

Prayers for the Family

A novena and prayer booklet for today's Catholic family featuring the teachings of Pope Francis



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This booklet and the enclosed original catechesis, prayers, and novena are an exclusive publication of Steubenville Press, a division of Nelson Fine Art and Gifts.

980 Lincoln Avenue
Steubenville, OH 43952
740.282.5334

www.steubenvillepress.com

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Printed in the USA, thanks be to God!

Prayers available online at NovenaForTheFamily.com



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What is the Family?

A brief catechesis based on the teachings of Pope Francis.

What is a family?

While the theological and practical definition of “family” is hotly debated in modern Western society, both within current popular culture, as well as, sadly, within the Church, a “family” has generally been characterized, across cultures and throughout history, by many articulations of this simple formula:

One man and one woman, united through marriage, raising children.

The “raising children” element of a family described here is not meant to imply that couples who experience infertility are not legitimate families, but rather that welcoming new human life, whether by actual procreation or by spiritual and/or legal adoption, is the ancient hallmark of the family. Those who find themselves unable to have children, the Catholic Church teaches, are still commended to live conjugal lives full of charity, hospitality, and sacrifice—the very virtues fostered by parenthood—with the Holy Spirit offering comfort throughout the pains of infertility.

It is nonetheless God's intended purpose, revealed through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, that through the mystery of marriage and the resulting procreation and rearing of children, humanity not only continues to be sustained on a practical level, but is also able to enter into the marital and creative character of God, who Himself is the original procreative actor of all existence.

The honor and dignity of family life can be fully appreciated by reflecting upon the Holy Trinity, which is itself the paragon and archetype of all human families, a "God-Family" of sorts. Within the Trinity is contained the core character of every family: God the Father as Lover, Jesus Christ as Beloved, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the unity of the Father and the Son.

Pope Francis, Marriage, and Family Life

Pope Francis himself, very much aware of and moved by this truth, and desiring the laity of the Church to understand their role more fully, has undertaken a special mission to promote, foster, and reinvigorate the life of the family. Francis' affinity for marriage and family life has been clear since the beginning of his pontificate, both from the frequency of his remarks on the subject, as well the gentleness and joy with which he presents the subject in his public speeches and writings.

It is observably and unavoidably true that, due to Francis' personal popularity and magnetic personality, there has been a war of sorts over his public image and perception of his personal views, with special interest groups and individuals wishing to ascribe positions and causes to the Holy Father that he himself does not advocate or even choose to involve himself with. Such advocates would have the general public believing that Pope Francis spends a great deal more time addressing certain fringe issues than he actually does, and few are likely to realize that their pet topic shows up with paltry frequency in the teachings of Pope Francis when compared with marriage and family life, arguably the most common subject about which Pope Francis publicly remarks and teaches.

To put it simply, Pope Francis' teachings on marriage and family life are succinct, pastoral, sometimes whimsical, and often quite beautiful. It is here that his pastoral character truly shines forth—the Pope, far from being an ivory tower, has a joyful demeanor that draws people to himself, and therefore to Christ, while communicating the ancient truths of the Church to modern ears.

Out of respect for the institution of the family, and recognizing Pope Francis' unique ability to teach on this subject, we offer you this brief catechesis, directly

from Pope Francis himself, to strengthen and inspire your own views on the family, the divinely-ordered building block for all humanity.

The Family Begins with a Marriage

“I think first and foremost of the stable union of man and woman in marriage. This union is born of their love, as a sign and presence of God’s own love, and of the acknowledgment and acceptance of the goodness of sexual differentiation, whereby spouses can become one flesh (cf. Gen 2:24) and are enabled to give birth to a new life, a manifestation of the Creator’s goodness, wisdom and loving plan. Grounded in this love, a man and a woman can promise each other mutual love in a gesture which engages their entire lives and mirrors many features of faith. Promising love forever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings, a plan which sustains us and enables



us to surrender our future entirely to the one we love.”
-The Joy of the Gospel, no. 52

God and Prayer: a Binding Force for Marriage

“We are well aware of how many difficulties two spouses experience.... The important thing is to keep alive their bond with God, who stands as the foundation of the marital bond. And the true bond is always the Lord. When the family prays, the bond is preserved. When the husband prays for his wife and the wife prays for her husband, that bond becomes strong; one praying for the other.”

-General Audience at St. Peter’s Square, April 2nd, 2014

Fighting Between Spouses

“It is true that there are so many difficulties in married life, so many, when there is insufficient work or money, when the children have problems. There is so much to contend with. And many times the husband and wife become a little fractious and argue between themselves. They argue, this is how it is, there is always arguing in marriage, sometimes the plates even fly. Yet we must not become saddened by this, this is the human condition. The secret is that love is stronger than the moment when there is arguing, and therefore I always advise spouses: do not let a day when you have argued end without making peace. Always! And to make peace it isn’t necessary to call

the United Nations to come to the house and make peace. A little gesture is sufficient, a caress, and then let it be! Until tomorrow! And tomorrow begin again. And this is life, carrying on, carrying on with courage and the desire to live together. And this is truly great, it is beautiful! Married life is such a beautiful thing and we must treasure it always.”

-General Audience at St. Peter's Square, April 2nd, 2014

Concerning the Rearing of Children

“All children must be able to play, study, pray and grow, in their own families, and do so in a harmonious context of love and serenity. It is their right and our duty. Many people instead of letting them play make slaves of them: this is a scourge. A serene childhood allows children to look forward with confidence to life and the future. Woe to those who stifle their joyful impulse of hope!”

-General Audience at St. Peter's Square, June 12th, 2013

On Family Unity

“But what is the power that unites the family? It is precisely love, and God is the one who sows love in our hearts, the love of God: It is precisely the love of God that gives meaning to the little daily duties and also helps us face the great trials.”

-Angelus address, August 12th, 2013

The Domestic Church

“Families are the domestic Church, where Jesus grows; he grows in the love of spouses, he grows in the lives of children. That is why the enemy so often attacks the family. The devil does not want the family; he tries to destroy it, to make sure that there is no love there. Families are this domestic Church.”

-Address to the Convocation of the Renewal of the Holy Spirit, Olympic Stadium, June 1st, 2014

Grandparents

“They are our wisdom, they are the wisdom of the Church—the elderly whom we so often discard, grandparents, the elderly ... grandmothers and grandfathers are our strength and our wisdom. May the Lord always give us wise elders! Elderly men and women who can pass on to us the memory of our people, the memory of the Church. May they also give us what the Letter to the Hebrews says about them: a sense of joy. It says that our forebears, our elders, greeted God’s promises from afar. May this be what they teach us.”

-Address to the Convocation of the Renewal of the Holy Spirit, Olympic Stadium, June 1st, 2014

Handing on the Faith

“In the family, faith accompanies every age of life, beginning with childhood: children learn to trust in the love of their parents. This is why it is so important that

within their families, parents encourage shared expressions of faith which can help children gradually to mature in their own faith. Young people in particular, who are going through a period in their lives which is so complex, rich, and important for their faith, ought to feel the constant closeness and support of their families and the Church in their journey of faith. We have all seen, during World Youth Days, the joy that young people show in their faith and their desire for an evermore solid and generous life of faith. Young people want to live life to the fullest. Encountering Christ, letting themselves be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness, which is stronger than our every weakness."

-The Joy of the Gospel, no. 53

Pope Francis' Prayer for the 2015 Bishops' Synod on the Family

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendor of true love, to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families, too, may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic Churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division: may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth, may the approaching Synod of Bishops make us once more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the family and its beauty in God's plan.

*Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer.
Amen.*



Pope Francis' Prayer to the Holy Spirit Given June 1st, 2014, at Olympic Stadium, Rome

Lord, look upon your people as we await the Holy Spirit. Watch over our young people, watch over our families, watch over our children, watch over our sick, watch over our priests, consecrated men and women, and us bishops... Watch over us all. And grant us that holy inebriation, the drunkenness of the Spirit, which enables us to speak all languages, the languages of charity, ever close to our brothers and sisters who need us. Teach us not to quarrel among ourselves to get a little more power; teach us to be humble, teach us to love the Church more than our own side, than our internal squabbles; teach us to have a heart open to receive the Spirit. Lord, send forth your Spirit upon us! Amen.

Prayer for Fatherhood

Eternal God, originator of Fatherhood, I offer up to you the blessed office of Father. May the men who occupy this dignified place protect and care for their children and wives with valiant honesty, heroic chastity, noble humility, and stern sobriety.

Ignite a fire in the hearts of men, O God, so that they may respond to the Divine call to fatherhood, both natural and spiritual, and model themselves after the holy example of Blessed Joseph, Father of the Universal Church.

Through his intercession, may fathers be strengthened to flee from sin, subdue their flesh, wrestle with the powers of corruption, banish the darkness, and obtain victory over hell and its agents.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, sanctifier of all men, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.



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