenges” (Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 4). I should like to present several ideas/key-tensions with three biblical images that allow us to make contact with the Spirit who passed through in the discernment of the Synod Fathers. Three Bible images.

1. “*Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground*” (Ex 3:5). This was God’s invitation to Moses before the burning bush. The land to be crossed, the themes to be addressed in the Synod, needed a certain attitude. It was not a matter of analyzing just any topic; we were not facing just any situation. We had before us the real faces of many families. I knew that, in some of the working groups, during the Synod, the Synod Fathers spoke of their own family reality. This giving a face to the themes — so to speak — required, and requires, a climate of respect that helps us to listen to what God is telling us within our situations. Not a diplomatic or politically correct respect, but a respect laden with concern and honest questions for the authentic care of those whom we are called to tend. How it helps to give a face to the topics! And how it helps to notice that behind the paper there is a face, how it helps! It frees us from rushing to reach conclusions that are well formulated but often lack life; it frees us from speaking

in the abstract, in order to enable us to draw near and deal with real people. It protects us from ideologizing the faith through systems that are well designed but overlook Grace. So often we become Pelagians! One can do this only in a climate of faith. It is faith that impels us not to grow weary of seeking God's presence in the changes of history.

Each of us has had a family experience. In some cases Grace is rendered more easily than in others, but everyone has lived this experience. In that context, God has come to meet us. His Word has come to us not in a series of abstract theories, but as a travelling companion that has supported us amid suffering, has enlivened us in celebration and has always indicated to us the aim of the journey (*AL*, n. 22). This reminds us that our families, the families in our parishes with their faces, their stories, with all their complications are not a problem, they are an opportunity that God places before us. An opportunity that challenges us to generate a missionary creativity capable of embracing every practical situation, in our case, of Rome's families. Not only those that come or that are in the parishes — this would be easy, more or less —, but being able to go to the families of our districts, to those who do not come. This encounter challenges us not to consider anything or anyone lost, but to seek, to renew the hope of knowing that God continues to act within our families. It challenges us not to abandon anyone for not being up to what is asked of him or her. This compels us to go beyond the declaration of principles so as to enter into the beating heart of Rome's neighbourhoods and, as artisans, setting ourselves to mould God's dream in this reality, something that can be done only by people of faith, those who do not close access to the action of the Spirit, and who get their hands dirty. Reflecting on the life our families, as they are and as they are found, asks that we take off our shoes in order to discover God's presence. This is the first Bible image. Go: there is God, there. God who enlivens, God who lives, God who was crucified..., but he is God.

2. Now for the second biblical image. That of the Pharisee, when praying, he said to the Lord: "*God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector*" (Lk 18:11). One of the temptations (cf. *AL*, n. 229) to which we are continually exposed is that of fostering a separatist logic. It is interesting. To protect ourselves, we think that we strengthen our identity and security each time that we distinguish or isolate ourselves from others, especially from those who are living with a different background. But identity does not depend on separation: identity is strengthened in belonging. My belonging to the Lord: this gives me identity. Not distancing myself from others because I think they do not "count".

I think we must take an important step: we cannot analyze, reflect on, much less pray about reality as if we were on different shores or paths, as if we were outside of history. We all need to repent, we all need to place ourselves before the Lord and each time renew the covenant with Him and together say to the tax collector: My God, have mercy on me because I am a sinner! With this point of departure, we stay on the same "side" — not separated, included in the same side — and we place ourselves before the Lord in a contrite attitude of listening.

Rightly, to look at our families with the sensitivity with which God looks at them helps us to direct our consciences in the same way as his. The emphasis placed on mercy places reality before us in a realistic way, not, however, with just any realism, but with the realism of God. The analyses we make are important, they are necessary and help us to have a healthy realism. But nothing can compare to Gospel realism, which does not stop at describing the various situations, the problems — much less the sins — but which always goes a step further and is able to see an opportunity, a possibility behind every face, every story, every situation. Gospel realism is total concern for the other, for others, and does not create an obstacle out of the ideal and the “ought to be”, in order to encounter others in whatever situation they may be. It is not a matter of proposing the Gospel ideal, no, it is not about this. On the contrary, it invites us to live it within history, with all that it entails. This does not mean not being clear about doctrine, but avoids falling into judgmental attitudes that do not consider the complexity of life. Gospel realism is practical because it knows that “grain and weeds” grow together, and the best grain — in this life — will always be mixed with a few weeds. “I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion”, I understand them. “But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church that is attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness: a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, “always does what good she can, even if she runs the risk of sullyng her shoes with the mud of the road”. A Church able “to treat the weak with compassion, avoiding aggravation or unduly harsh or hasty judgements. The Gospel too tells us not to judge or condemn (cf. Mt 7:1; Lk 6:37)” (AL, n. 308). And here I add a parenthesis. I came across — I expect you know it — the image of that capital in the Basilica of St Mary Magdalene in Vézelay, in the South of France, where the Camino de Santiago starts: on one side is Judas, hanged, with his tongue sticking out, and on the other side of the capital is Jesus the Good Shepherd who carries [Judas] on His shoulders, who takes him with Him. This is indeed a mystery. But these mediaeval people, who taught the catechesis with figures, understood the mystery of Judas. And Fr Primo Mazzolari gave a fine discourse, one Holy Thursday, on this, a beautiful discourse. He is a priest, not from this diocese, but from Italy. An Italian priest who really understood the complexity of the logic of the Gospel. And Jesus is the one who got his hands really dirty. Jesus got the most dirty. He was not a “fastidious” man, but he went to the people, among the people, and accepted the people as they were, not as they should have been. Let us return to the Bible image: “I thank you, Lord, that I belong to Catholic Action, or to this association, or to *Caritas*, or to this one or to that one..., and that I am not like those who live in the neighbourhoods and are thieves and delinquents and...”. This does not help the ministry!

3. The third biblical image: *The old men shall have prophetic dreams* (cf. Joel 2:28). This was a prophecy that Joel made for the time of the Spirit. The old men shall have dreams and the young men shall see visions. With this third image I should like to underscore the importance that the Synod Fathers gave to the value of witness as the place in which one can find the dream of God and the life of men. In this prophecy we contemplate a binding reality: in the dreams of our elders often lies the possibility that our young people may have new visions, may once again have a future — I am thinking of the young people of Rome, of the outskirts of Rome —, that they may

have a tomorrow, they may have hope. But if 40 percent of young people aged 25 and under do not have work, what hope can they have? Here in Rome. How can they find the way? They are two realities — the old and the young — that go together and that need one another and are bound together. It is beautiful to find spouses, couples, who in old age continue to seek each other, who look at each other, who look at each other, who continue to love the one of their choice. It is really beautiful to find “grandparents” who show on their faces, wrinkled by time, the joy that is born from having made a choice of love and for love. Many couples celebrating 50, 60 years of marriage come to Santa Marta, and also to the Wednesday Audiences, and I always embrace them and thank them for their witness, and I ask: “Which of you has had the most patience?”. They always say: “Both!”. At times, jokingly, one says: “I have!”, but then adds “No, no, it’s a joke”. Once there was such a beautiful response. I think that everyone thought so. There was a couple who had been married for 60 years who managed to express it: “We are still in love!”. How beautiful! Grandparents who bear witness. I always say: show that to the young people, who tire quickly, who after two or three years say: “I’m going back to Mamma”. Grandparents!

As a society, we have deprived our elderly of their voice — this is a current social sin! —, we have deprived them of their space; we have deprived them of the opportunity to recount to us their life, their stories, their experience. We have put them aside and thus we have lost the wealth of their wisdom. Discarding them, we discard the opportunity to make contact with the secret that has enabled them to go forward. We have deprived ourselves of the witness of spouses who have not only persevered in time, but who have preserved in their hearts the gratitude for all that they have experienced (cf. *AL*, n. 38).

This absence of examples, of witnesses, this lack of grandparents, of fathers able to tell their dreams, does not allow the younger generations to “see visions”. And they are at a standstill. It does not allow them to make plans, since the future creates insecurity, doubt, fear. Only the witness of our parents, seeing that it has been possible to fight for something that was worthwhile, will help them to lift their gaze. How can we expect young people to take up the challenge of family, of marriage as a gift, if they continually hear us say that it is a burden? If we want “visions”, let our grandparents share and tell us their dreams, so that we can have the prophecies for the future.

Here I would like to pause for a moment. This is the time to encourage grandparents to dream. We need the dreams of grandparents, and to listen to these dreams. Salvation springs from here. It was by no coincidence that when the Child Jesus was brought to the Temple he was welcomed by two “grandparents”, who recounted their dreams: that elderly man [Simeon] had “dreamed”, the Spirit had promised him that he would see the Lord. This is the time — and it is not a metaphor — this is the time in which grandparents must dream. It is important to encourage them to dream, to tell us something. They feel they are discarded, if not scorned. In pastoral programmes, we like to say: “This is the time for courage”, “this is the time of the laity”, “this is the time...”. But were I to say, this is the time of grandparents! “But Father, you are going backwards, you are pre-conciliar!”.

It is the time of grandparents: may the grandparents dream, and the young will learn to prophesy, and to bring about with their own strength, with their imagination, with their work, the dreams of their grandparents. This is the time of grandparents. And on this I should really like you to pause in your reflections, I should be really pleased.

Three images, for reading *Amoris Laetitia*:

1. The life of each person, the life of each family must be treated with much respect and much care. Especially when we reflect on these matters.
2. Let us take care not to set up a ghetto-like ministry.
3. Let us make room for the elderly so that they may dream once more.

Three images which remind us that “faith does not remove us from the world, but draws us more deeply into it” (AL, n. 181). Not like the perfect and immaculate people who believe they know everything, but as people who know the love that God has for us (cf. 1 Jn 4:16). And with this trust, with this certainty, with much humility and respect, we want to draw closer to all our brothers and sisters so as to experience the joy of love in the family. With this trust we give up the ‘enclosures’ that “shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune, and instead to enter into the reality of other people’s lives and to know the power of tenderness” (AL, n. 308).

This impels us to develop a family ministry designed to *welcome, accompany, discern* and *integrate*. A ministry that allows and makes possible the appropriate framework so that the life entrusted to us may find the support it needs in order to develop according to the dream — allow me to diminish — according to the dream of the “eldest”: according to the dream of God. Thank you.

After his address, Pope Francis answered three questions which emerged during the preparations for the conference and were posed by a priest and two catechists:

In the Exhortation ‘Evangelii Gaudium’, you say that the big problem today is “complacent yet covetous individualism”, and in ‘Amoris Laetitia’ you say that there is a need to create relationships among families. You use an expression that in Italian, has a rather bad ring to it: “the wider family”. A revolution of tenderness is needed. We too experience the virus of individualism in our communities. We need help to create this network of relations among families, capable of breaking closures and of finding our bearings.

It is true that *individualism* is like the axis of this culture. And this individualism has many names, so many names rooted in selfishness: always searching for oneself, not looking at others, not looking at other families.... Sometimes it reaches the point of true pastoral cruelty. For example, I

am speaking of an experience that I learned about when I was in Buenos Aires: in a nearby diocese, several priests did not want to baptize the children of teen mothers. As if they were animals! And this is individualism. “No, we are perfect, this is the way”. It is an individualism that also seeks pleasure, it is hedonistic. I would say a word that is a bit harsh, but I say it between quotation marks: that “cursed wellbeing” that has done us a great deal of harm. Wellbeing. Today Italy has a terribly low birth rate: it is, I believe, below zero. This began with the culture of wellbeing, several decades ago.... I have met many families who would rather — please, don’t blame me, animal lovers, because I do not want to offend anyone — they would rather have two or three cats, a dog, instead of a child. Because having a child is not easy, and then, raising him or her.... But what becomes more of a challenge with a child is that you create a person who will become free. The dog, the cat, will give you affection, but a “programmed” affection, up to a certain point, not free. You have one, two, three, four children, and they will be free, and will have to go through life with life’s risks. This is the challenge that is frightening: freedom. Let us return to individualism: I think that we are afraid of freedom. Even in ministry: “What will be said if I do this?... Is it possible?...” And we are afraid. You are afraid: take a risk! In the moment that you are there, and you must decide, take a risk! If you make a mistake, there is the confessor, there is the bishop, but take a risk! It is like that Pharisee: the ministry of clean hands, everything clean, everything in its place, all fine. But outside of this environment, how much misery, how much pain, how much poverty, how much opportunity for development is lacking! It is a hedonistic individualism, it is an individualism that is afraid of freedom. It is an individualism — I don’t know if Italian grammar allows it — I would say “confining”. It cages you in, it does not allow you to fly free. Then, yes, the *wider family*. It is true, it is a word that does not always have a good ring, but according to cultures; I wrote the Exhortation in Spanish.... I have met, for example, families....

Just the other day, one or two weeks ago, a country’s ambassador came to present his letters of credence. There was the ambassador, the family and the woman who has done their housekeeping for many years: this is a wider family. This woman was part of the family: a single woman, and not only did they pay her well, they paid her legitimately, but when they had to go to the Pope to present credentials: “you come with us, because you are part of the family”. This is one example. This is giving a place to people. And among simple people, with the simplicity of the Gospel, that good simplicity, there are examples like this, of widening the family....

Then, the other key word that you said, beyond individualism, beyond the fear of freedom, beyond the attachment to pleasure, you said another word: *tenderness*. Once, in the Synod, this came out: “We have to make a revolution of tenderness”. Some Fathers — years ago — said: “But one cannot say this, it does not have a good ring to it”. But today we can say it: tenderness is missing, tenderness is lacking. To caress not only children, the sick, to caress everything, sinners.... There are good examples of tenderness.... Tenderness is a language that applies for the smallest, for those who have nothing: a child knows his father and mother through caresses, then the voice, but it is always tenderness. I enjoy hearing when the father or mother speaks baby talk to a child who is beginning to speak, even the father and mother pretend to be children....

[He makes a sound]

This is how they speak.... Everyone has seen it, it's true. This is tenderness. It is lowering myself to another person's level. It is the path that Jesus took. Jesus did not retain the privilege of being God: he emptied himself (cf. Phil 2:6-7). He spoke our language, he spoke with our gestures. The way of Jesus is the way of tenderness. Here: hedonism, the fear of freedom, this is precisely contemporary individualism. We have to go out through the way of tenderness, of listening, of supporting, without asking.... Yes, with this language, with this attitude, families grow: there is the small family, then the large family of friends or of those who come.... I do not know if I have answered, but I think so, this is what came to me.

We know that as Christian communities we do not want to renounce the radical demands of the Gospel of the family. How do we prevent a double morality from arising in our communities, one demanding and one permissive, one rigorist and one lax?

Both are not truth: neither rigorism nor laxity are truth. The Gospel chooses another way. For this, those four words — welcome, support, integrate, discern — without nosing into people's moral lives. For your tranquility, I must tell you that all that is written in the Exhortation — and I again take up the words of a great theologian who was the secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Schönborn, who presented it — everything is Thomist, from beginning to end. It is the doctrine that is certain. But we often want the certain doctrine to have that mathematical certainty that does not exist, neither with laxity, lenience, nor with rigidity. Let us think of Jesus: the history is the same, it repeats. When Jesus spoke to the people, the people said: "He speaks not as our doctors of the law, but as one who has authority" (cf. Mk 1:22). Those doctors knew the law, and for each case they had a specific law, reaching about 600 precepts in the end. Everything was regulated, everything. The Lord — God's anger is seen in Chapter 23 of Matthew, that Chapter is terrible — above all it made an impression on me when he speaks of the fourth Commandment and says: "You, who rather than give food to your elderly parents, tell them: 'No, I made this promise, better the altar than you', you are in contradiction" (cf. Mk 7:10-13).

Jesus was like that, and he was condemned out of hatred, they always set pitfalls before him: "Can this be done or not?". Let us consider the scene of the adulterous woman (cf. Jn 8:1-11). It is written: she must be stoned. It is the moral code. It is clear. Not rigid, this is not rigid, it is a clear moral code. She must be stoned. Why? For the sanctity of marriage, fidelity. Jesus is clear about this. The word is adultery. It is clear. And Jesus plays dumb, he lets some time pass, writes on the ground.... And then he says: "Begin: Let the first of you who is without sin throw the first stone". Jesus sidestepped the law in that case. They went away, beginning with the eldest. "Woman, has no one condemned you? Neither do I". What is the moral code? It was to stone her. But Jesus sidestepped, he sidestepped the moral code. This makes us think that one cannot speak of "rigidity", of "certainty", of being mathematical in morality, like the morality of the Gospel.

Then, let us continue with the women: when that woman or maiden [the Samaritan (cf. Jn 4:1-27)], I do not know what she was, begins to give something of a “catechesis” and says: “Should we worship God on this mountain or on that one?”.... Jesus said to her: “And your husband?...”. — “I have none” — “You have spoken the truth”. Indeed, she won recognition, much “distinction”, as an adulteress.... Yet she was, before being forgiven, she was the “apostle” of Samaria. So what must we do? Let us go to the Gospel, let us go to Jesus! This does not mean throwing out the baby with the bath water, no, no. This means seeking the truth; and that morality is an act of love, always: loving God, loving neighbour. It is also an act that leaves room for the conversion of the other, it does not condemn immediately, it leaves room.

Once — there are so many priests here, excuse me — my predecessor, no, another, Cardinal Aramburu, who died after my predecessor, when I was appointed archbishop, he gave me some advice: “When you see that a priest is wavering somewhat, sliding, call him and tell him: ‘Let’s talk a bit, they told me that you are in this situation, almost a double life, I don’t know...’; and you will see that that priest will begin to talk: ‘No, it isn’t true, no...’; you interrupt him and tell him: ‘Listen to me: go home, think about it, and come back within 15 days, and we’ll talk about it again’; and in those 15 days, that priest’ — so he told me — ‘will have had time to think, to rethink before Jesus and will return: ‘Yes, it’s true. Help me!’”. It always takes time. “But Father, that priest lived, and celebrated Mass, in mortal sin in those 15 days, so says morality, and what do you say?”. What is better? What was better? That the bishop had the generosity to give him 15 days to think it over, with the risk of celebrating Mass in mortal sin, is this better or the other thing, the rigid moral code? In regard to rigid morality, I will tell you a fact which I have witnessed myself. When we were in theology, the exam for hearing Confessions — “*ad audiendas*”, it was called — was in the third year, but we, those in the second year, had permission to go and observe in order to prepare ourselves; and one time, a classmate of ours, was given a case, of a person who went to confess, but a case so intricate, regarding the seventh commandment, “*de justitia et jure*”; but it was really such an otherworldly case...; and this classmate, who was an average person, told the professor: “But Father, you don’t find this in real life” — “Yes, but it is there in the books!”. I have seen this myself.

Wherever we go, today we hear talk of a marriage crisis. And so I wanted to ask you: What can we focus on today in order to educate young people about love, in particular way about sacramental marriage, to overcome their resistance, skepticism, disillusion, the fear of the definitive?

I’ll take the last word from you: we are also experiencing a culture of the provisional. I heard a bishop say, several months ago, that a young man, who had finished his university studies, a fine young man, introduced himself to the bishop and told him: “I want to become a priest, but for 10 years”. It is the culture of the provisional. This happens everywhere, even in priestly life, in religious life. The provisional. This is why a part of our sacramental marriages are null, because they [the spouses] say: “Yes, for a lifetime”, but they do not know what they are saying, because they have another culture. They say it, and they mean well, but they do not have the awareness. A

woman in Buenos Aires once scolded me: “You priests are clever, because to become priests you study for eight years, and then, if things do not go well and the priest finds a young woman that he likes.... in the end you give him permission to get married and have a family. And we lay people, who have to make an indissoluble lifelong sacrament, they make us have four conferences, and this for a lifetime!”. To me, one of the problems is this: the preparation for marriage.

Then the issue is closely connected to social fact. I remember, I called — here in Italy, last year — I called a young man whom I met some time ago in Ciampino, and he was getting married. I called him and I asked him: “Your mother told me that you are getting married next month.... Where will it be?...” — “We don’t know, because we are looking for a Church that is appropriate for my girlfriend’s dress.... Then we have so many things to do: the wedding favours, and then find a restaurant that isn’t too far away...”. These are the concerns! A social fact. How can we change this? I do not know. A social fact in Buenos Aires: I forbade performing religious marriages in Buenos Aires, in cases that we call “*matrimonios de apuro*”, “shotgun” [rushed] weddings, when a child is on the way. Now things are changing, but there is this: socially everything must be in order, a baby is coming, let’s get married. I forbade doing this, because they are not free, they are not free! Perhaps they love each other. And I have seen beautiful cases, in which then, after two or three years, they got married, and I saw them enter the church, dad, mom and baby, holding hands. But they really knew what they were doing. The marriage crisis is because people don’t know the sacrament, the beauty of the sacrament: they do not know what indissoluble means, they do not know that it is for a lifetime. It is difficult. Another one of my experiences in Buenos Aires: the pastors, when they held preparation courses, there were always 12 or 13 couples, no more, they did not reach 30 people. The first question they asked: “How many of you are living together?”. The majority raised their hands. They prefer to live together, and this is a challenge, it calls for work. Not to say straight away: “Why don’t you get married in Church?”. No. Accompany them: wait and cultivate. And cultivate fidelity. In the Argentine countryside, in the Northeastern region, there is a superstition: that couples have a child, they live together. In the countryside this happens. Then, when the child must go to school, they have a civil marriage. And then, as grandparents, they have a religious marriage. It is a superstition, because they say that having a religious wedding straight away scares the husband! We must also fight against these superstitions. Yet really, I say that I have seen a great deal of fidelity in these cohabiting couples, a great deal of fidelity; and I am certain that this is a true marriage, they have the grace of matrimony, precisely because of the fidelity that they have. But there are local superstitions. It is the most difficult ministry, that of marriage.

Then, peace in the family. Not only when they argue amongst themselves, and the advice is always not to let the day end without making peace, because the cold war of the following day is worse. It is worse, yes, it is worse. But when the relatives meddle, the in-laws, because it is not easy becoming a father-in-law or a mother-in-law! It is not easy. I heard something beautiful, that the women will enjoy: when a woman learns from the sonogram that she is pregnant with a boy, from that moment on she begins studying to become a mother-in-law!

I come back to what is serious: marriage preparation must be done with closeness, without getting scared, slowly. Many times, it is a journey of conversion. There are, there are young men and women who have a purity, a great love and they know what they are doing. But they are few. Today's culture presents us these young people, they are good, and we must be close to them and accompany them, accompany them, until the moment of maturity. And there, may they make the sacrament, but joyfully, joyfully! It takes a lot of patience, a lot of patience. It is the same patience that is called for in the pastoral care of vocations. To listen to the same things, listen: the apostolate of the ear, listen, accompany.... Do not be afraid, please, do not be afraid. I do not know if I have responded, but I speak to you of my experience, of what I experienced as a parish priest.

[At the end, after the Salve Regina was sung]

Many thanks and pray for me!