

HOLY MASS FOR THE FAMILY DAY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE *YEAR OF FAITH*

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

*Saint Peter's Square
Sunday, 27 October 2013*

The readings this Sunday invite us to reflect on some basic features of the Christian family.

1. First: *the family prays*. The Gospel passage speaks about two ways of praying, one is false – that of the Pharisee – and the other is authentic – that of the tax collector. The Pharisee embodies an attitude which does not express thanksgiving to God for his blessings and his mercy, but rather self-satisfaction. The Pharisee feels himself justified, he feels his life is in order, he boasts of this, and he judges others from his pedestal. The tax collector, on the other hand, does not multiply words. His prayer is humble, sober, pervaded by a consciousness of his own unworthiness, of his own needs. Here is a man who truly realizes that he needs God's forgiveness and his mercy.

The prayer of the tax collector is the prayer of the poor man, a prayer pleasing to God. It is a prayer which, as the first reading says, "will reach to the clouds" (*Sir* 35:20), unlike the prayer of the Pharisee, which is weighed down by vanity.

In the light of God's word, I would like to ask you, dear families: Do you pray together from time to time as a family? Some of you do, I know. But so many people say to me: But how can we? As the tax collector does, it is clear: humbly, before God. Each one, with humility, allowing themselves to be gazed upon by the Lord and imploring his goodness, that he may visit us. But in the family how is this done? After all, prayer seems to be something personal, and besides there is never a good time, a moment of peace... Yes, all that is true enough, but it is also a matter of humility, of realizing that we need God, like the tax collector! And all families, we need God: all of us! We need his help, his strength, his blessing, his mercy, his forgiveness. And we need simplicity to pray as a family: simplicity is necessary! Praying the Our Father together, around the table, is not something extraordinary: it's easy. And praying the Rosary together, as a family, is very beautiful and a source of great strength! And also praying for one another! The husband for his wife, the wife for her husband, both together for their children, the children for their grandparents....praying for each other. This is what it means to pray in the family and it is what makes the family strong: prayer.

2. The second reading suggests another thought: *the family keeps the faith*. The Apostle Paul, at the end of his life, makes a final reckoning and says: "I have kept the faith" (*2 Tim* 4:7). But how did he keep the faith? Not in a strong box! Nor did he hide it underground, like the somewhat lazy servant. Saint Paul compares his life to a fight and to a race. He kept the faith because he didn't just defend it, but proclaimed it, spread it, brought it to distant lands. He stood up to all those who wanted to preserve, to "embalm" the message of Christ within the limits of Palestine. That is why he made courageous decisions, he went into hostile territory, he let himself be challenged by distant peoples and different cultures, he spoke frankly and fearlessly. Saint Paul kept the faith because, in the same way that he received it, he gave it away, he went out to the fringes, and didn't dig himself into defensive positions.

Here too, we can ask: How do we keep our faith as a family? Do we keep it for ourselves, in our families, as a personal treasure like a bank account, or are we able to share it by our witness, by our acceptance of others, by our openness? We all know that families, especially young families, are often "racing" from one place to another, with lots to do. But did you ever think that this "racing" could also be the race of faith? Christian families are missionary families. Yesterday in this square we heard the testimonies of missionary families. They are missionary also in everyday life, in their doing everyday things, as they bring to everything the salt and the leaven of faith! Keeping the faith in families and bringing to everyday things the salt and the leaven of faith.

3. And one more thought we can take from God's word: *the family experiences joy*. In the responsorial psalm we find these words: "let the humble hear and be glad" (*33/34:2*). The entire psalm is a hymn to the Lord who is the source of joy and peace. What is the reason for this gladness? It is that the Lord is near, he hears the cry of the lowly and he frees them from evil. As Saint Paul himself writes: "Rejoice always ... The Lord is near" (*Phil* 4:4-5). I would like to ask you all a question today. But each of you keep it in your heart and take it home. You can regard it as a kind of "homework". Only you must answer. How are things when it comes to joy at home? Is there joy in your family? You can answer this question.

Dear families, you know very well that the true joy which we experience in the family is not superficial; it does not come from material objects, from the fact that everything seems to be going well... True joy comes from a profound harmony between persons, something which we all feel in our hearts and which makes us experience the beauty of togetherness, of mutual support along life's journey. But the basis of this feeling of deep joy is the presence of God, the presence of God in the family and his love, which is welcoming, merciful, and respectful towards all. And above all, a love which is patient: patience is a virtue of God and he teaches us how to cultivate it in family life, how to be patient, and lovingly so, with each other. To be patient among ourselves. A patient love. God alone knows how to create harmony from differences. But if God's love is lacking, the family loses its harmony, self-centredness prevails and joy fades. But the family which experiences the joy of faith communicates it naturally. That family is the salt of the earth and the light of the world, it is the leaven of society as a whole.

Dear families, always live in faith and simplicity, like the Holy Family of Nazareth! The joy and peace of the Lord be always with you!