

MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS  
TO THE FIRST LATIN AMERICAN FAMILY PASTORAL CONGRESS  
AUGUST 4-9, PANAMA CITY, PANAMA

Vatican City, May 8, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

My heart is close to all the participants in the First Latin American Family Pastoral Congress that is being organized by the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) and I congratulate you on this initiative in support of a value that is so dear and so important in our nations today.

What is the family? Beyond its pressing problems and its basic needs, the family is a “center of love,” where the law of respect and communion rules, which is able to resist manipulation and domination by the world’s “centers of power.” In the family, a person can integrate him or herself with ease and harmony into a human group and overcome the false opposition between individual and society. In the family, no one is pushed aside, both the elderly and children are welcomed. The family is the origin of a culture of encounter and dialogue, of an opening to solidarity and transcendence.

For this reason, the family is a great “social treasure” (*cf.* Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, 44), and in this context I would like to emphasize two of its primary contributions: stability and fruitfulness.

Relations based on faithful love until death, such as being husband and wife or mother-father-child, or being a son or daughter, a brother or a sister, are learned and lived in the family. When these relations make up the basic fabric of a society, they give it cohesion and consistency. It is impossible therefore to be part of a people, to feel like a neighbor, to care for the lonely and unfortunate, if in the human heart the fundamental family relationships that make it safe to open oneself to others are fractured.

In addition, family love is fruitful, not only because it produces new life, but also because it broadens the horizons of existence, it creates a new world; it makes us believe, against any discouragement or defeatism, that a life together based on respect and trust is possible. In the face of a materialistic vision of the world, the family keeps humanity from sterile utilitarianism and rather offers it a way to achieve its deepest aspirations.

To close, I want to tell you that, thanks to the formative experience of family love, men and women also grow in the openness to God as a father. For this reason, the Aparecida Document says that the family is not to be considered as only an object of evangelization but rather an evangelizing entity itself (*cf.* nn. 432, 435). The family reflects the image of God who in His deepest mystery is a family and who thus enables human love to be seen as a sign and presence of divine love (*cf.* Encyclical Letter, *Lumen Fidei*, 52). In the family, the faith is taken in like mother’s milk. As an example, the

simple and spontaneous gesture of asking for a blessing, traditional in many of our nations, is a perfect reflection of the biblical belief that the blessing of God is passed on from father to son.

Fully aware of the fact that family love ennobles and adds value to all that man and women do, it is important that we encourage families to cultivate wholesome relationships among their members, to know how to say "Sorry," "Thanks," and "Please," and to talk to God using that beautiful term, "Father."

May Our Lady of Guadalupe obtain from God bountiful blessings for the families of America make them seedbeds of life, of concord, and of robust faith, nourished by the Gospel and good works.

Please do me a favor and pray for me. I need it.

Your Brother,

Francis