



THE CALL, THE JOURNEY AND THE MISSION

An Invitation from the Bishops of England and Wales to Reflect on the Gift of Marriage and Family Life



In October 2014 bishops and other delegates from around the world met with Pope Francis in Rome for a special gathering called a Synod. The theme for discussion was the **Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelisation**. A further Synod will take place in October 2015 and the focus then will be on the theme of **The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World**. In this time between these two Synods, our Holy Father has asked us to spend time reflecting on these themes with “true spiritual discernment.”

What does this mean?

The Church always acts under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Ask for this in your prayer; think about the situation of the family today; pray about the family and ask to know how to strengthen marriage and family life. Above all, pray for your own families, that they may be strengthened in love by the gift of God’s spirit. It may be useful to reflect both personally and in groups – people joining together in their parishes, praying together and discussing the issues that face the family today. We hope your conversations will inspire your prayer and action on behalf of families, all families, especially your own. We join our hearts and prayers with yours that all families will be strengthened in love, in God’s love, for one another, that God’s kingdom come, and that God’s will be done here on earth as it is in heaven.

POPE FRANCIS

“Dear families, the Lord knows our struggles: he knows them.

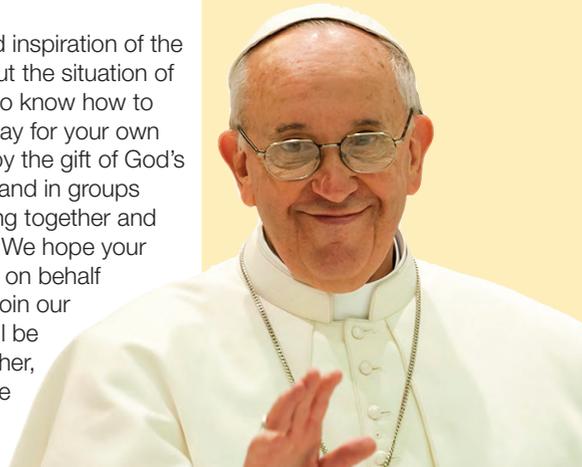
He knows the burdens we have in our lives. But the Lord also knows our great desire to find joy and rest!

Do you remember? Jesus said, ‘... that your joy may be complete.’

(cf. Jn 15:11)

Jesus wants our joy to be complete!”

TO FAMILIES GATHERED IN ROME
26 OCTOBER 2013





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POPE FRANCIS ON MARRIAGE

“Those who celebrate the sacrament say, ‘I promise to be true to you, in joy and in sadness, in sickness and in health; I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.’ At that moment, the couple does not know what will happen, nor what joys and pains await them.

They are setting out, like Abraham, on a journey together. And that is what marriage is! Setting out and walking together, hand in hand, putting yourselves in the Lord’s powerful hands. Hand in hand, always and for the rest of your lives. And do not pay attention to this makeshift culture, which can shatter our lives.”

ROME, 26 OCTOBER 2013



READ AND REFLECT

We ask you to reflect on the different stages of marriage and family life: falling in love, engagement, the celebration of marriage, the early years; children, joys and sorrows, teenage children, alone as a couple, the elderly years. Prayerfully read and reflect on these scripture stories:

- The faith of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 12:1-9)
- The prayer of Tobias and Sarah (Tobit 8:4-8)
- Mary – the Annunciation and Visitation (Luke 1:26-56)
- The presentation of Jesus in the temple (Luke 2: 22-40)
- The wedding feast of Cana (John 2: 1-12)
- Mary and John at the foot of the cross (John 19.24-27)
- The disciples on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-32)

How do these stories touch your own call, journey and mission as a family?

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Our Catholic faith and the teaching of the Church enable us to affirm the truth about marriage and family:

We believe that marriage is a sacred and beautiful vocation; because

We believe in God our Father, who creates every person, male and female, in His image and likeness;

We believe in Jesus Christ, God’s Son, our Saviour, who reveals what it is to be fully human, who shows God’s love to us and commands that we love one another;

We believe in the Holy Spirit, whose living presence sanctifies our hearts and purifies our desires;

We believe in God as Three Persons, a relationship of reciprocal mutuality and equality, the model for all human relationships;

We believe in the Church, the bride of Christ, whose mission is to announce the Good News of salvation and the call to conversion;

We believe that in baptism we have become sisters and brothers in Christ for him and for each other, our first responsibility as Christians and as family members;

We believe that, for the baptised, Christ has raised the married state to the dignity of a sacrament;

We believe that, in Christian marriage, a man and woman are joined together as husband and wife in a bond of love that is total, faithful, fruitful and lifelong in which Christ is ever present;

We believe that marriage and family are for the mutual good of husband and wife and the procreation and education of any children God may send them;

We believe that families are schools of deepest humanity, where virtue is learned and parents are the first teachers in the ways of faith;

We believe that the family is the foundation of society and the common good;

We believe that prayer and the life of faith sustain marriage and family as the domestic Church;

We believe that the Lord is present in the joys and struggles of spouses and families;

We believe that times of difficulty in marriage and family life can also be moments of growth in holiness and love and therefore have a special claim to the Church's pastoral ministry;

Therefore as a church

We believe that marriage is the basis for family life which offers to the world the witness of faith lived as a journey of hope, joy and love.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Thinking about what you have read in the scriptures and using the quotes below from the teaching of Pope Francis, reflect on the questions that follow applying them to your experience of marriage and family life.

1. *"I am asking you to rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes you are incapable of responsibility, that believes you are incapable of true love. I have confidence in you and I pray for you. Have the courage 'to swim against the tide'. And also have the courage to be happy."*

POPE FRANCIS, 28 JULY 2013, WORLD YOUTH DAY, BRAZIL

What are your joys and hopes of marriage and family life today?

2. *"With trust in God's faithfulness, everything can be faced responsibly and without fear. Christian spouses are not naïve; they know life's problems and temptations. But they are not afraid to be responsible before God and before society. They do not run away, they do not hide, they do not shirk the mission of forming a family and bringing children into the world. But today, Father, it is difficult... Of course it is difficult! That is why we need the grace, the grace that comes from the sacrament!"*

POPE FRANCIS, ROME, 26 OCTOBER 2013

What are your struggles and fears of marriage and family life today?

3. *"Those who celebrate the sacrament say, 'I promise to be true to you, in joy and in sadness, in sickness and in health; I will love you and honour you all the days of my life'. At that moment, the couple does not know what will happen, nor what joys and pains await them. They are setting out, like Abraham, on a journey together. And that is what marriage is! Setting out and walking together, hand in hand, putting yourselves in the Lord's powerful hands. Hand in hand, always and for the rest of your lives. And do not pay attention to this makeshift culture, which can shatter our lives."*

POPE FRANCIS, ROME, 26 OCTOBER 2013

How can we better understand marriage as a vocation?

4. *“Today, there are those who say that marriage is out of fashion... They say that it is not worth making a life-long commitment, making a definitive decision, ‘for ever’, because we do not know what tomorrow will bring.”*

POPE FRANCIS, 28 JULY 2013, WORLD YOUTH DAY, BRAZIL

How does your marriage enrich you?

5. *“The family is important, and it is necessary for the survival of humanity. Without the family, the cultural survival of the human race would be at risk.”*

POPE FRANCIS, 27 JULY 2013, INTERVIEW ON RADIO CATEDRAL

How does your family life enrich those around you?

6. *“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... 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!”

POPE FRANCIS, ROME, 27 OCTOBER 2013

In what way, through the abiding presence of God, is your family “salt of the earth and light to the world,” and a place of and for handing on our faith?

PRAYER

O God, who were pleased to give us
the shining example of the Holy Family,
Graciously grant that we may imitate them
in practicing the virtues of family life
and in the bonds of charity,
and so, in the joy of your house,
delight one day in eternal rewards.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION OR SUPPORT

catholicfamily.org.uk	The dedicated Marriage and Family Life website of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales
homeisaholyplace.org.uk	A resource to help reflect on God’s presence at home
familias-ew.org.uk	Details of diocesan coordinators of marriage and family ministry
cedar.uk.net	Catholics Experiencing Domestic Abuse Resources
marriagecare.org.uk	Marriage Care – Preparation and Counselling