



Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis
Consilium Internationale
FAMILY COMMISSION
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The Family and Evangelization

(From the final report of the Synod of Bishops on the Family, n° 87-93)

“Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization”, exhorts Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*¹. This call is addressed not only to individuals and canonical ecclesial communities, but also to the family that is itself “a domestic church”. If the world is sad and dreary, we are all supposed to be concerned because we are sent to bring the Good News “of *Great joy to all people*” (Lk 2: 10). The family has a great role in the Church’s mission of evangelization both as agent and beneficiary. The fourth chapter of the final report of the Synod of Bishops on the Family actually bears the title “The Family and Evangelization”.

1. A Family Spirituality (n° 87-88)

“The family, in its vocation and mission, is truly a treasure of the Church” (N° 87). Each person who nurtures the family, nurtures the Church and indeed of all society, even those who try to harm her. The Synod Fathers, taking into consideration our human weakness, recall Pope Francis’ watch words for the building of a strong family spirituality: ‘*May I?*’, ‘*Thank you.*’ And ‘*Pardon me.*’. The three words express respectively, respect for the other, gratitude and forgiveness that must never lack in our families where we all face the daily challenges of sharing a common space and intimacy. Above all of these, the Synod Fathers also underline the importance of prayer as family and in the family: *“The staple food of the spiritual life of the family is the Eucharist, especially on the Day of the Lord, as a sign of his deep grounding in the ecclesial community (cf. John Paul II, Dies Domini, 52; 66). Domestic prayer, participation in the liturgy and the practice of Marian and popular devotions are an effective means of encountering Jesus Christ and the evangelization of the family”* (n°87). In order to nurture the joy of love in our families, the Synod Fathers also invite us to the practice of tenderness. *“Tenderness means to give with joy and stir in the other the joy of feeling loved. (It) is expressed in a particular way by exercising loving care in treating the limitations of the other, especially when they are evident.”* (n° 88)

2. The Family: Object of Pastoral Care (n°89-90)

“The family cannot evangelize without being evangelized”, say the Fathers of the Synod. Evangelizing the family is, first and foremost, the duty of those faithful who are part of that family, especially the parents. *“An effort at evangelization and catechesis inside the family is important.”* Catechesis and all aspects of Christian initiation are not to be left only to priests and catechists. *“The mission of the family includes the fruitful union of the spouses, the upbringing of their children, the witness of the Sacrament of Matrimony, preparing other couples for marriage and friendly guidance of couples or families facing difficulties.”* (n° 89) As such, the family is not only an object of pastoral ministry but also an agent: *“Families need to be prepared, trained and empowered to guide others in living in a Christian manner.*

¹ PP. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 83.

Families who are willing to live the mission ad gentes are to be acknowledged and encouraged. Finally, we note the importance of connecting youth ministry with family ministry” (n°90). We have met OFS Fraternities in Italy that prepare and send on mission ad gentes whole families. In the OFS, for example, a special concern for young couples and the YouFra, would be of great help to this family apostolate.

3. Relationship with Cultures and Institutions (n° 91-92)

The Synod Fathers quote Pope Paul VI when he says: *“The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures.”* (EN, 20) The Gospel is the river flowing from the Temple which render fresh the water of the Sea, and “wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live and there will be very many fish.” (cf. Ez 47:8-9) The Fathers therefore strongly call for the evangelization of cultures with courageous denunciation of those systems that put the family to jeopardy, (n° 91). The family is anew recognized as “the first and vital cell of society.” As such, *“It is essential that families, through their associating one with the other, find ways to interact with political, economic and cultural institutions in order to build a more just society.”* (n° 92) Needless to note that the said association of families is open to all families and not only Catholic or Christian families, in the same sense that the OFS Rule envisages: *“Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world... “* (OFS Rule, 14)

4. Openness to Mission (n° 93)

“Evangelization begins in the family, which transmits corporeal as well as spiritual life.” As such, everyone is involved. Even grandparents are not overlooked as the Synod Fathers point out their important role as witnesses and *“guardians of the great traditions of wisdom, prayer and good example.”* (n°93) The OFS Rule says: *“By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.”* (Rule 17)

Prayer to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph
in you we contemplate
the splendor of true love, to you, confidently we come.
Holy Family of Nazareth, make our families also
the Cenacle place of communion and prayer,
genuine schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches.
Holy Family of Nazareth,
let there never be families episodes
of violence, of isolation and division;
that anyone who has been hurt or offended
may soon be comforted and healed.
Holy Family of Nazareth, make aware to all
the sacred and inviolable character of the family,
of its beauty in God's plan.
Jesus, Mary and Joseph, hear and receive our prayer.
Amen.

With this, we complete our series of articles summarizing the Final Report of the Synod Fathers to Pope Francis that laid the ground for the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* of 19th March 2016.

Points for reflections, sharing and exercise:

1. "Do we have the courage to welcome with tenderness the difficulties and problems of those who are near to us?" (cf. n° 88)
2. What concrete activity do we have as a fraternity to promote the evangelization of the family? If not yet, can you come up with a project?
3. Take time in your families to practice tenderness in terms of *"'May I?', 'Thank you.' And 'Pardon me'"*; appreciate your spouses, your children, your parents, your grandparents, your siblings etc. and report your experience to your Fraternity at the next meeting.

Documents:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea_en.html

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