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## THE FAMILY: WORK AND CELEBRATION

# CATECHESSES

## THE FAMILY: WORK AND CELEBRATION

**Preparatory Catecheses  
for the Seventh World Meeting of Families**

(Milan, May 30 – June 3 2012)

## Summary

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10. Celebration, a time for the community

## THEME OF THE CATECHESSES

*Family, work, celebration.* these are the three words of the theme for the *Seventh World Meeting of Families*. They make up a trinomial that starts from the family and opens up to the world: work and celebration are ways in which the family inhabits the social “space” and lives human “time”. The theme links the man-woman couple with its lifestyles: the way of living relationships (the family), inhabiting the world (work), and humanizing time (celebration).

The catecheses are divided into three groups regarding the family, work and celebration in this order, and introduced by a catechesis on family lifestyle. They aim at shedding light on the connection between the family’s experience and daily life in society and the world.

## Structure of the catecheses

Ordinary	A. Opening hymn and greeting
	B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit
	C. Reading from the Word of God
Proper	D. Biblical Catechesis
	E. Listening to the Magisterium
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### 1. THE SECRET OF NAZARETH

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

<sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own,  
but his own people did not accept him.

<sup>12</sup>But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name (*Jn 1:11-12*).

<sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

<sup>41</sup>Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover,  
<sup>42</sup>and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom [...]

<sup>51</sup>He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

<sup>52</sup>And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man (*Lk 2:40-42; 51-52*).

## D. Biblical Catechesis

**1. *He came to what was his own.*** Why does the family have to choose a lifestyle? What are the new lifestyles for today's family regarding work and celebration? Two biblical passages describe the way the Lord Jesus came among us (*Jn 1:11-12*) and lived in a human family (*Lk 2:40-41; 51-52*).

The first text presents Jesus to us living among his own people. "He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name".

The everlasting Word leaves from the Father's heart, comes to live among his people and becomes part of a human family. The people of God, who should have been the womb that welcomed the Word, proved to be sterile. His own do not accept him; on the contrary, they killed him. The mystery of Jesus of Nazareth's rejection is found in the heart of his coming in our midst. However, to those who do accept him, "he gave power to become children of God".

Under the cross, John sees the fulfillment of what he proclaims at the beginning of his gospel. "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved" (*Jn 19:26*), he gave his mother to her new son

and entrusted his mother to the beloved disciple. The evangelist comments: “And from that hour the disciple took her into his home” (19:27). This is the “style” that Jesus asks from us to come in our midst: a style that can welcome and generate. Jesus asks *the family to be the place that welcomes and generates life fully*. It not only gives physical life but it also opens up to the promise and joy. The family becomes capable of “welcoming” if it preserves its intimacy, the story of each one, family traditions, trust in life and hope in the Lord.

The family becomes capable of “generating” when it circulates the gifts it has received, when it takes care of the rhythm of daily life between work and celebration, affection and charity, commitment and gratuity. This is the gift that is received in the family: to take care of and transmit life in the couple and to the children. The family has its rhythm, like a heartbeat. It is a place of rest and enthusiasm, arrival and departure, peace and dreaming, tenderness and responsibility.

The couple has to build the atmosphere before children arrive. Work cannot turn the house into a desert; instead, the family should learn to live and combine the moments for work and those for celebration. Many times the family will have to measure itself against outside pressures that do not allow it to choose the ideal, but the Lord’s disciples are those who live in concrete situations but know how to give flavor to all things, even what they cannot be changed, because they are the salt of the earth. In particular, Sunday should be a time for trust, freedom, encounter, rest and sharing. Sunday is the moment for the encounter between the man and the woman.

Above all, it is the Lord’s Day, the day of prayer, the Word of God, the Eucharist, openness to the community and charity. In this way, the weekdays will also get light from Sunday and the celebration. There will be less dispersion and more encounter, less haste and more dialogue, fewer things and more presence. A first step in this direction is to see how we live in our home, what we do in our home. We need to see what our home is like and consider our style of living, the choices we have made in it, the dreams we have nurtured, the sufferings we experience, the struggles we endure and the hopes we cherish.

2. *The secret of Nazareth.* In this village of Galilee Jesus lived the longest period in his life. Jesus became a man. As the years passed, he went through many human experiences in order to save them all: he became one of us, he became part of a human family, and he lived thirty years in absolute silence, which become a revelation of the mystery of the humility of Nazareth.

The refrain that opens the passage sketches out *the “secret of Nazareth”*. *It is the place to grow in wisdom and God’s grace*, in the context of a family that welcomes and generates. “The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him”. The mystery of Nazareth tells us in a simple way that Jesus, *the Word that came down from heaven*, the Son of the Father, became a child, took on our humanity, grew up as a child in a family, lived the experience of religiosity, the law, and daily life cadenced by work days, rest on the sabbath and the calendar of the feasts. *The “son of the Most High” who took on the cloak of fragility and poverty*, was accompanied by the shepherds and people who expressed the hope of Israel.

However, the Mystery of Nazareth is much more: it is the secret that fascinated great saints like Teresa of Lisieux and Charles de Foucauld. In fact, the refrain that closes the episode says that Jesus “went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man”.

This is the profound mystery of Nazareth: Jesus, the Word of God in person, was *immersed in our humanity* for thirty years. The human words, the family relations, the experience of friendship and conflicts, health and sickness, joy and suffering became languages that Jesus learned in order to speak the *Word of God*.

Where did Jesus’ words come from if not from the family and the context of Nazareth, his images, his ability to look at a field, the farmer who sows, the golden harvest, the woman who kneads the dough, the shepherd who lost his sheep, and the father with his two sons? Where did Jesus learn his surprising ability to tell stories, to imagine, to compare and to pray in and with life? Didn’t they come

from Jesus' immersion in the life of Nazareth? For this reason, we say that *Nazareth is the place of humility and hiding*. The word is hidden, the seed comes down into the womb of the earth and dies in order to bring God's love as a gift; indeed, God's paternal face. This is the mystery of Nazareth.

**3. *Family ties.*** Jesus lives in a *family marked by Jewish spirituality and fidelity to the law*: "Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom".

The family and the law were the context where Jesus grew in wisdom and grace.

The Hebrew family and Jewish religiosity, a patriarchal family and a domestic religion – with its yearly feasts, the sense of the sabbath, prayer and daily work and the style of a couple's pure and tender love – allow us to see how Jesus lived his family in depth.

We, too, grow up in a human family with attachments that welcome us and let us grow and respond to life and to God. We, too, become what we have received. *The mystery of Nazareth is the whole of all these ties*: the family and religiosity, our roots and our people, our daily life and dreams for the future. The adventure of human life starts from what we have received: life, home, affection, language, faith. Our humanity is forged by a family, *with its riches and its forms of poverty*.

## E. Listening to the Magisterium

*Family life brings a unique, new and creative style with it to be lived and enjoyed in the couple and transmitted to the children so that it will change the world. The evangelical style of family life has influence inside and beyond the ecclesial circle and makes the charisma of marriage shine, the new commandment of love of God and neighbor. In an evocative way Familiaris Consortio No. 64 exhorts us to rediscover a more family-friendly face of the Church by adopting "a more human and fraternal style of relationships".*

## **Evangelical lifestyle in the family**

Inspired and sustained by the new commandment of love, the Christian family welcomes, respects and serves every human being, considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God.

It should be so especially between husband and wife and within the family, through a daily effort to promote a truly personal community, initiated and fostered by an inner communion of love. This way of life should then be extended to the wider circle of the ecclesial community of which the Christian family is a part.

Thanks to love within the family, the Church can and ought to take on a more homelike or family dimension, developing a more human and fraternal style of relationships. Love, too, goes beyond our brothers and sisters of the same faith since “everybody is my brother or sister.”

In each individual, especially in the poor, the weak, and those who suffer or are unjustly treated, love knows how to discover the face of Christ, and discover a fellow human being to be loved and served. In order that the family may serve man in a truly evangelical way, the instructions of the Second Vatican Council must be carefully put into practice: “That the exercise of such charity may rise above any deficiencies in fact and even in appearance, certain fundamentals must be observed. Thus, attention is to be paid to the image of God in which our neighbor has been created, and also to Christ the Lord to whom is really offered whatever is given to a needy person” (AA 8). [Familiaris Consortio, 64]

## **F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group**

### **QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE**

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1. Is our family a place that welcomes and generates life fully in its various

- human and Christian dimensions?
2. What choices do we make so that our family will be a space to grow in wisdom and God's grace?
  3. What kind of family, affective and religious ties nurture the growth of the couple and the children?

## QUESTIONS FOR THE FAMILY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

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1. What are the new lifestyles for today's family regarding work and celebration?
2. What choices and criteria guide our daily life?
3. What communication and social problems need to be tackled in order to make the family a place of human and Christian growth?
4. What cultural difficulties are encountered in transmitting the forms of the good life and faith?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn

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## 2. THE FAMILY GENERATES LIFE

### A. Opening hymn and greeting

### B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

### C. Reading from the Word of God

<sup>27</sup>God created man in his image;  
in the divine image he created him;  
male and female he created them (*Gen 1:27*).

<sup>18</sup>The Lord God said: “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.” <sup>19</sup>So the Lord God formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each of them would be its name. <sup>20</sup>The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man. <sup>21</sup>So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, <sup>23</sup>the man said:  
“This one, at last,  
is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
This one shall be called ‘woman,’  
for out of ‘her man’ this one has been taken.”  
<sup>24</sup>That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body (*Gen 2:18-24*).

### D. Biblical Catechesis

**1. *Male and female he created them.*** Why did God create man and woman? Why did he want his image to shine in the human couple

more than in any other creature? A man and a woman who love each another with their whole selves are the cradle which God chose to place His love so that every son and daughter born in the world can know, welcome and experience it, from generation to generation, and give praise to the Creator.

In the first pages of the Bible, the good that God planned for his creatures is illustrated. God created man and woman *equal in dignity but different*: one is male and the other is female. The similarity together with the sexual difference enables both to start up a creative dialogue and make a covenant of life. In the Bible, the covenant with the Lord is what gives life to the people in relation with the world and the history of all humanity. What the Bible teaches about humanity and God has its roots in the events of the Exodus in which Israel experiences the Lord's benevolent nearness and becomes his people, agreeing to the covenant from which only life comes.

The history of the Lord's covenant with his people sheds light on the account of the creation of man and woman. They were created for *a covenant that does not concern only them but also involves the Creator*: "In the divine image he created him; male and female he created them".

The family originates from the couple contemplated in its sexual difference *in the image of the God of the covenant*. Body image has great importance in it and says something about God himself. The covenant which a man and a woman, in their difference and complementarity, are called to live is in the image and likeness of the God allied with his people. The female body is predisposed to desire and welcome the male body and vice versa, but this is true even before for the "mind" and "heart".

The encounter with a person of the opposite sex always arouses curiosity, appreciation, the desire to be noticed, to give one's best, to show one's value, to take care and protect. It is always a dynamic encounter, filled with *positive energy* because in the relationship with the other we discover and develop ourselves. The male and female identity stands out in particular when the wonder grows between them regarding their encounter and their desire to form a bond.

In the account of *Genesis 2*, Adam discovers that he is a male precisely when he recognizes the female: the encounter with the woman lets him perceive and name his male being. The man and the woman's reciprocal recognition overcomes the evil of loneliness and reveals the goodness of the conjugal covenant. Contrary to what the gender ideology maintains, *the difference of the two sexes is very important*. It is the presupposition for each one to develop his or her humanity in relation and interaction with the other. While the two spouses give themselves totally to each another, together they also give themselves to the children that could be born. These dynamics of the gift are impoverished whenever sexuality is used selfishly and excludes all openness to life.

**2. *It is not good for man to be alone.*** To fill Adam's loneliness, God creates "a suitable helper for him". In the Bible, the term "helper" has mostly God as its subject, so much so that it becomes a divine title ("The Lord is with me as my helper" *Psalms 117:7*).

Moreover, by "helper" is not meant a generic intervention but the aid brought in the face of a moral danger. By creating the woman as a suitable helper for man, God removes him from the negative loneliness that mortifies and inserts him into the covenant that gives life: the conjugal covenant in which a man and a woman give each other life; the parental covenant in which the father and the mother transmit life to their children.

The man and the woman are a "*helper*" for each another who "stands in front", supports, shares and communicates, excluding any form of inferiority or superiority. The equal dignity of a man and a woman does not admit any hierarchy and, at the same time, it does not exclude the difference. The difference allows the man and the woman to make a covenant and the covenant makes them solid. The Book of Sirach teaches us this: "A wife is her husband's richest treasure, a helpmate, a steady column. A vineyard with no hedge will be overrun; a man with no wife becomes a homeless wanderer" (*Sirach 36:24-25*).

A man and a woman who love one another in the desire and tenderness of their bodies as well as the depth of their dialogue

become allies who recognize themselves in one another. They keep the word they have given and are faithful to the covenant; they support each another to achieve the similarity with God to which they are called, as male and female, from the foundation of the world. Along life's way they deepen the language of the body and the word because both are needed like air and water.

The man and woman should avoid the dangers of silence, distance and misunderstanding. Many times, when the rhythm of work becomes extenuating, it takes away time and energy from care of the relationship between the spouses, and so a time for celebration of the covenant and life is needed.

The creation of woman takes place while man is in a deep sleep. The sleep that God brings down over him expresses his abandon to a mystery that is impossible for him to understand. The origin of woman remains enveloped in the mystery of God, just as the origin of their love and the reason for their encounter and the mutual attraction that led to their communion of life are mysterious for every couple.

However, one thing seems certain: *in the couple's relationship God inscribed the "logic" of his love* whereby the good in one's life consists in self-giving to the other. The couple's love, which is made up by attraction, company, dialogue, friendship and care, plunges its roots into God's love who planned man and woman from the beginning as creatures who would love one another with his own love, even though the danger of sin can make their relationship difficult and ambiguous. Unfortunately, *sin replaces the logic of love* and self-giving with the logic of power, dominion and selfish affirmation.

**3. *The two will be one flesh.*** Having been created from man's rib, the woman is "flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones". For this reason, *woman shares in the weakness – the flesh – of man, but also in his supporting structure – bones.*

A comment in the Talmud notes this: "God did not create woman from man's head, that he should command her, nor from his feet, that she should be his slave, but rather from his side, that she should be near his heart". These words are echoed by those of the "beloved" in

the Song of Songs: “Set me as a seal on your heart...” (8:6). The profound and intense union is expressed to which the couple’s love aspires and is destined. “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”: the man says these first words before the woman.

Until that moment he worked naming the animals, but he was still alone and incapable of words of communion. Instead, when he saw the woman before him, man spoke words of wonder and recognized God’s greatness in her and the beauty of feelings. To the communion filled with wonder, gratitude and solidarity of a man and a woman God entrusts his creation. *By allying themselves in love, they will become in time “one flesh”.*

The expression “one flesh” surely alludes to a child, but even before that it refers to the interpersonal communion which completely involves the man and the woman to the point that they constitute a new reality. United in this way, a man and a woman can and must prepare themselves for the transmission of life, for welcoming it by generating children, but also by opening themselves to forms of foster parenting and adoption. In fact, conjugal intimacy is the original place predisposed and willed by God where human life is not only generated and born, but also welcomed, and where it learns a whole array of affections and personal ties.

In the couple there is wonder, welcome, dedication, relief from unhappiness and loneliness, covenant and gratitude for God’s wonderful works. In this way it becomes a good terrain where human life is sowed, germinates and is born. *A place of life, a place of God:* by welcoming one and the Other, the human couple fulfills its destiny at the service of creation, and by becoming more and more similar to its Creator, it follows the path to holiness.

## **E. Listening to the Magisterium**

*In family life, the interpersonal relationships are founded on and nourished by the mystery of love. Christian marriage, the bond through which a man and a woman promise to love each another in*

*the Lord forever with their whole selves, is the source that nourishes and enlivens the relations among all the family members. Not by chance, in the following passages from Familiaris Consortio and Evangelium Vitae, to illustrate the secret of domestic life, the terms “communion” and “gift” are used several times.*

### **Love, the source and soul of family life**

Conjugal communion constitutes the foundation on which is built the broader communion of the family, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters with each other, of relatives and other members of the household.

This communion is rooted in the natural bonds of flesh and blood, and grows to its specifically human perfection with the establishment and maturing of the still deeper and richer bonds of the spirit: the love that animates the interpersonal relationships of the different members of the family constitutes the interior strength that shapes and animates the family communion and community.

The Christian family is also called to experience a new and original communion which confirms and perfects natural and human communion. In fact the grace of Jesus Christ, “the first-born among many brethren” (*Rm* 8:29) is by its nature and interior dynamism “a grace of brotherhood,” as St. Thomas Aquinas calls it. (*S.Th.* II-II, 14, 2 ad 4). The Holy Spirit, who is poured forth in the celebration of the sacraments, is the living source and inexhaustible sustenance of the supernatural communion that gathers believers and links them with Christ and with each other in the unity of the Church of God. The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called “the domestic Church” (*LG* 11; Cfr. *AA*, 11).

All members of the family, each according to his or her own gift, have the grace and responsibility of building, day by day, the communion of persons, making the family “a school of deeper humanity” (*GS*, 52): this happens where there is care and love for the little ones, the sick, the aged; where there is mutual service every day; when there is

a sharing of goods, of joys and of sorrows.

[*Familiaris Consortio*, 21]

The family has a special role to play throughout the life of its members, from birth to death. It is truly “the *sanctuary of life*: the place in which life-the gift of God-can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth”. Consequently the role of the family in building a culture of life is *decisive and irreplaceable*.

As the domestic church, the family is summoned to proclaim, celebrate and serve the *Gospel of life*. This is a responsibility which first concerns married couples, called to be givers of life, on the basis of an *ever greater awareness of the meaning of procreation* as a unique event which clearly reveals that human life is *a gift received in order then to be given as a gift*. In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, “as the fruit of their mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift which flows from them”.

It is above all in raising children that the family fulfills its mission to proclaim the Gospel of life. By word and example, in the daily round of relations and choices, and through concrete actions and signs, parents lead their children to authentic freedom, actualized in the sincere gift of self, and they cultivate in them respect for others, a sense of justice, cordial openness, dialogue, generous service, solidarity and all the other values which help people to live life as a gift. In raising children Christian parents must be concerned about their children’s faith and help them to fulfill the vocation God has given them.

The parents’ mission as educators also includes teaching and giving their children an example of the true meaning of suffering and death. They will be able to do this if they are sensitive to all kinds of suffering around them and, even more, if they succeed in fostering attitudes of closeness, assistance and sharing towards sick or elderly members of the family.

[*Evangelium Vitae*, 92]

## F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

### QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE

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1. How do we live desire and tenderness in our relationship?
2. What obstacles hinder our path of profound covenant?
3. Is our love as a couple open to children, society and the Church?
4. What small decisions can we make to improve our understanding?

### QUESTIONS FOR THE FAMILY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

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1. How can we promote the value of nuptial love in our community?
2. How can we favor communication and mutual aid among families?
3. How can we help those in difficulty in their life as a couple and a family?

## G. A commitment for family and social life

## H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

## I. Closing hymn

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### 3. THE FAMILY IS PUT TO THE TEST

#### A. Opening hymn and greeting

#### B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

#### C. Reading from the Word of God

<sup>13</sup>The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.”

<sup>14</sup>Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. <sup>15</sup>He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “*Out of Egypt I called my son.*”

<sup>19</sup>When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt <sup>20</sup>and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” <sup>21</sup>He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup>But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee. <sup>23</sup>He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazorean” (*Mt 2:13-15; 19-23*).

#### D. Biblical Catechesis

**1. *An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream.*** Sooner or later, in various ways, *family life is put to the test*. Then wisdom, discernment and hope are needed, great hope, sometimes beyond all human evidence. Suffering, limitations and failure are part of our condition as creatures marked by the experience of sin, the ruin of all beauty, the corruption of all goodness.

This does not mean that we are destined to succumb; on the contrary, acceptance of this condition urges us to trust in God’s benevolent presence which can make all things new. The Gospel passage

describes in dramatic tones the journey of a family, Jesus' family, which is apparently similar to many others: the little child is in danger, and so a journey must be made immediately, by night, to a foreign land. The young family is thus forced to set out on an unexpected, complicated and disturbing road.

This is what happens today to many families who are forced to leave their homes in order to offer their children better living conditions and remove them from the dangers of the world around them. However, the account of the flight into Egypt may refer to a more universal experience that affects all families: the need to *undertake a journey that will lead the parents to their maturity and their children to adulthood*, to awareness of their vocation, which can often take place at the cost of decisions that may be painful. The journey of making a family, generating and educating children is a hard, difficult, demanding road on which the many difficulties from which no family is spared can be discouraging at times.

In the Gospel account, Jesus leaves as a child, and after he returns, he gets his adult name: "He shall be called a Nazorean" (verse 23), a title that prefigures his destiny on the cross. So from every family's journey, during which the parents also mature, adult children are born who can take on their vocation themselves. On this family journey, the *main actors are the parents*, especially the father, who is called to provide good living conditions for the children. The need to leave is referred to Joseph through the language of dreams. In a dream (*Mt* 1:20-21), Mary's pregnancy had been announced to him and he was invited to accept her and take her with him (*Cfr. Mt* 1:20-21).

Little is known about Joseph, but one thing is for sure: "He was a righteous man" (*Mt* 1:19). Justice, the virtue of interpersonal relations, puts safeguarding one's neighbor in first place. Since Joseph was just, he decided to dismiss Mary secretly rather than expose her to public judgment. In the simplicity of his heart, he got a glimpse of God's plan and saw the divine hand in the events of family life. It is fundamental to know how "to listen to the angels", to discern spiritually the events and moments in our family life so that the relationships will always be protected, favored and healed. In fact, the

family lives of good relations, the exchange of positive looks, reciprocal esteem and reassurance, defense and protection. From this atmosphere the careful discernment and quick decision making are derived that can save a child's life.

This is true for every family, for those who are facing a concrete situation of danger, but also for those who are in apparently safer situations. Parents must stay focused on their children's good life in order to remove them from threats and dangers. The angel invites Joseph to wake up, to take, accept, flee...and trust, and to stay in the foreign land until He, the Lord, says so.

Joseph takes on his responsibilities, he is the protagonist of his experience, but he does not feel alone because *he relies on the look of the One who provides for people's lives*. Trust in God does not exonerate us from reflection, evaluation of situations or the complex decision-making process. Instead, it makes it possible to live in all situations without despairing or becoming resigned. Joseph is awake, capable of facing the events and protecting the life of mother and child, but he also acts with the full awareness that he is aided by God's effective protection.

**2. *Take the child and his mother.*** Joseph obeys, takes the child and his mother and brings them far from the dangerous situation. In fact, King Herod, who was supposed to be the guarantor of his people's lives, became a persecutor to flee from.

Today the family still lives *in contact with dangerous and subtle threats*: suffering, poverty, arrogance, but also exaggerated work rhythms, consumerism, indifference, abandonment and loneliness. *The whole world can seem to be hostile*, an adversary of the life of the littlest ones in many ways. All parents would like to make the world easier and more livable for their children and show them that life is good and worth living.

This desire motivates the care given to children in their early childhood. Parents are sorry if their children cry; they suffer and do everything to alleviate their pain. They do what they can so that life for their children will be beautiful, a gift, and blessed in God's name.

This is the meaning of the journey into Egypt: the search for a safe place beyond the night that will protect from danger, preserve from violence, make it possible to hope again and *keep a good idea about God and life*.

It seems that the father is called to this task in first place: it is he who wakes up and takes the initiative. The child and his mother are entrusted to Joseph; he knows he will have to bring them both to Egypt, to safety. “Take the child and his mother”, the angel says twice, and the text repeats these words two more times. They sound like an encouragement to fathers to overcome the uncertainties, to come forward and to take care of the child and his mother. Today the human sciences are rediscovering the decisive importance of the paternal figure for children’s integral development.

The father – as the text suggests – finds his identity and role when he takes care of the mother; that is, when he takes care of the couple’s relationship. We are well aware *how decisive the parents’ understanding is in order to protect, care for and encourage the children*. We are also aware of how difficult it is for the man to protect the woman from the countless nights of loneliness, silence and a lack of communication. When looked at carefully, these are also dangers that make life more “difficult” for the children!

**3. *They took refuge in Egypt.*** A family’s journey: to leave, to go from a hostile land to one that is more livable, Egypt, which, in its time, was a land of slavery and suffering, but also the place where the Lord’s love for his people Israel was revealed.

Egypt fills Israel’s imagination with many thoughts: it is the land where Jacob and his children were hosted, and even before them, his son Joseph, who was sold by his brothers. It is the land where the people suffered slavery and experienced liberation. Moses also fled from that land which had hosted him. The angel asks Joseph to bring the child to safety precisely there, almost as if to say that when revisited and inhabited with hope and trust, *even a place of death can become a cradle for life*. But for this to happen the courage is needed to go back there, and the decision to live in that difficult place, supported by trust in the God of life. Faith in God is capable of

making all things  
new and giving back vitality to families.

Joseph leaves “by night”. At night we see nothing, as if we were blind, but we can hear the voice that supports and encourages us. Many “dark nights” descend on family life: those populated by dreams, both good and bad; those which see the couple groping in the dark of a relationship that has become difficult; those of children going through a crisis who become silent, distant or even accusers and rebels...and almost unrecognizable. All of these nights – as the account of the flight into Egypt teaches us – can be gotten through by bringing the child to safety and listening carefully and confidently to the Word of the Lord.

Parents are asked *to protect their children from the many dark nights* of their relationship, their problems, and from their children’s own dark nights, which are sometimes more painful because of their choices contrary to what is good. Especially in these moments, the father takes care of the child by maintaining the certainty, also in the eyes of the mother who is suffering, that he will find a place of refuge for him. Not rarely, this refuge is the father’s and the mother’s own heart where the child’s image is kept intact and where the parents can find the patience and hope to go on loving him.

Jesus will die in Jerusalem, the same land from which he was taken away to be protected, by the same power from which his parents removed him. *A moment comes in a family’s life when the parents must withdraw.* When they have completed their service by accompanying their child to recognize his vocation, it is good for them to step back and let God’s will be done. The family is not eternal, and after accompanying their children to hope in the goodness of the life they have received, it should encourage them to leave, to go on their way.

Parents give proof of their wisdom through their discreet presence and by stepping aside, which is never abandonment, but rather a form of respect and freedom that prepares the future of the world. Again in a dream, Joseph understands that the moment has come to bring his family back to the land of Israel. Wisely he takes steps, evaluates the

situation and – enlightened by a mysterious prophecy – decides to live in Nazareth, a safer place than Judea.

Once again, a dream is the place of revelation and victory over hostility and violence, and although it is invisible and almost unsubstantial, it becomes the place of *careful and courageous discernment* and manages to overcome the most obvious, solid arm of power. Nothing can jeopardize God's providence, which can save all those who entrust themselves to Him from the most difficult and dangerous situations. He is present in the dark nights of our families, and in the hidden, often obscure web of events, he weaves his design of salvation.

### E. Listening to the Magisterium

*No. 18 of Familiaris Consortio depicts an evocative fresco of the “dark nights of the family” that close in on all the ages of life and seasons of existence. The text helps us to interpret the peculiar difficulties of families in every part of the world at the present time with the intelligence of the mind and the compassion of the heart. In gathering together the pastoral concerns of the Synod Fathers, John Paul II's great affection directs the “eyes” of the Church to read the sufferings and difficulties that affect family life with love, and he asks pastors, lay ministers, and families today to enrich the Church's “look” at the countless crowds that are like “a flock without a shepherd”.*

### **Support the family in difficulty**

An even more generous, intelligent and prudent pastoral commitment, modeled on the Good Shepherd, is called for in the case of families which, often independently of their own wishes and through pressures of various other kinds, find themselves faced by situations which are objectively difficult [...]

Such for example are the families of migrant workers; the families of those obliged to be away for long periods, such as members of the

armed forces, sailors and all kinds of itinerant people; the families of those in prison, of refugees and exiles; the families in big cities living practically speaking as outcasts; families with no home; incomplete or single-parent families; families with children that are handicapped or addicted to drugs; the families of alcoholics; families that have been uprooted from their cultural and social environment or are in danger of losing it; families discriminated against for political or other reasons; families that are ideologically divided; families that are unable to make ready contact with the parish; families experiencing violence or unjust treatment because of their faith; teenage married couples; the elderly, who are often obliged to live alone with inadequate means of subsistence [...]

Other difficult circumstances in which the family needs the help of the ecclesial community and its pastors are: the children's adolescence, which can be disturbed, rebellious and sometimes stormy; the children's marriage, which takes them away from their family; lack of understanding or lack of love on the part of those held most dear; abandonment by one of the spouses, or his or her death, which brings the painful experience of widowhood, or the death of a family member, which breaks up and deeply transforms the original family nucleus.

[*Familiaris Consortio* 77]

## F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

### QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE

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1. What are our family's current "trials"? How do we live through them?
2. What man am I for the mother of my children? What woman am I for the father of my children? What father and

- mother are we for our children?
3. How can we grow as a couple in trust and hope in the face of difficult situations and suffering?
  4. What small decisions can we make?

## QUESTIONS FOR THE FAMILY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

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1. What are the principal threats to families in our society and culture?
2. How can we make the world more livable for our children?
3. How can we help our community to strengthen hope in the future?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn

**BACK TO SUMMARY**

## 4. THE FAMILY ANIMATES SOCIETY

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘*You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.*’ <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, love your enemies,

and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. <sup>46</sup>For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup>And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? <sup>48</sup>So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect...” <sup>1</sup>(But) take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. <sup>2</sup>When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup>But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your alms-giving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Mt 5:43-48; 6:1-4).

## D. Biblical Catechesis

**1. *You have heard it said... but I say to you...*** Why educate our children to generosity, hospitality, gratitude, service, solidarity, peace and all the social virtues that are so important for the human quality of their life? What advantage do they get from this? Perhaps there will be no increase in their wealth, prestige or safety. And yet, it is only by cultivating these virtues that people have a future on earth. They grow thanks to the perseverance of those, like parents, who educate the new generations to goodness.

The Christian message encourages us to something greater, something more beautiful, more risky and more promising: the humanity of the family, thanks to the divine spark present in it, which not even sin has taken away, can renew society in accordance with its Creator’s design.

Divine love encourages us on the way of love of enemy, dedication to strangers, and generosity beyond what is due. The family shares in our God’s overabundant generosity and so it can look farther and experience greater joy, stronger hope and more courage in its choices.

Many of Jesus' words reported in the Gospels enlighten family life. Moreover, his wisdom regarding human life grew thanks to the family atmosphere in which he spent a great part of his existence. There he experienced the varied world of feelings, hospitality, tenderness, forgiveness, generosity and dedication. In his family he observed that it is better to give than to presume, to forgive rather than avenge, to offer rather than keep, to spend one's life without sparing it. Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom comes from his direct family experience and affects all of his relationships, starting precisely from his family relationships, and enlightens them with a new light and expands them beyond the confines of the old law. Jesus invites us to go beyond a selfish view of family and social ties, to expand our affections beyond the limited circle of our own family so that they will become a leaven of justice for social life.

The family is the *first school of affections*, the cradle of human life, where evil can be confronted and overcome. The family is a valuable resource of good for society. It is the seed from which other families will grow who are called to improve the world. However, it can happen that family ties prevent from developing the social role of affections. This happens when the family keeps energies and resources for itself and closes itself into the logic of the family's advantage which leaves no legacy for the future of society.

Jesus wants to free the couple and the family from the temptation to withdraw into themselves: "For if you love those who love you... if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that?" With revolutionary words Jesus reminds his listeners about the "ancient" likeness to God and invites them to dedicate themselves to others *in the divine style*, beyond apprehension and fear, beyond calculations and guarantees of one's own advantage.

Jesus astonishes his listeners when he teaches that it is possible to be children who resemble the Father. He removes us from the dullness of resignation and selfishness and tells us forcefully to love our enemy and to pray for those who persecute us; that we can uproot the violence from our hearts by forgiving offenses, and that our generosity can overcome the economic logic of a mere exchange.

**2. *Be children of your heavenly Father.*** Jesus asks for this unique lifestyle and in this way reveals that people are destined for this high calling. He trusts in the teaching which families, through God's design, can offer on the way of his love.

In the family, we are taught to say "thank you" and "please", to be generous and helpful, to lend our things, to pay attention to the needs and emotions of others, and to consider the toil and difficulties of those near us. In the little actions of everyday life a child learns to establish a good relationship with others and to share in life. *Promoting personal virtues is the first step towards educating to the social virtues.* In the family, children are taught to lend their toys, to help their school companions, to ask politely, to not offend those who are weaker, and to be generous in doing favors. For this reason, adults should strive to give an example of attention, dedication, generosity and altruism. In this way the family becomes the first place where one learns the truest meaning of justice, solidarity, moderation, simplicity, honesty, truthfulness and uprightness, together with a great passion for the history of man and society.

Parents, like Joseph and Mary, are astonished when they see their children deal with the adult world with assurance. Children prove to be surprising teachers at times, even for adults: "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers" (*Lk 2:46-47*).

Like the family of Nazareth, every family gives society, through its children, the human riches it has lived, including the ability to love one's enemy, to forgive without seeking revenge, to delight in the success of others, to give more than what is required...

In fact, divisions and conflicts also occur in the family, and enemies crop up: a spouse, a parent, a child, a brother or sister can become an enemy...However, in the family the members love each another and sincerely want the good of the others. They suffer when someone is ill, even if he or she has behaved like an "enemy". They pray for those who have offended us and are willing to give up their own things in

order to make the others happy. They understand that life is beautiful when it is spent for their good.

*The family is the “first and vital cell of society”.* (FC 42), because in the family one learns the importance of the bond with others. In the family one senses that the power of affections cannot be confined “to us” but is destined to the broader horizon of social life. When affections are only lived within the small family unit they wear out, and instead of expanding the family’s breathing space, they end up suffocating it. What makes the family vital is the openness of its ties and the extension of its affections, which would otherwise close its members into mortifying cages!

**3. *Your Father sees in secret.*** Care for family ties and affections is guaranteed more when families are good and generous with other families, attentive to their wounds and the problems of their children, however different they may be from their own.

Between parents and children, husband and wife, the good increases to the extent that the family is open to society and gives attention and aid to the needs of others. This is how the family acquires important motivations to carry out its social function and becomes the foundation and principal resource of society. The acquired ability to love often goes beyond the needs of one’s own family. The couple becomes available for the service and education of other children besides their own. In this way, parents become fathers and mothers of many.

“So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect...”: the perfection that brings families closer to the heavenly Father is that “extra” in life offered beyond one’s family unit, a trace of the superabundant love that God pours out over his creatures.

Many families open the doors of their homes to hospitality, to taking care of the difficulties and poverty of others; or they simply knock on their neighbors’ door to ask if they need help, or to offer some clothing that is still good, or to give hospitality to their children’s school companions while they do their homework... or they welcome

a child that has no family or they help to preserve family warmth where only a father or mother is left.

Families associate to support other families with their countless daily problems, and they teach their children mutual support for those who are different by race, language, culture or religion. In this way *the world is made more beautiful and livable* for everyone and the quality of life benefits from this to the advantage of the whole society.

It is not by chance that after the call to perfection the Gospel text deals with alms, which in ancient times, in a subsistence economy, was a way to redistribute resources, a practice of social justice. Jesus exhorts us to not seek the recognition of others by using the poor to gain prestige, but to act in secret. In the secret of the heart the encounter with God confirms one's identity as a child so similar to the Father. This is a lofty, apparently unattainable goal but family life brings it closer.

## E. Listening to the Magisterium

*The family gives society the precious fruit of gratuitous love, which includes sweetness, goodness, service, altruism and mutual respect. On the other hand, as the following passage from Familiaris Consortio shows, the magisterial teaching has always aimed at highlighting how the family, in addition to being the school of affections, is also known as the “first school of social virtues”. In fact, the family has a specific and original public dimension, which has a positive influence on the good functioning of society and the stability of social bonds.*

### **The family's social task**

The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the

animating principle of the existence and development of society itself. Thus, far from being closed in on itself, the family is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society, and undertakes its social role. The very experience of communion and sharing that should characterize the family's daily life represents its first and fundamental contribution to society. The relationships between the members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of "free giving." By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service and deep solidarity. [*Familiaris Consortio*, 42, 43]

## F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

### QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE

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1. What values do our children learn from our way of life?
2. What attention does our family give to social life?
3. What help do we offer to the poor and needy?

### QUESTIONS FOR THE FAMILY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

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1. What are the most urgent needs of our community?
2. What can we do for those in need?
3. Which families can we help? How?

## G. A commitment for family and social life

## H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

## I. Closing hymn

### BACK TO SUMMARY

## 5. WORK AND CELEBRATION IN THE FAMILY

### A. Opening hymn and greeting

### B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

### C. Reading from the Word of God

<sup>26</sup>Then God said: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.”

<sup>27</sup>God created man in his image;  
in the divine image he created him;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them, saying:  
“Be fertile and multiply;  
fill the earth and subdue it.

Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air,  
and all the living things that move on the earth.”

<sup>29</sup>God also said: “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; <sup>30</sup>and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground, I give all the green plants for food.” And so it happened. <sup>31</sup>God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed – the sixth day.

<sup>1</sup>Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed.

<sup>2</sup>Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. <sup>3</sup>So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he

had done in creation. <sup>4</sup>Such is the story of the heavens and the earth at their creation (*Gen* 1:26-31; 2:1-4).

#### D. Biblical Catechesis

1. ***God said: Let us make man.*** The biblical account of the beginning presents the creation of man, male and female, as God's work, the fruit of his labor. God creates man by working like a potter who shapes the clay (*Gen* 2: 7). Also, when he gives life to his people Israel, frees them from slavery in Egypt and leads them to the promised land, God's work will be like that of a shepherd who leads his flock to pasture (Cfr. *Psalms* 77:21).

God's creative work is accompanied by his word; indeed, it is accomplished through his word: "God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"...and "God created man in his image...". *What God brings about is not first of all "used" but contemplated.* He looks at what he has made until he sees its splendor and rejoices in the beauty of the good he has created. In his eyes, the work appears to be a masterpiece.

Those who can still marvel at the wonders of the world relive God's joy in some way. Even today, for those who can look with simplicity and faith, the beauty of the universe invites us to recognize God's hand and to understand that it is not the product of chance but of the Creator's loving work for the human creature who is not only "good", like all the other creatures, but "very good".

The word that accompanies God's creation cannot be absent for the man who works either. Work must never stifle man to the point that it reduces him to silence! When a worker is deprived of the right to speak, he falls into the condition of a slave who is prevented from rejoicing in his work because every fruit is taken away from him by his owner.

Man has to work to live, but *working conditions must safeguard and indeed promote his dignity as a person.* Today the labor market forces not a few people, especially if they are young and women, into situations of constant uncertainty and impedes them from working

stably and with certainties of an economic and social nature which ensure that the young generations can have a family and that families can generate and raise their children.

The convenient “flexibility” of work called for by the so-called “*globalization*” does not justify the permanent “*precariousness*” of those whose only resource to ensure a livelihood for themselves and their families is their “labor force”. Adequate social security and protection mechanisms should integrate the labor economy so that especially families that are going through very delicate moments like motherhood, or very difficult moments, such as sickness or unemployment, can count on a reasonable economic security.

**2. *God blessed them, saying... fill the earth and subdue it.*** Man should not just contemplate the “very good” creation; he is also called to collaborate. In fact, work, for every man, is a call to take part in God’s work and so it is a real place of sanctification.

By transforming reality, man recognizes that the world comes from God who involves man in completing the good work begun by him. This means, for example, that serious unemployment, a product of the current world economic crisis, not only deprives families of the necessary means for survival, but it also hinders man from developing himself fully by denying or reducing the work experience .

It is not work that should subject man, but it is man, through work, who is called to “subject” the earth (*Gen 1:28*). The entire earthly globe is at man’s disposal so that through his creativity and effort he will discover the resources needed to live and make proper use of them. For this purpose, today, much more than in the past, we should not forget that *God entrusted the earth to us like a garden to be appreciated and cultivated (Gen 2:7)*.

The responsible use of the earth’s resources in view of sustainable development has become a primary question today: the “ecological question”. The environmental degradation of many areas of the planet, the rising levels of pollution, and other negative factors like global warming are warning bells regarding a way of conducting technical-scientific progress that overlooks the collateral effects of its

undertakings. Studying industrial, agricultural and urban policies that will put man at the center and safeguard creation is the indispensable condition for guaranteeing families today, and especially in the future, a livable and hospitable world.

After working for six days on the creation of the world and man, on the seventh day God rested. God's rest reminds man about the need to suspend work so that religious, personal, family and community life will not be sacrificed to the idols of accumulating wealth, career advancement and the increase of power. One does not live only of work relations that are functional to the economy. It takes time to cultivate the gratuitous relationships of family affections and the bonds of friendship and kinship.

Unfortunately, in the West, the dominant culture only tends to consider the individual as functional to the society of production and consumption. When he is more productive because he is more willing to move and keep flexible hours, he consumes percentage-wise more than those who live in the family.

**3. *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*** Created in God's image and likeness (*Gen 1:26*), man, like God, works and rests. A serene time for rest and a joyful time for celebration are also the space to thank God, the Creator and Savior. By suspending work, people remember and experience that at the origin of their working activity there is God's creative action. *Human creativity plunges its roots into God the Creator* because only He creates from nothing.

By resting in God, people also rediscover the right measure of their work with respect to their relations with their neighbor. Work is at the service of the deeper bonds which God wanted for the human creature. The bread we earn by working is not only for ourselves, but also gives sustenance to the others that live with us. Through work spouses nurture their relationship and their children's lives. Moreover, work is also *the act of justice through which people share in the good of the society and contribute to the common good.*

As a gratuitous time for interpersonal and social relations, rest from work is a favorable occasion for nurturing family affections and

making bonds of friendship with other families. In fact, work rhythms today dictated by the consumer economy are limiting to the point that for certain professions they almost cancel the spaces for life in common, especially in the family. Current living conditions seem to contradict what was thought until not too long ago. It was expected that technological progress would have increased free time. The frenetic work rhythms and the traveling time to and from work drastically reduce the space for comparison and sharing between the spouses and the possibility to be with their children. One of the most difficult challenges of the economically developed countries is to balance the times for the family with those for work. On the other hand, the difficult task for the developing countries is to increase productivity without losing the riches of human, family and community relations, and to solve and reconcile the family-work relation in the context of external as well as internal migrations.

**4. *God blessed them...*** From the account of creation, a close connection emerges between conjugal love and work. In fact, God's blessing concerns the couple's fruitfulness and dominion over the earth. The twofold blessing invites us *to recognize the goodness of family life and work*. Therefore, it encourages us to find a way to live family and work in a balanced, harmonious way. Today attempts in this direction are not absent: for example, where it is possible and advisable, part-time work, or authorizations or leaves of absence compatible with work duties which correspond to the family's needs. Flexible work hours can also favor the right balance between family demands, especially regarding childcare, and work demands.

The blessing is given to the spouses so that they will be fruitful and derive benefit from the earth's fruitfulness. The family blessed by God is called to recognize the gifts it receives from God. One concrete way to remember God's beneficial action, the origin of all good, is the prayer of blessing which the family recites at meals. Getting recollected together to praise God and thank him for their food is both a simple and a profound act: it is the expression of gratitude to the heavenly Father who provides for his children on earth and lavishes upon them the grace to love one another and the bread to live.

## E. Listening to the Magisterium

*Not only work but also rest from work constitutes a fundamental right and an essential good for individuals and their families. This is what the post-synod Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis states. A man and a woman are worth more than their work. They are made for communion and encounter. So Sunday should not take the form of an interval from work to be filled with frenetic activities or unusual experiences, but rather a day of rest which opens up to the encounter, lets the other be rediscovered, and makes it possible to dedicate time to family relations and friends and to prayer.*

### **The meaning of rest and work**

It is particularly urgent nowadays to remember that the day of the Lord is also a day of rest from work. It is greatly to be hoped that this fact will also be recognized by civil society, so that individuals can be permitted to refrain from work without being penalized. Christians, not without reference to the meaning of the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition, have seen in the Lord's Day a day of rest from their daily exertions.

This is highly significant, for it relativizes work and directs it to the person: *work is for man and not man for work*. It is easy to see how this actually protects men and women, emancipating them from a possible form of enslavement. As I have had occasion to say, "work is of fundamental importance to the fulfillment of the human being and to the development of society. Thus, it must always be organized and carried out with full respect for human dignity and must always serve the common good. At the same time, it is indispensable that people not allow themselves to be enslaved by work or to idolize it, claiming to find in it the ultimate and definitive meaning of life." It is on the day consecrated to God that men and women come to understand the meaning of their lives and also of their work.

[*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 74]

## F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

### QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE

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1. Do we feel realized in our work?
2. Do we compare our work experiences with one another?
3. Does the exercise of a profession conflict with our conjugal and family ties?
4. Do we have the habit of praying at meals? What meaning do we give to blessing food?

### QUESTIONS FOR THE FAMILY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

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1. In our Christian communities is attention given to the problems of work and the economy?
2. In *Caritas in veritate*, Benedict XVI talks about conditions for “decent work” (CV 63). In what way can we get committed to guaranteeing everyone dignified work?
3. Does work flexibility represent an opportunity or is it detrimental?
4. What forms of idolatry of work are present in the society we live in?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn

## BACK TO SUMMARY

### 6. WORK, A RESOURCE FOR THE FAMILY

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

<sup>10</sup>When one finds a worthy wife,  
her value is far beyond pearls.

<sup>11</sup>Her husband, entrusting his heart to her,  
has an unfailing prize.

<sup>12</sup>She brings him good, and not evil,  
all the days of her life.

<sup>13</sup>She obtains wool and flax  
and makes cloth with skillful hands.

<sup>14</sup>Like merchant ships,  
she secures her provisions from afar.

<sup>15</sup>She rises while it is still night,  
and distributes food  
to her household.

<sup>16</sup>She picks out a field to purchase;  
out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.

<sup>17</sup>She is girt about with strength,  
and sturdy are her arms.

<sup>18</sup>She enjoys the success of her dealings;  
at night her lamp is undimmed.

<sup>19</sup>She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her fingers ply the spindle.

<sup>20</sup>She reaches out her hands to the poor,  
and extends her arms to the needy.

<sup>21</sup>She fears not the snow for her household;  
all her charges are doubly clothed.  
<sup>22</sup>She makes her own coverlets;  
fine linen and purple are her clothing.  
<sup>23</sup>Her husband is prominent at the city gates  
as he sits with the elders of the land.  
<sup>24</sup>She makes garments and sells them,  
and stocks the merchants with belts.  
<sup>25</sup>She is clothed with strength and dignity,  
and she laughs at the days to come.  
<sup>26</sup>She opens her mouth in wisdom,  
and on her tongue is kindly counsel.  
<sup>27</sup>She watches the conduct of her household,  
and eats not her food in idleness.  
<sup>28</sup>Her children rise up and praise her;  
her husband, too, extols her:  
<sup>29</sup>“Many are the women of proven worth,  
but you have excelled them all.”  
<sup>30</sup>Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting;  
the woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.  
<sup>31</sup>Give her a reward of her labors,  
and let her works praise her at the city gates  
(*Proverbs 31:10-31*).

## D. Biblical Catechesis

**1. *Who can find a worthy wife?*** In the portrait from the Book of Proverbs, a woman’s activity assumes a value of primary importance in the domestic and family economy. The woman, a figure of both human and divine wisdom, expresses through her work the creative genius of all humanity. The qualities attributed to women, in fact, can hold for all the persons called to a *sense of responsibility to the family and work*.

The picture outlined is that of an ideal woman who lives good relations inside the family. In Israel, by trusting in his wife’s organizational ability and work, the husband could dedicate himself to

the profession of judge, a role that fell upon wise men, usually elderly men who had acquired wisdom over time.

This division of domestic and professional duties sheds light on the importance of the common agreement between a husband and wife in planning their work. Each one is asked to make every effort so that the other can express his or her talents as well as possible.

In turn, society should give all possible support so that the spouses can make their work choices freely and responsibly. The children, together with the husband, also praise the mother and exalt her talents. This surely idealized family picture is offered as a model from which to draw inspiration and encouragement. The exemplary family lives in fear of God and puts its trust in Him.

The prosperity it enjoys, which is recognized as a divine gift, is taken care of and enhanced in everyday industriousness.

The woman senses the responsibility entrusted to her and makes every effort, without sparing herself, to respond to the task required of her. With her attitude she invites everyone to be responsible for his or her actions, but also to take care of the other members of the family and to be concerned about social life by contributing to the common good. Personal gifts and talents are at the same time *a responsibility towards God and towards one's neighbor*.

Our thoughts go to the parable of the talents which are given to everyone so that they will be multiplied (Cfr. *Mt* 25:14-30).

**2. *She rises while it is still night.*** The woman who wakes up at night and works at night describes a kind zeal that eliminates all forms of idleness. The woman's industriousness, which is far removed from any negligence, is stressed further in the text when it notes that she "watches the conduct of her household, and eats not her food in idleness". Everyone is called to *be constantly vigil to not give in to the temptation of idleness* by falling short of one's responsibilities and neglecting one's commitments.

The portrait of an ideal woman who is averse to all forms of idleness is the icon of someone who is not afraid of toil and sacrifice because she knows that using her energies is not useless but has a meaning. Through her work, in fact, she provides for the needs of her family and can also help the poor and beggars.

This ever up-to-date example challenges family life. One of the family's responsibilities is to open up to the needs of others, whether near or far. Attention to the poor is one of the most beautiful forms of love of neighbor that a family can experience.

Knowing that through one's work one can help those who do not have what is necessary to live strengthens one's commitment and supports one's toil. On the other hand, to give what one has to those who have nothing and to share one's wealth with the poor is to recognize that everything we have received is grace, and that at the origin of our prosperity there is a gift of God, which cannot be kept for oneself but must be shared with others. With this kind of attitude, social justice is promoted and a contribution is made to the common good by contesting the selfish ownership of wealth and opposing indifference to the common good.

**3. *She opens her mouth in wisdom.*** One characteristic trait of the ideal family is that it refrains from gossip. What does the family talk about? What is the tone of their conversations? The appeal of the woman portrayed in the Book of Proverbs is also enhanced by the fact that "she opens her mouth in wisdom, and on her tongue is kindly counsel". It is the parents' duty to teach their children to do good and to avoid evil and, furthermore, to appreciate the commandment of love of God and neighbor. *The consistency of the parents' life strengthens their teaching and makes it true*, and all the more so when it has to do with good to be done and love to be lived. The model of those who practice what they teach is perennially valid, and today in particular it maintains all of its incomparable effectiveness.

Today communication often appears to be distorted. Words are spoken and messages are sent out with the superficiality of those who assume no responsibility for the consequences of what they say. A responsible person seeks the veracity of the facts and talks about what he is

convinced of. Biblical wisdom invites us to shun lies and avoid useless talk. The Christian family, by listening to the Word of God, has the great responsibility to give witness to it faithfully and prevent it from being stifled by too many useless words.

In a society where distorted and deceptive communication is at the origin of so much suffering and misunderstanding, the family can become *the favorable context for education to sincerity and truth*. To admit one's errors by asking for forgiveness and assuming one's responsibility in a consistent way is a lifestyle that is anything but spontaneous to which the children should be educated from the earliest age.

Since she speaks with wisdom, on the ideal woman's tongue there is only "kindly counsel" The wisdom of speech consists in giving voice to the good and avoiding the kind of criticism that ruins the family dialogue. For this purpose, it is necessary to let listening to the Word of God make family life more evangelical by enlightening and enriching the quality of communication.

**4. *She looks to the future confidently.*** Family life and a woman's life in the family is not as easy and accessible as it seems in the ideal portrait of the Book of Proverbs, such as when women are forced to work doubly, both inside and outside the home. It becomes of decisive importance, for example, from the practical and the affective standpoint, *for the spouses to share the educational duties and to collaborate in the domestic duties*. Today the grandparents' presence appears to be very valuable for many families, but their contribution to family life risks being recognized too little and exploited too much.

The attraction of a woman who looks to the future confidently, and thus recalls hope in the future, is of great current significance. Despite their everyday difficulties, *many families represent an authentic sign of hope* for our society. The virtue of hope has its origin in confident trust in Divine Providence.

Gratitude is certainly due to every wife and mother. As the Book of Proverbs notes, "Give her a reward of her labors". The domestic work of taking care of the home, educating the children and helping the

elderly and sick has a social value much higher than many professions that are also well paid. The *woman's irreplaceable contribution* to the family's formation and the development of society is still awaiting due recognition and appropriate evaluation.

*The family is the context for formation to many virtues and it is also a school of recognition* for the efforts lavished by parents with gratuity and love. Learning to say "thank you" is anything but automatic, and yet it is entirely essential.

«*Gift and responsibility*» make up the pair in which the work of the family and everyone in it is placed. All are called to recognize the gifts received from God, to put one's gifts at the disposal of others, and to enhance the value of the others' gifts. Each one is responsible for the others' lives. Through work each one provides for the good of everyone in the family and can also contribute to those in need.

By living in this way, family affections and ties expand to the point that they recognize every man and every woman as a brother and a sister who are all children of the same Father.

## **E. Listening to the Magisterium**

*Work is a resource for the family in the twofold meaning of a source of sustenance and development of the family and, at the same time, the place where solidarity between families and generations is exercised. The Church's teaching suggests keeping work in correlation with the family. Moreover, what development model could we imagine without the family which gathers its fruits and through its procreational choices guides its further developments? Laborem Exercens proposes the correlation of work with the family and reminds us that "the family is simultaneously a community made possible by work and the first school of work, within the home, for every person".*

## **Work and the family**

Work constitutes a foundation for the formation of *family life*, which is a natural right and something that man is called to. These two spheres of values—one linked to work and the other consequent on the family nature of human life—must be properly united and must properly permeate each other. In a way, work is a condition for making it possible to found a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work. Work and industriousness also influence the whole *process of education* in the family, for the very reason that everyone “becomes a human being” through, among other things, work, and becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education.

Obviously, two aspects of work in a sense come into play here: the one making family life and its upkeep possible, and the other making possible the achievement of the purposes of the family, especially education. Nevertheless, these two aspects of work are linked to one another and are mutually complementary in various points.

It must be remembered and affirmed that the family constitutes one of the most important terms of reference for shaping the social and ethical order of human work.

The teaching of the Church has always devoted special attention to this question, and in the present document we shall have to return to it. In fact, the family is simultaneously a *community made possible by work* and the first *school of work*, within the home, for every person. [*Laborem Exercens*, 10]

## F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

### QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE

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1. Do we thank the Lord for the work that allows us to support our family?
2. What relation is there between our being

- workers and our vocation  
as spouses and parents?
3. Are domestic work and  
childcare shared by both?

## QUESTIONS FOR THE FAMILY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

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1. In the working world,  
does unjust discrimination  
exist between men and  
women, between single  
and married women?
2. What educational role can  
the family, schools and  
the parish play in training  
young people to the value  
of industriousness and  
social responsibility?
3. How can solidarity in the  
working world be  
regained today? What  
help can the Church  
provide?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn

[BACK TO SUMMARY](#)

## 7. WORK, A CHALLENGE FOR THE FAMILY

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

<sup>18</sup>Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup>Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. <sup>10</sup>A river rises in Eden to water the garden; beyond there it divides and becomes four branches. <sup>15</sup>The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it (*Gen 2:8-10; 15*).

<sup>17</sup>To the man he said: “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, “Cursed be the ground because of you!

In toil shall you eat its yield  
all the days of your life.

<sup>18</sup>Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you,  
as you eat of the plants of the field.

<sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat,

Until you return to the ground,  
from which you were taken;

For you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return.” (*Gen 3:17-19*).

## D. Biblical Catechesis

**1. *The Lord God planted a garden in Eden.*** The garden of Eden is a gift that comes from God’s hands, a splendid place rich in water that irrigates the whole world. The first task that God entrusts to man after creating him is to *work in his garden by cultivating it and taking care of it*. The breath of life which God instilled into humanity enriches it with creativity and strength, genius and vigor, so that it will be able to collaborate in his work of creation.

God is not jealous of his work, but he puts it at men’s disposal with no diffidence and with great generosity. He not only entrusts them with the care of every other creature, but he also gives them the gift of the spirit so that they will take an active part in his creation and shape it according to his design. The spirit is the resource which God puts into the human creature so that he will take care of the whole creation for Him and with Him.

People were not created, as some religions of the Ancient Orient maintained, to substitute the work of the gods or to be their slaves in the humblest services. Humanity was willed by God to take care of created nature *by collaborating actively* in God's creative work.

In the biblical tradition, manual work enjoys great consideration, and in the rabbinical schools it is combined with study. Today, before the growing disdain for certain professions, especially handcrafts, it is very advisable *to rediscover the dignity of manual labor*. The care and cultivation of the earthly garden entrusted by God to humanity does not only concern the mind and heart, but it also uses hands. Agricultural work and handcrafted and industrial production continue to be two cornerstones of work through which men contribute to the development of every person and the whole society. As *Laborem Exercens* 9 says: "Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man *not only transforms nature*, adapting it to his own needs, but he also *achieves fulfillment* as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes "more a human being".

**2. *The Lord took man and placed him in the garden of Eden.*** God not only plants a garden but he places man in it to live there. The earthly garden is given to people so that they will live in communion with one another, and by working, take reciprocal care of their lives. Work is not a divine punishment, as imagined in the ancient myths, or a condition of slavery, as was thought in Greco-Roman culture. Instead, it is a constitutive activity of every human being.

The world expects people to get to work. They have *the possibility and the responsibility to bring about the design of God the Creator in the created world*. In this light, work is a way through which man lives his relationship and fidelity to God.

Work, therefore, is not the purpose of life. Its correct measure is as a means. The purpose is people's communion and co-responsibility with their Creator. If work becomes an end, the idolatry of work could take the place of the collaboration God requested from people.

People are not simply asked to work but to "work by taking care of and cultivating" divine creation. Man does not work on his own; he

collaborates in God's work. His collaboration, moreover, is active and responsible so that by avoiding idleness and being industrious, he "takes care of and cultivates" the earth "by working".

The work foreseen for man in the garden of Eden is that of a farmer, which consists mainly in taking care of the land so that the seed sowed will yield all of its fruitfulness and abundant fruits. To promote creation without upsetting it, to hold in great consideration the laws written into nature, to put oneself at the service of humanity, of every man and woman created in God's image and likeness, to act to free them from all forms of slavery, including labor exploitation: these are some of the tasks assigned to man so that he will contribute to making humanity one great family.

**3. *So that he will cultivate it and take care of it.*** While in the first account of creation (*Gen 1*) man is expected to rule over the animals and subject the earth, in the second account (*Gen 2*), reference is made instead to sowing and cultivation. And while in the first account despotic dominion is not intended but the generous dominion of a sovereign who seeks his people's good with wisdom and fairness, in the second account reference is made to patience and hope while awaiting the fruits.

In the period of waiting, man is asked to have the virtue of fidelity similar to the virtue requested of those in Israel who lent religious service in the temple. Human industriousness also requires the humility of a farmer who observes the land in order to guess how to cultivate it best, as well as the modesty of a carpenter who works the wood and respects its grain.

The correct use of the earth's resources implies safeguarding creation and solidarity with the future generations. An Indian proverb teaches that "we should never think that we inherited the land from our forefathers but that we have borrowed it from our children". The task of taking care of the earth calls for respect for nature and recognizing the order willed by its Creator. In this way, human work avoids the temptation to squander the riches and disfigure the beauty of planet earth, and to make it instead, according to God's dream, the garden of

coexistence and conviviality of the human family blessed by the heavenly Father.

**4. *By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat.*** The risk that work may become an idol also holds for the family. This happens when work has the absolute primacy over family relationships, when both spouses are blinded by economic profit and pin their happiness only on material well-being. The risk for workers in every era is to forget God by letting themselves be completely absorbed by worldly occupations with the conviction that they hold the satisfaction of every desire. A correct work equilibrium that can avoid these distortions calls for *family discernment regarding domestic and professional choices*. In this regard, the principle which delegates domestic work and care of the home only to women seems unfair because the whole family should be involved in this effort according to a fair distribution of duties. Regarding professional activity, on the other hand, it is surely advisable for spouses to agree to avoid long absences from the family. Unfortunately, all too often the need to provide for the family's livelihood does not leave spouses the possibility to choose wisely and harmoniously.

Neglect of religious and family life goes against the commandment to love God and neighbor, which Jesus indicated as the first and the greatest commandment (Cfr. *Mk 12: 28-31*). To recognize his fatherly love with all his gifts and to live in this horizon is what God wants for every human family. *To recognize the heavenly Father's love and live it on earth is the vocation proper to every family.*

Toil is an integral part of work. In the current era of "everything right away", education to work "by sweating" appears to be providential. The condition of life on earth, which is only temporary and always precarious, also contemplates toil and suffering for the family, especially with regard to the work to be done for survival. However, toil from work gets meaning and relief when it is taken on not for one's selfish enrichment, but to share life's resources, both inside and outside the family, especially with the poorest, in the logic of the universal destination of goods.

Sometimes parents exaggerate when they try to keep their children from any toil. They should not forget that *the family is the first school of work* where one learns to be responsible for oneself and the others who live with them. Family life, with its domestic duties, teaches to appreciate toil and to strengthen the will in view of the common well-being and reciprocal good.

### E. Listening to the Magisterium

*A Christian recognizes the value of work, but he can also see the deformations introduced into it by sin. For this reason the Christian family welcomes work as providential for its life and the life of its family members. But it avoids making work an absolute value and considers this tendency, which is so widespread today, as one of the idolatrous temptations of this era. It does not limit itself to stating a different conviction. It arranges its life so that an alternative priority will stand out. It makes its own the concern expressed in Laborem Exercens 9: “In work, whereby matter gains in nobility, man himself should not experience a lowering of his own dignity”.*

### **Work: a good for the person and his dignity**

And yet, in spite of all this toil-perhaps, in a sense, because of it-work is a good thing for man. Even though it bears the mark of a *bonum arduum*, in the terminology of Saint Thomas, this does not take away the fact that, as such, it is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man’s dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it. If one wishes to define more clearly the ethical meaning of work, it is this truth that one must particularly keep in mind [...]

Without this consideration it is impossible to understand the meaning of the virtue of industriousness, and more particularly it is impossible to understand why industriousness should be a virtue: for virtue, as a moral habit, is something whereby man becomes good as man. This fact in no way alters our justifiable anxiety that in work, whereby

*matter* gains in *nobility*, *man* himself should not experience a *lowering* of his own dignity. Again, it is well known that it is possible to use work in various ways *against man*, that it is possible to punish man with the system of forced labor in concentration camps, that work can be made into a means for oppressing man, and that in various ways it is possible to exploit human labor, that is to say the worker. All this pleads in favor of the moral obligation to link industriousness as a virtue with *the social order of work*, which will enable man to become, in work, “more a human being” and not be degraded by it not only because of the wearing out of his physical strength (which, at least up to a certain point, is inevitable), but especially through damage to the dignity and subjectivity that are proper to him.  
[*Laborem Exercens*, 9]

## F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

### QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE

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1. Do we support each another in our respective professional efforts?
2. Do we look with interest for occasions to do some manual work together?
3. Do our children understand the toil of work and the value of money earned through effort and hard work?
4. Do we also share the proceeds from our work with the poor?

### QUESTIONS FOR THE FAMILY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

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1. How does the economic crisis affect the lives of our families?
2. In our Christian communities is there concern for those who are unemployed or have precarious, poorly paid or unhealthy jobs?
3. What concrete choices can the family make to educate little children to “safeguard creation”?
4. Do forms of slavery still exist in the labor world? How can they be broken down, confronted and overcome?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn

**BACK TO SUMMARY**

## 8. CELEBRATION, A TIME FOR THE FAMILY

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

<sup>1</sup>Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed.

<sup>2</sup>Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. <sup>3</sup>So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in

creation.

<sup>4</sup>Such is the story of the heavens and the earth at their creation (*Gen 2:1-4a*).

<sup>8</sup>Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. <sup>9</sup>Six days you may labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you. <sup>11</sup>In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy (*Ex 20:8-11*).

## D. Biblical Catechesis

**1. *The seventh day of creation.*** Modern man created free time and lost the meaning of celebration. The meaning of the celebration, particularly Sunday, as “a time for man”, indeed, a “time for the family”, needs to be retrieved. Rediscovering the heart of the celebration is also decisive for humanizing work, for giving it a meaning that will not reduce it to a response to need but open it up to relations and sharing with the community, one’s neighbor and God.

The seventh day for Christians is the “Lord’s day” because it celebrates the Risen Christ who is present and living in the Christian community, the family and personal life. It is the weekly resurrection. Sunday does not break the continuity with the Hebrew sabbath but brings it to completion. To understand the uniqueness of the Christian Sunday, therefore, it is necessary to refer to the meaning of the commandment regarding the sabbath.

To sanctify the feast day, according to the commandment, the people of God must *dedicate a time reserved for God and man*. In the Old Testament there is a strong connection between the seventh day of creation and the law to sanctify the sabbath. The commandment of the sabbath, which reserves a time for God, also preserves its intention to create a time for man.

After six days of work, rest is the *completion of God's creative work*. On the first day God establishes the measure of time by alternating night and day. On the fourth day God creates the stars, the sun and the moon to "mark the fixed times, the days and the years" (*Gen 1:14*), and on the seventh day God "was finished with the work he was doing". The beginning, center and end of the week of creation are marked by time, which has its end on God's day. Worship and celebration thus give meaning to human time.

Through worship, time puts man in communion with God and God enters into human history. The seventh day preserves man's time, his space of gratuity and relations.

Celebration as "free time" is lived today in the context of the "weekend", which tends to expand more and more and take on characteristics of dispersion and evasion. The particularly agitated time of the weekend stifles the space of Sunday. Instead of rest, diversion is favored and getting out of the city, and this influences the family, especially if there are adolescent children and young adults. The family has difficulty finding a domestic moment for serenity and closeness.

Sunday loses the family dimension because it is lived more as an "individual" time rather than a "common" space. Free time often becomes a "movable" day and runs the risk of no longer being a "fixed" day in order to adapt to the demands of work and its organization.

One does not rest just to return to work but to celebrate. It is very advisable for families to rediscover *celebration as a place of encounter with God and reciprocal nearness* by creating a family atmosphere, especially when children are small. The atmosphere lived during one's early years at home are engraved forever on one's memory. The acts of faith on Sunday and the yearly festivities should also mark the family's life in the home and in taking part in the community's life. It has been said that "It is not so much that Israel preserved the sabbath but that the sabbath preserved Israel". So, too, the Christian Sunday preserves the family and the Christian

community that celebrates it because it opens up to the encounter with the holy mystery of God and renews family relations.

**2. *The commandment to keep holy the sabbath.*** The third commandment of the Decalogue *recalls the liberation from Egypt, the gift of freedom*, which creates Israel as a people. It is a “perennial sign” of the covenant between God and man in which every life shares, even animal life. The earth also shares in it (which has its rest on the seventh year) and the whole of creation (the jubilee, the sabbath of the years) (*Lv 25:1-7 and 8-55*). Therefore, the sabbath of the Decalogue has a social and a liberating meaning. The commandment is not motivated only by the work of creation but also by the redemptive action: “For remember that you too were once slaves in Egypt, and the Lord, your God, brought you from there...That is why the Lord, your God, has commanded you *to observe* the sabbath day” (*Dt 5:15*). The work of creation and the remembrance of the liberation go hand in hand. “To observe the sabbath” means to make an “exodus” for the sake of human freedom going from “slavery” to “service”. For six days man will serve by toiling, but on the seventh day he will stop the servile work so that he can serve in gratitude and praise. So the sabbath takes out from service/slavery to introduce into service/ freedom.

In the Liturgy there is a wonderful prayer (the *Offertory Prayer* of the Twentieth Sunday) that can help us to rediscover the celebration as the completion of human work: “O Lord, accept our gifts in this mysterious encounter between our poverty and your greatness. We offer you the things you have given us and you, in exchange, give us yourself”. The text invokes the wondrous encounter between our poverty and God’s greatness.

This exchange is made in the encounter between work and celebration, between the “productive” dimension and the “gratuitous” dimension of life. At home and in the Christian community, the family experiences the joy of transforming everyday life into a living liturgy. In prayer at home, the couple prepares and irradiates the festive liturgical celebration. If children see their parents pray before them and with them, they will learn to pray in the ecclesial community.

3. *The Offertory Prayer mentioned earlier concludes in this way: You, in exchange, give us yourself.* The invocation asks God not only for health, serenity and family peace, but nothing less than Himself.

The meaning of everyday toil is to transform our work into a grateful offering in recognition of the gift that has been given to us: life, one's spouse, one's children, health, work, one's falls and recoveries in life. *Christian freedom consists in man's liberation from work and in work so that he will be free for God and for others.* The man and the woman, but especially the family, should include in their lifestyle the meaning of celebration in order to live not only as subjects in need, but also as a community of encounter.

*The encounter with God and with others is the heart of the celebration.*

The Sunday meal, at home and with the community, is different from an everyday meal. An everyday meal is for survival while the Sunday meal is to experience the joy of the encounter.

The festive meal is a time for God, a space for listening, communion and readiness for worship and charity. Celebration and service are the two fundamental forms of the law through which God is honored and his gift of love is welcomed: in worship, God communicates his charity to us gratuitously; in service, the gift received becomes love that is shared and lived with others. The *dies Domini* must also become a *dies hominis!* If the family approaches the celebration in this way, it will be able to live it as "the Lord's day".

## E. Listening to the Magisterium

*A family that knows how to suspend the continuous flow of time and take a break to gratefully remember the benefits received from its Lord is training itself to enter into the Lord's rest. The family called to rest in the Lord knows how to redirect the dispersion of the days towards the day of gratitude. It knows how to convert the expectation of the days into the one expectation of the Lord's Day. It returns like the healed leper to give thanks to its Lord for the salvation of all.*

*Through its insistent intercession, it shortens the time of waiting for the eighth day, for which the Bridegroom promised the bride: “‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen! Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).*

## **Remember the sabbath**

The commandment of the Decalogue by which God decrees the Sabbath observance is formulated in the Book of Exodus in a distinctive way: “Remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it holy” (20:8). And the inspired text goes on to give the reason for this, recalling as it does the work of God: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (v. 11).

Before decreeing that something be *done*, the commandment urges that something be *remembered*. It is a call to awaken remembrance of the grand and fundamental work of God which is creation, a remembrance which must inspire the entire religious life of man and then fill the day on which man is called to *rest*. Rest therefore acquires a sacred value: the faithful are called to rest not only *as* God rested, but to rest *in* the Lord, bringing the entire creation to him, in praise and thanksgiving, intimate as a child and friendly as a spouse.

The connection between Sabbath rest and the theme of “remembering” God’s wonders is found also in the Book of Deuteronomy (5:12-15), where the precept is grounded less in the work of creation than in the work of liberation accomplished by God in the Exodus: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with mighty hand and outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (*Dt* 5:15).

This formulation complements the one we have already seen; and taken together, the two reveal the meaning of “the Lord’s Day” within a single theological vision which fuses creation and salvation. Therefore, the main point of the precept is not just any kind of *interruption* of work, but the *celebration* of the marvels which God has wrought.

Insofar as this “remembrance” is alive, *full of thanksgiving and of the praise of God*, human rest on the Lord’s Day takes on its full meaning. It is then that man enters the depths of God’s “rest” and can experience a tremor of the Creator’s joy when, after the creation, he saw that all he had made “was very good” (*Gen 1:31*).  
[*Dies Domini*, 16-17]

## F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

### QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE

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1. In our family, how do we live Sunday?
2. Is our Sunday a day of “rest in the Lord”?
3. For the Bible, the celebration is a time of inner freedom, reciprocal listening and family nearness: how is our domestic atmosphere on Sunday?
4. The encounter with God and with others is the heart of the celebration: does our Sunday really put the celebration of God and time for others at the center?

### QUESTIONS FOR THE FAMILY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

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1. In today’s society, what are the lifestyles of celebration and free time?

2. What experiences do the Christian communities propose to live Sunday as a time for God and for others?
3. Parish and ecclesial groups help to “observe Sunday”: what initiatives can be carried out?
4. In what way can the Sunday celebration become the “burning bush” that helps to rediscover the meaning of God?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn

**BACK TO SUMMARY**

## 9. CELEBRATION, A TIME FOR THE LORD

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

<sup>23</sup>As he was passing through a field of grain on the sabbath, his disciples began to make a path while picking the heads of grain. <sup>24</sup>At this the Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the sabbath?” <sup>25</sup>He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions were hungry? <sup>26</sup>How he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of offering that

only the priests could lawfully eat, and shared it with his companions?  
” 27 Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath (*Mk 2:23-27*).

<sup>1</sup>After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup>Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee’s sons, and two others of his disciples. <sup>3</sup>Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We also will come with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup>When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Jesus said to them, “Children, have you caught anything to eat?” <sup>6</sup>They answered him, “No.” So he said to them, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.” So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. <sup>7</sup>So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. <sup>8</sup>The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. <sup>9</sup>When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. <sup>10</sup>Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you just caught.” <sup>11</sup>So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fiftythree large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup>Jesus said to them, “Come, have breakfast.” And none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they realized it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. <sup>14</sup>This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead (*Jn 21:1-14*).

## D. Biblical Catechesis

1. ***Jesus, “Lord” of the sabbath.*** Sunday begins as a weekly “*memorial*” of Jesus’ resurrection. It celebrates the current

“*presence*” of the Risen Lord, and awaits the “*promise*” of his glorious coming.

In the early period of Christianity, the *dies dominicus* did not replace the Hebrew sabbath immediately but existed in symbiosis with it. To understand this, we have to reflect on three moments: the relation between Jesus and the sabbath; the rise of the first day of the week; Sunday in the early centuries. In these three moments the spiritual and theological meaning of the Christian Sunday is pointed out as a memory, presence and promise.

In the Gospel, Jesus showed particular freedom with regard to the sabbath, so much so that his activity of performing miracles seems to be concentrated on that day. Think of the episode of the ears of wheat gathered on the sabbath (*Mk* 2:23-28; *Mt* 12:18; *Lk* 6:15); the healing of the man with the withered hand (*Mk* 3:16; *Mt* 12:9-14; *Lk* 6:6-11), the crippled woman (*Lk* 13:10-17), and a man suffering from dropsy (*Lk* 14:1-6). The evangelist John puts the healing of the paralytic at the pool on the sabbath (*Jn* 5:1-18) and the account of the blind man from birth (*Jn* 9:1-41). With regard to the sabbath, Jesus moves in a threefold perspective. First, Jesus confirms veneration for the commandment to observe the sabbath. Beyond the pharisees’ legalistic practice, Jesus recognizes, lives and recommends the significance of the sabbath. The episode of the ears of wheat plucked on the sabbath interprets the Law in the light of God’s will: “The sabbath is made for man, not man for the sabbath”. The purpose of the sabbath is human life in fullness (*Mk* 3:4; *Mt* 12:11-12). Second, Jesus completes the meaning of the sabbath by liberating man from evil. The sabbath is the summit of God’s work and man is created for the authentic sabbath: that is, communion with God. Jesus’ mission is carried out in offering humanity the grace to fulfill its vocation for which God created it from the beginning. This holds especially for those who are wounded in their bodies and souls: the sick, the crippled, the blind and sinners.

The sabbath is the day of Jesus’ acts of liberation. Finally, Jesus is the “Lord” of the sabbath. By renewing the work of creation and

liberation from evil, Jesus reveals himself as the fullness of life, the end of the commandment regarding the sabbath.

Jesus is the Lord of the sabbath because he is the Son, and as the Son he introduces us into the fullness of the sabbath.

To experience *the “presence” of the Risen Lord*, the family should let itself be enlightened by the Sunday Eucharist. The celebration of Mass becomes the living, beating heart of the Lord’s day, of his presence here and today as the Risen Lord. The Eucharist lets us reach the shore of God’s holy mystery. On Sunday, the family finds the center of the week, the day that preserves its everyday life. This happens when the family asks itself: can we find the mystery of God together? In its simplicity, the celebration lets the “mystery” of God reach us. The ritual puts the family in contact with the source of life, communion with God and fraternal communion. In fact, it does much more: the Christian mystery is *the new life of the Risen Jesus who makes himself present in the Eucharistic assembly*. The Sunday Eucharist is the center of Sunday and the celebration. In it the family receives the new life of the Risen Lord, accepts the gift of the Spirit, listens to the Word, shares the Eucharistic bread, and expresses itself in fraternal love. For this reason, Sunday is the lord of the days, the day of the encounter with the Risen Lord!

**2. *The “first day of the week”.*** Sunday is the “memorial” of Jesus’ Resurrection. According to the concordant evangelical testimonies, Christ arose on the “first day of the week” (*Mk 16:2,9; Mt 28:1; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1*). On that day, all the events on which the Christian faith is founded took place: Jesus’ resurrection, the paschal apparitions, the effusion of the Spirit. The early Christians took up the Hebrew weekly rhythm, but starting from the resurrection, they gave fundamental importance to the “first day after the sabbath” (*Lk 24:1*). In the framework of this day John and Luke place the remembrance of the meals taken with the Risen Lord (*Lk 24:13-35; and Jn 21:1-14*) and color them with Eucharistic features. The text of *John 21* expresses well the atmosphere of the Eucharistic meetings of the early Christian communities. Jesus “took, gave thanks and distributed” the bread broken (*Jn 21:12, 9-14*) and was “recognized in breaking the bread”

(Lk 24:30,35). In continuity with Jesus' meals, the "meetings" are put on the first day of the week, which are recalled in *Acts* 20:7 as the moment for the community assembly to "break bread" and listen to the apostle's word, as mentioned in *1 Cor* 16:2, and the day to take up the collection for the poor of Jerusalem. So Sunday implies three elements: listening to the Word, breaking the bread for fraternal sharing, and charity. Later, in *Rev* 1:10, it will be called the "Lord's Day". The early Church thus affirms the bond of continuity and difference with the sabbath. The "Lord's day" is the day of the memorial of the resurrection.

By taking part in Mass, the family dedicates space and time, offers energies and resources, and learns that life is not just made up of needs to be satisfied but of relationships to be built. The gratuity of the Sunday Eucharist calls for the *family to take part in the memorial of Jesus' resurrection*. In the Mass the family nourishes itself at the table of the word and the bread, which give flavor and meaning to the words and the food shared at table in the home.

From early childhood children should be educated to listen to the word by taking up what they heard in the community again at home. This will enable them to discover Sunday as the "Lord's day". The encounter with the Risen Jesus, at the center of Sunday, must feed on the memorial of Jesus, the Gospel account, the reality of the bread broken and the body given up. The memorial of the Crucified Risen Lord marks the difference between Sunday and free time: if we do not encounter Him, the celebration does not take place, communion is just a feeling, and charity is reduced to a gesture of solidarity which does not build the Christian community and educate to the mission. As it introduces us into God's heart, the Sunday Eucharist makes the family, and in some way the family, in the Christian community, makes the Eucharist.

**3. *Sunday in the early centuries.*** In the earliest period of the Church's life, Sunday and the Eucharist on the Lord's day also put great emphasis on the expectation of the Lord's coming.

St. Justin, a philosopher and martyr, left us an evocative image of the Christian community gathered together on the “Lord’s day”, which corresponds to the day after the sabbath.

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need (Cfr. *The First Apology*, Chapter 37).

Sunday is the day for the Christians’ assembly and it lets us feel the atmosphere of the first communities that lived the Sunday Eucharist as an “anticipation” of the new life given by the Risen Lord and a “promise” of the transformation of the world. Today the Church and the family are called once again to this gushing spring so that the originality of the Christian Sunday will not be lost. Especially during some periods of the year, such as Advent and Christmas, the expectation of the Lord’s coming is renewed through the actions that nurture a sense of hope in the family and the community.

### **E. Listening to the Magisterium**

*The family is jealous of Sunday, the “day of joy and rest”: this is how the Second Vatican Council defines it in the Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. It should be jealous of Sunday not so much as a free day of collective rest or a popular feast, but above all as the*

*“Lord’s day”*: that is, the day of the Eucharistic assembly from which all of Christian life starts and towards which it converges (source and culmination), in unity of time and place. The other aspects of Sunday come later; they are important but not essential. The Eucharistic assembly is necessary for the family. The Christian family organizes its life and educates itself and its children so that it can give Mass precedence over any other commitments.

## **Sunday, the Lord’s day**

By a tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ’s resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day; with good reason this, then, bears the name of the Lord’s day or Sunday. For on this day Christ’s faithful are bound to come together into one place so that by hearing the word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, they may call to mind the passion, the resurrection and the glorification of the Lord Jesus, and may thank God who “has begotten them again, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto a living hope” (*1 Pt* 1:3).

Hence the Lord’s day is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work. Other celebrations, unless they be truly of greatest importance, shall not have precedence over the Sunday which is the foundation and kernel of the whole liturgical year.  
[*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106]

## **F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group**

### **QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE**

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1. How are Sunday and the encounter with the Risen Lord felt in our family?

2. Do the actions and rituals at home and in the community make it possible to perceive the new life of the Risen Lord and the joy of His presence?
3. Does the experience of the gratuity of things and time, listening to the Word at home and in church, and the shared Eucharistic table let us live Sunday as a weekly Easter?
4. At what moments of the year in particular, and through what actions do we experience the Sunday Eucharist as a time of waiting and hope?

## QUESTIONS FOR THE FAMILY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

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1. In today's society, what impedes us from living Sunday as *dies dominicus* (the Lord's day)?
2. Do education to the ritual and the atmosphere of the Christian community really introduce us into the encounter with the Crucified and Risen Lord?
3. How can Sunday become the day of the Gospel and

the memorial of Jesus' resurrection?

4. In what way does the path of the liturgical year, with its times and celebrations, express the expectation of the Lord?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn

**BACK TO SUMMARY**

## 10. CELEBRATION, A TIME FOR THE COMMUNITY

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

<sup>46</sup>Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (*Acts 2:46-47*).

<sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all (*Acts 4:33*).

<sup>42</sup>And all day long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus (*Acts 5:42*).

<sup>43</sup>“But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; <sup>44</sup>whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. <sup>45</sup>For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (*Mk 10: 43-45*).

<sup>1</sup>Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Symeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who was a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

<sup>2</sup>While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup> Then, completing their fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them off. <sup>4</sup>So they, sent forth by the holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup>When they arrived in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. They had John also as their assistant (*Acts* 13:1-5).

#### D. Biblical Catechesis

**1. A day of communion.** The Lord’s day makes us live the celebration as a time for others, a day of *communion* and *mission*. The Eucharist is the remembrance of Jesus’ action: *this is the body given up, this is the blood shed for you and for everyone*. “For you and for everyone” closely links fraternal life (*for you*) and openness to everyone (*for the multitude*). In the conjunction “and” lies all the power of the evangelizing mission of the family and the community: it is given to us so that it will be for everyone.

The Church that is born from the Sunday Eucharist *is open to all*. The first form of mission is to build communion among believers, to make the community a family of families. This is also the fundamental law of the mission: the united and harmonious Church is the most persuasive witness for the world. The Church can become a school of mission only if it is the house of communion.

The passages from the *Acts of the Apostles* reported above offer us the image of the first communities that lived their Christian experience between the home and the temple. The celebration and Sunday are the moment for renewing ecclesial life so that the community of believers will take on the atmosphere of family life and the family will open up to the horizon of ecclesial communion.

The local Church and the parish are the concrete presence of the Gospel in the heart of human life. They are the most well known

figures of the Church because of their characteristics of nearness and hospitality for all. In many countries, the parishes have indicated the “good life” according to the Gospel of Jesus and upheld the sense of belonging to the Church. As the Second Vatican Council states, in the local Churches “the Church...goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 40). In the parish, families, which are the “domestic church”, act in such a way that the parish community will be a church in the midst of the people’s homes. Daily life, with its rhythm of work and celebration, allows the world to enter the home and opens the home to the world. On the other hand, the Christian community has to take care of families and remove them from the temptation to withdraw into themselves, into their “apartment”, and open them instead to the paths of faith.

In the family, life is transmitted as a gift and promise; in the parish, the promise contained in the gift of life is welcomed and nourished.

The Lord’s day becomes the day of the Church when it helps to experience the beauty of a Sunday lived together, avoiding the triviality of a consumerist weekend, in order to achieve at times experiences of fraternal communion among families.

**2. A day of charity.** The Lord’s day as *dies ecclesiae* becomes the day of charity. The Church that is nourished at the Sunday Eucharist is the *community at the service of all*. The family, although not by itself, is the network in which this service is transmitted. The beautiful text from the Gospel of Mark reported above illustrates how in the Sunday Eucharist Jesus is in our midst as one who serves. This is the criterion of service in the community: those who want to be the greatest shall become small (*your servant*), and those who want to be first should dedicate themselves to the poor and the little ones (*servant of all*). The service of charity is a characteristic feature of the Christian Sunday. Some liturgical times (Advent and especially Lent) propose it as an essential task for the families and the community.

Sunday thus becomes the “day of charity”.

The service of charity expresses the desire for communion with God and our brothers and sisters. Throughout the week, the family

responds to everyday needs, but family life cannot stop at just giving things and carrying out tasks: it must make the bond grow between persons, the good life in faith and charity. Without any experience of service at home or any practice of mutual aid and sharing in common difficulties, it will be hard for a heart to grow that is capable of love. In the family, children experience day after day their parents' tireless dedication and their humble service, and they learn from their example the secret of love. When in the parish community the children and young people have to expand the horizon of charity to other people, they will be able to share the experience of love and service they learned at home. *The practical teaching of charity*, especially in families with only one child, should immediately open up to small or great forms of service to others.

3. *A day for sending on a mission.* The missionary dimension of the Church is at the center of the Sunday Eucharist and opens the doors of family life to the world. The *Sunday community is by definition a missionary community*. In the beautiful icon from the Book of the Acts quoted above, the community of Antioch is depicted which, as it celebrates the Lord, perhaps on Sunday, it is encouraged by the Spirit to the mission. On the day of worship, the community becomes missionary. The mission not only concerns the individuals who are sent, but it also shows its efficacy when the whole Church, with the variety of its charismas, ministries and vocations, becomes the real sign of Christ's charity for all people.

The missionary forms of the community are different, but all must lead people to Christ. The family is called to evangelize in its own irreplaceable way: inside the family, in its environment (neighbors, friends, relatives), in the ecclesial community, and in society.

The Eucharistic community will expand its outlook to a universal horizon by taking on Paul's concern for all the Churches. If the *missio ad gentes* is the missionary horizon for the Church, the local Church, on its own territory, is also *sent to proclaim the Gospel*.

Education to welcoming others, those who are different or immigrants, should start from the families and get an impulse from the community. Even before this, it is often in the family where insight

grows about a life spent for others, dedicated to the mission, and to commitment in the world. In many Christian families, with a great experience of humanity and love, and by attending the Sunday Eucharist, some splendid vocations have blossomed for service in society, commitment in volunteer work, witness in politics and the mission in the other countries of the world. The relation between Sunday and the Eucharist, between the Church and the mission, between the family and service to others, calls for a renewed task of introduction to the essentials of Christian life, which will spur a *new missionary awareness*. The extraordinary power of Sunday, centered on the domestic Eucharist, even brought the martyrs of Abitinia to martyrdom.

«Did you act against the rules of the emperors and the Caesars by gathering all of these together?». And the presbyter Saturninus, inspired by the Spirit of the Lord, answered: «We celebrated the Sunday Eucharist without worrying about them». The pro-consul asked: «Why?». He answered: «Because the Sunday Eucharist cannot be neglected» (IX). «In your home were meetings held against the emperors' decree?».

Emeritus, filled with the Holy Spirit, said: «In my home we celebrated the Sunday Eucharist». And the other said: «Why did you allow them to enter?». He replied: «Because they are my brothers and I could not have prevented it». «And yet – the pro-consul repeated – you had the duty to prevent it».

And he said: «I could not because we Christians cannot live without the Sunday Eucharist» (*Acta SS. Saturnini, Dativi et aliorum plurimorum Martyrum in Africa*, XI).

In the first centuries, the Sunday Eucharist enabled the Church to spread to the confines of the world. Today, the daily life of the family and the Church is still invited to start again from there: without the Sunday Eucharist Christians cannot live.

## E. Listening to the Magisterium

*Sunday is the repetition of the brief cycle of weekly time, of the great mystery of Easter. It is also called the “little Easter Sunday”. “Living in accordance with the Lord’s day” means to live in the awareness of the liberation brought about by Christ so that his victory will be fully manifested to all men through a profoundly renewed existence. Sunday as a celebration for others should not be understood only from the liturgical viewpoint: it is a human value in addition to a Christian gift. Not living days that are all the same (and only Sunday has the secret of diversity), and dedicating time to the community and to charity is an effective way to liberate man from the servitude of work.*

### **Living in accordance with the Lord’s day**

From the beginning Christians were clearly conscious of this radical newness which the Eucharist brings to human life. The faithful immediately perceived the profound influence of the Eucharistic celebration on their manner of life. Saint Ignatius of Antioch expressed this truth when he called Christians “those who have attained a new hope,” and described them as “those living in accordance with the Lord’s Day” (*iuxta dominicam viventes*). This phrase of the great Antiochene martyr highlights the connection between the reality of the Eucharist and everyday Christian life. The Christians’ customary practice of gathering on the first day after the Sabbath to celebrate the resurrection of Christ – according to the account of Saint Justin Martyr – is also what defines the form of a life renewed by an encounter with Christ. Saint Ignatius’ phrase – “living in accordance with the Lord’s Day” – also emphasizes that this holy day becomes paradigmatic for every other day of the week. Indeed, it is defined by something more than the simple suspension of one’s ordinary activities, a sort of parenthesis in one’s usual daily rhythm. Christians have always experienced this day as the first day of the week, since it commemorates the radical newness brought by Christ. Sunday is thus the day when Christians rediscover the Eucharistic form which their lives are meant to have. “Living in accordance with the Lord’s Day” means living in the awareness of the liberation brought by Christ and making our lives a constant self-offering to God, so that his victory may be fully revealed to all humanity through

a profoundly renewed existence.  
[*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 72]

## F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

### QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE

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1. Does our family sense that Sunday is a time with and for others?
2. How are relations between our family, the other families and the Christian community?
3. What acts of service and charity do we perform in our home during the week? What charitable efforts do we suggest for others, especially the neediest?
4. Does our home have an open door to the world, its problems and needs?

### QUESTIONS FOR THE FAMILY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

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1. The community dimension of Sunday appears to be lived very little today. What remedies and suggestions can we find?
2. Do the Christian communities transmit the experience of communion

- to families? Do families urge the Christian communities to have a more fraternal lifestyle?
3. Has charity become a constant concern of parish life? Are the charitable associations and institutions (Caritas) an expression of the whole community?
  4. How do families help each another in educating to the value of a life spent for others, to awakening vocations for the mission?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn