



Pontifical Council
for the Family

Preparatory Catecheses for the Fifth World Meeting of Families



Archbishop
of Valencia

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Preparatory Catecheses for the Fifth World Meeting of Families



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Introduction: Human love cannot exist if it seeks to detach itself from the Cross

Opening Address of Benedict XVI at the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome on **the family and the Christian community** (June 6, 2005)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I very willingly accepted the invitation to introduce our Diocesan Convention with a Reflection, first of all because it gives me the chance to meet you, of having direct contact with you, and then too, because I can help you acquire a deeper understanding of the sense and purpose of the pastoral journey the Church of Rome is making.

I greet with affection each one of you, Bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious, and in particular you lay people and families who consciously take on those duties of responsibility and Christian witness that have their root in the sacrament of Baptism and, for those who are married, in the sacrament of Marriage. I cordially thank the Cardinal Vicar and the couple, Luca and Adriana Pasquale, for their words on behalf of you all.

Missionary commitment

This Convention and the guidelines it will provide for the pastoral year are a new stage on the journey begun by the Church of Rome, based on the Diocesan Synod, with the "City Mission", desired by our deeply loved Pope John Paul II in preparation for the Great Jubilee of 2000. In that Mission all the components of our Diocese - parishes, religious communities, associations and movements - were mobilized, not only for a mission to the people of Rome, but to be themselves "a people of God in mission", putting into practice John Paul II's felicitous expression: "The parish must seek itself outside itself" and find itself, that is, in the places where the people live. So it was that during the City Mission thousands of Christians of Rome, mainly lay people, became missionaries and took the word of faith first to the families in the various districts of the city, and then to the different workplaces, hospitals, schools and universities, and the environments of culture and leisure time.

After the Holy Year, my beloved Predecessor asked you not to stop on this journey and not to lose the apostolic energies kindled or the fruits of grace gathered. Therefore, since 2001, the fundamental pastoral policy of the Diocese has been to give the mission a permanent form, and to impress a more decidedly missionary approach on the life and activities of the parishes and of every other ecclesial situation.

I want to tell you first of all that I fully intend to confirm this decision: indeed, it is proving to be more and more necessary. There are no alternatives to it in a social and cultural context in which many forces are working to distance us from the faith and from Christian life.

For two years now the missionary commitment of the Church of Rome has focused above all on the family. This is not only because today this fundamental human reality is subjected to a multitude of problems and threats and is therefore especially in need of evangelization and practical support, but also because Christian families constitute a crucial resource for education in the faith, for the edification of the Church as communion and for her ability to be a missionary presence in the most varied situations of life, as well as to act as a Christian leaven

in the widespread culture and social structures.

We will also continue along these lines in the coming pastoral year, and so the theme of our Convention is "Family and Christian community: formation of the person and transmission of the faith".

The assumption from which it is necessary to set out, if we are to understand the family mission in the Christian community and its tasks of forming the person and transmitting the faith, is always that of the meaning of marriage and the family in the plan of God, Creator and Saviour. This will therefore be the focus of my Reflection this evening and I will refer to the teaching of the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (Part II, nn. 12-16).

The anthropological foundation of the family

Marriage and the family are not in fact a chance sociological construction, the product of particular historical and financial situations. On the other hand, the question of the right relationship between the man and the woman is rooted in the essential core of the human being and it is only by starting from here that its response can be found. In other words, it cannot be separated from the ancient but ever new human question: Who am I? What is a human being? And this question, in turn, cannot be separated from the question about God: Does God exist? Who is God? What is his face truly like?

The Bible gives one consequential answer to these two queries: the human being is created in the image of God, and God himself is love. It is therefore the vocation to love that makes the human person an authentic image of God: man and woman come to resemble God to the extent that they become loving people.

This fundamental connection between God and the person gives rise to another: the indissoluble connection between spirit and body: in fact, the human being is a soul that finds expression in a body and a body that is enlivened by an immortal spirit.

The body, therefore, both male and female, also has, as it were, a theological character: it is not merely a body; and what is biological in the human being is not merely biological but is the expression and the fulfilment of our humanity.

Likewise, human sexuality is not juxtaposed to our being as person but part of it. Only when sexuality is integrated within the person does it successfully acquire meaning. Thus, these two links, between the human being with God and in the human being, of the body with the spirit, give rise to a third: the connection between the person and the institution. Indeed, the totality of the person includes the dimension of time, and the person's "yes" is a step beyond the present moment: in its wholeness, the "yes" means "always", it creates the space for faithfulness. Only in this space can faith develop, which provides a future and enables children, the fruit of love, to believe in human beings and in their future in difficult times.

The freedom of the "yes", therefore, reveals itself to be freedom capable of assuming what is definitive: the greatest expression of freedom is not the search for pleasure without ever coming to a real decision; this apparent, permanent openness seems to be the realization of freedom, but it is not true. The true expression of freedom is the capacity to choose a definitive gift in which freedom, in being given, is fully rediscovered. In practice, the personal and reciprocal "yes" of the man and the woman makes room for the future, for the authentic humanity of each of them. At the same time, it is an assent to the gift of a new life. Therefore, this personal "yes" must also be a publicly responsible "yes", with which the spouses take on the public responsibility of fidelity, also guaranteeing the future of the community. None of us, in fact, belongs exclusively to himself or herself: one and all are therefore called to take on in their inmost depths their own public responsibility. Marriage as an institution is thus not an undue interference of society or of authority. The external imposition of form on the most private reality of life is instead an intrinsic requirement of the covenant of conjugal love and of the depths of the human person.

Today, the various forms of the erosion of marriage, such as free unions and "trial marriage", and even pseudo-marriages between people of the same sex, are instead an expression of anarchic freedom that are wrongly made to pass as true human liberation. This pseudo-freedom is based on a trivialization of the body, which inevitably entails the trivialization of the person. Its premise is that the human being can do to himself or herself whatever he or she likes: thus, the body becomes a secondary thing that can be manipulated, from the human point of view, and used as one likes. Licentiousness, which passes for the discovery of the body and its value, is

actually a dualism that makes the body despicable, placing it, so to speak, outside the person's authentic being and dignity.

Marriage and Family in the history of salvation

The truth about marriage and the family, deeply rooted in the truth about the human being, has been actuated in the history of salvation, at whose heart lie the words: "God loves his people". The biblical revelation, in fact, is first and foremost the expression of a history of love, the history of God's Covenant with humankind.

Consequently, God could take the history of love and of the union of a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage as a symbol of salvation history. The inexpressible fact, the mystery of God's love for men and women, receives its linguistic form from the vocabulary of marriage and the family, both positive and negative: indeed, God's drawing close to his people is presented in the language of spousal love, whereas Israel's infidelity, its idolatry, is designated as adultery and prostitution.

In the New Testament God radicalizes his love to the point that he himself becomes, in his Son, flesh of our flesh, a true man. In this way, God's union with humankind acquired its supreme, irreversible form. Thus, the blue-print of human love is also definitely set out, that reciprocal "yes" which cannot be revoked: it does not alienate men and women but sets them free from the different forms of alienation in history in order to restore them to the truth of creation.

The sacramental quality that marriage assumes in Christ, therefore, means that the gift of creation has been raised to the grace of redemption. Christ's grace is not an external addition to human nature, it does not do violence to men and women but sets them free and restores them, precisely by raising them above their own limitations. And just as the Incarnation of the Son of God reveals its true meaning in the Cross, so genuine human love is self-giving and cannot exist if it seeks to detach itself from the Cross.

Dear brothers and sisters, this profound link between God and the human being, between God's love and human love, is also confirmed in certain tendencies and negative developments that have weighed heavily on us all. In fact, the debasement of human love, the suppression of the authentic capacity for loving, is turning out in our time to be the most suitable and effective weapon to drive God away from men and women, to distance God from the human gaze and heart.

Similarly, the desire to "liberate" nature from God leads to losing sight of the reality of nature itself, including the nature of the human being, reducing it to a conglomeration of functions so as to have them available at will to build what is presumed to be a better world and presumed to be a happier humanity. Instead, the Creator's design is destroyed, and so is the truth of our nature.

Children

Even in the begetting of children marriage reflects its divine model, God's love for man. In man and woman, fatherhood and motherhood, like the body and like love, cannot be limited to the biological: life is entirely given only when, by birth, love and meaning are also given, which make it possible to say yes to this life. From this point it becomes clear how contrary to human love, to the profound vocation of the man and the woman, are the systematic closure of a union to the gift of life and even more, the suppression or manipulation of newborn life.

No man and no woman, however, alone and single-handed, can adequately transmit to children love and the meaning of life. Indeed, to be able to say to someone "your life is good, even though I may not know your future", requires an authority and credibility superior to what individuals can assume on their own. Christians know that this authority is conferred upon that larger family which God, through his Son Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit, created in the story of humanity, that is, upon the Church. Here they recognize the work of that eternal, indestructible love which guarantees permanent meaning to the life of each one of us, even if the future remains unknown.

For this reason, the edification of each individual Christian family fits into the context of the larger family of the Church, which supports it and carries it with her and guarantees that it has, and will also have in the future, the meaningful "yes" of the Creator. And the Church is reciprocally built up by the family, a "small domestic church",

as the Second Vatican Council called it (*Lumen Gentium* , n. 11; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* , n. 11), rediscovering an ancient Patristic expression (cf. St John Chrysostom, *In Genesim Serm . VI, 2; VII, 1*). In the same sense, *Familiaris Consortio* affirms that "Christian marriage... constitutes the natural setting in which the human person is introduced into the great family of the Church" (n. 15).

The family and the church

There is an obvious consequence to all this: the family and the Church - in practice, parishes and other forms of Ecclesial Community - are called to collaborate more closely in the fundamental task that consists, inseparably, in the formation of the person and the transmission of the faith.

We know well that for an authentic educational endeavour, communicating a correct theory or doctrine does not suffice. Something far greater and more human is needed: the daily experienced closeness that is proper to love, whose most propitious place is above all the family community, but also in a parish, movement or ecclesial association, in which there are people who care for their brothers and sisters because they love them in Christ, particularly children and young people, but also adults, the elderly, the sick and families themselves. The great Patron of educators, St John Bosco, reminded his spiritual sons that "education is something of the heart and that God alone is its master" (*Epistolario* , 4, 209).

The central figure in the work of educating, and especially in education in the faith, which is the summit of the person's formation and is his or her most appropriate horizon, is specifically the form of witness. This witness becomes a proper reference point to the extent that the person can account for the hope that nourishes his life (cf. I Pt 3: 15) and is personally involved in the truth that he proposes. On the other hand, the witness never refers to himself but to something, or rather, to Someone greater than he, whom he has encountered and whose dependable goodness he has sampled. Thus, every educator and witness finds an unequalled model in Jesus Christ, the Father's great witness, who said nothing about himself but spoke as the Father had taught him (cf. Jn 8: 28).

This is the reason why prayer, which is personal friendship with Christ and contemplation in him of the face of the Father, is indispensably at the root of the formation of the Christian and of the transmission of the faith. The same is, of course, also true for all our missionary commitment, and particularly for the pastoral care of families: therefore, may the Family of Nazareth be for our families and our communities the object of constant and confident prayer as well as their life model.

Dear brothers and sisters, and especially you, dear priests, I am aware of the generosity and dedication with which you serve the Lord and the Church. Your daily work forming the new generations in the faith, in close connection with the sacraments of Christian initiation, as well as marriage preparation and offering guidance to families in their often difficult progress, particularly in the important task of raising children, is the fundamental way to regenerating the Church ever anew, and also to reviving the social fabric of our beloved city of Rome.

The threat of relativism

Continue, therefore, without letting yourselves be discouraged by the difficulties you encounter. The educational relationship is delicate by nature: in fact, it calls into question the freedom of the other who, however gently, is always led to make a decision. Neither parents nor priests nor catechists, nor any other educators can substitute for the freedom of the child, adolescent or young person whom they are addressing. The proposal of Christianity in particular challenges the very essence of freedom and calls it to faith and conversion.

Today, a particularly insidious obstacle to the task of educating is the massive presence in our society and culture of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires. And under the semblance of freedom it becomes a prison for each one, for it separates people from one another, locking each person into his or her own "ego".

With such a relativistic horizon, therefore, real education is not possible without the light of the truth; sooner or later, every person is in fact condemned to doubting in the goodness of his or her own life and the relationships of which it consists, the validity of his or her commitment to build with others something in common.

Consequently, it is clear that not only must we seek to get the better of relativism in our work of forming people, but we are also called to counter its destructive predominance in society and culture. Hence, as well as the words of the Church, the witness and public commitment of Christian families is very important, especially in order to reassert the inviolability of human life from conception until its natural end, the unique and irreplaceable value of the family founded on marriage and the need for legislative and administrative measures that support families in the task of bringing children into the world and raising them, an essential duty for our common future. I also offer you my heartfelt thanks for this commitment.

Priesthood and consecrated life

I would like to entrust to you a last message concerning the care of vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life: we all know the Church's great need of them! First of all, prayer is crucial in order that these vocations be born and reach maturity, and that those called will always continue to be worthy of their vocation; prayer should never be lacking in any family or Christian community. However, the life witness of priests and men and women religious and their joy in having been called by the Lord is also fundamental.

Equally so is the essential example that children receive in their own family and the conviction of families themselves that for them too, the vocation of a child of theirs is a great gift from the Lord. Indeed, the choice of virginity for the love of God and the brethren, which is required for priesthood and for consecrated life, goes hand in hand with the estimation of Christian marriage: both, in two different and complementary ways, make visible in a certain way the mystery of God's Covenant with his people.

Dear brothers and sisters, I consign these thoughts to you as a contribution to your work in the evening sessions of the Convention, and later, during the coming pastoral year. I ask the Lord to give you courage and enthusiasm, so that our Church of Rome, each parish, religious community, association or movement, may participate more intensely in the joy and labours of the mission; thus, each family and the entire Christian community will rediscover in the Lord's love the key that opens the door of hearts and makes possible a true education in the faith and people's formation.

[Translation from the original Italian text taken from the electronic archives of the Holy See.]

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Preparatory Catecheses for the Fifth World Meeting of Families



First Catechesis: The family, the first and principal transmitter of the faith

1. Opening hymn.
2. Recitation of the "Our Father".
3. A reading from the Bible: *Mt 11, 25-30*.
4. A reading from the Teaching of the Church:

1. The eternal design to save men in and through Christ was revealed and fully realized by the Word Incarnate, especially through the paschal ministry of his death, resurrection, ascension and sending the Holy Spirit. In Christ, therefore, the revelation of the mystery of God was perfect and definitive in such a way that there will be no other revelation. "In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word-and he has no more to say" (Saint John of the Cross).

2. This revelation was entrusted to the Church, which is always aided by the Holy Spirit so that it will bring God's salvation to all men of all times and cultures in a true and indefinable way. The Church has not ceased-and will never cease-to proclaim this mystery, especially through the ministry of the Pope and the bishops, who are the ones principally responsible. Every Christian faithful also takes part in this responsibility by virtue of the prophetic mission he/she received from Christ in Baptism.

3. When this proclamation is accepted, it brings about conversion and faith. This is always a gratuitous gift of God, but it requires a human response and cooperation with openness and acceptance. Ordinarily, faith is not possible without an explicit proclamation of the contents revealed. Only in exceptional cases God directly instills faith in an adult without a previous proclamation of his mystery. The sequence is usually: explicit proclamation of the mystery of God, acceptance of this proclamation, conversion and profession of faith, and Baptism.

4. The Christian family, through the Sacrament of Marriage and the Baptism of the parents and the children, is a "domestic church" and shares in this mission. As the generator of children, the family becomes the first and principal institution entrusted with transmitting the saving mystery of God to them. For this reason, parents are the authentic transmitters of the faith they profess to their children. The great saints were usually born into deeply Christian families. It is a fact that in countries where faith was persecuted for a long time, it was preserved and transmitted through the ministry of the parents.

5. The family is not a self-sufficient or autonomous institution in transmitting the faith to its children. It needs to be in close relation with the parish and the school their children attend, especially if it is Catholic school. The parish catechesis and the religion class in the educational center complement informal family catechesis, which must also be formal at times.

6. In the earliest times of Christianity, the Christian family already appeared to be the transmitter of the parents' faith, as manifested in the practice of bringing the children to Baptism and the acceptance of this proposal by the bishop in charge of the community. The parents' witness played a decisive role, to the point that the family became the place par excellence where the Church transmitted the faith. This is what happens in the mission countries, whereas in other nations with a great Christian tradition, the family has often lost its protagonist role, with the resulting decline in faith and religious practice.

7. The recovery of a vigorous, evangelizing Church passes by way of the restoration of the family as the basic institution for transmitting the faith. Therefore, in the countries mentioned above the Christian family has a special field of action today, especially with regard to other non-Christian families or those that have drawn away from religious practice. Grandparents, children and other Christian family members are urged to transmit the faith to their parents and relatives.

5. Reflections of the leader.

6. Dialogue:

- Do married people today realize that the family is the first and principal transmitter of the faith, or do they ignore or relinquish this mission?
- Are Christian families aware that the fulfillment of their mission requires on-going contact and dialogue with educators and the parish? In what ways can this dialogue, or its absence, be seen?
- How can the family proclaim Jesus Christ to their children today?

7. Commitments.

8. Recitation of the "Hail Mary" and invocation: "*Regina familiae. Ora pro nobis*".

9. Prayer for the family: *O God, you have given Christian families the honor and responsibility to transmit the faith to their children. Grant them the strength to carry out this task faithfully which you have entrusted to them. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

10. Closing hymn.

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Second Catechesis: God One and Triune

1. Opening hymn.
2. Recitation of the "Our Father".
3. A reading from the Bible: *Ef 1, 3-10*.
4. A reading from the Teaching of the Church:

1. The Mystery of God One and Triune is at the very center of the Christian family. Parents transmit this central truth of their faith to their children to the extent that they incorporate it into family life.

2. God is "he who is" and "God is love". These two names are so ineffably joined that they manifest the same divine essence, which is above all created intelligence. Therefore, only God can grant us correct and full knowledge about himself and reveal himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We already share in this divine life through faith in an initial way on earth, and later in fullness and through the vision of God in eternal life.

3. Through Revelation, we can profess that God the Father, throughout all eternity, generates the Son, that the Son is generated, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as their everlasting Love. The three divine Persons are thus eternal and equal to one another. In the same way, God's life and happiness is totally shared by each one of them and, consequently, it is always necessary to venerate the unity in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity.

4. Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, revealed this Mystery to us in which God's plan is revealed to us: that is, we all share-as children-in the communion of love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

5. Jesus Christ himself suggests a certain similarity between the divine Persons and the union of God's children in truth and charity when he asks the Father, "May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you" (Jn 17:21-22). This similarity shows that man can only find his fullness in self-giving to others. This similarity with God, through self-giving, unity and love, is the perfection of the family.

6. Marriage, which implies the spouses' total self-giving to one another and the parents' self-giving to their children, is thus a perfect reflection of Trinitarian communion. Therefore, the dynamics of family life must manifest this intimate union between the divine Persons.

7. Any invocation to the Blessed Trinity in the family should lead all its members to renew their bonds of communion and a more generous sharing of their gifts with other families.

5. Reflections of the leader.

6. Dialogue:

- Jesus Christ is the Son of God and we too are God's children. What are the similarities and the differences in these relationships?
- Why is the Christian family a reflection of the Trinity?
- What are the principal traits that a Christian family must make evident in family life in order to be a reflection of Trinitarian life?

7. Commitments.

8. Recitation of the "Hail Mary" and invocation: "*Regina familiae. Ora pro nobis*".

9. Prayer for the family: *God, Almighty Father, you sent the Word of truth and the Spirit of sanctification to the world to reveal your wondrous mystery to men. Grant us to profess the true faith, to know the glory of the everlasting Trinity, and to adore your all-powerful Unity. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord*

10. Final hymn.

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Third Catechesis: The Person of Jesus Christ, the center and synthesis of the Christian faith

1. Opening hymn.
2. Recitation of the "Our Father".
3. A reading from the Bible: *Mt 1, 18-25*.
4. A reading from the Teaching of the Church:

1. "Jesus Christ is the everlasting Son of God. "He is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible...all things were created through him and for him. He is the Beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that he should be supreme in every way; because God wanted all fullness to be found in him and through him to reconcile all things to him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, by making peace through his death on the cross" (Col 1:15-20).

2. Once he became man through the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb, he made the Father known to us in his Person and his preaching. He gave us the new commandment to love one another as he loved us. He taught us the way of the beatitudes: to be poor in spirit and meek, to bear suffering with patience, to thirst for justice, to be merciful, pure of heart and peacemakers, and to suffer persecution for justice. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. He died for us like the innocent Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. He was buried and rose again through his own power, and through his resurrection he let us to share in divine life. He ascended into heaven from where he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, each one according to his/her merits. And his kingdom will have no end.

3. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the Center of the world, of history and the life of all men, and he is their only Savior. Our salvation is in Him alone, with no other mediators or founders of religions. The Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and true man among men, is thus the center and the synthesis of the Christian faith. In Him we find the program of the Church and the Christian family, the "domestic church". Consequently, a new program does not have to be invented because it already exists. It is the same program as always brought together by the Gospel and living tradition. In short, it is centered on Christ himself, who must be known, loved and imitated in order to live Trinitarian life in Him and transform history in Him until its perfection in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is a program that does not change as times and cultures change, even though it takes them into consideration for a real dialogue and effective communication.

4. Knowledge about Jesus Christ is born and grows especially through the encounter with his Word by listening to and reading the Gospel, participating in the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Eucharist, personal and community prayer, and service and concern for the poor and needy. This knowledge leads to love for his Person and to practicing the commandment to

love one's neighbor that He gave us as a distinctive mark, and this is the beginning of any imitation of his life.

5. Therefore, reading the Word of God and the Gospel in the family, sharing as a family in the Sunday Eucharist, prayer in common, and works of charity have a predominant place in the Christian home. These manifestations are an essential part of family catechesis.

5. Reflections of the leader.

6. Dialogue:

- Can we love Jesus without knowing his life and doctrine?
- How can parents bring Jesus' life and teachings close to their children?
- How can we make children discover that Christ is living among us, even though he is enjoying the glory of God the Father?

7. Commitments.

8. Recitation of the "Hail Mary" and invocation: "*Regina familiae. Ora pro nobis*".

9. Prayer for the family: *Father of goodness and God of all consolation, you so loved the world that you gave it your only begotten Son. Make Christian families capable of presenting you to their children as the way that brings us to You. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord*

10. Closing hymn.

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Preparatory Catecheses for the Fifth World Meetings of Families



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Fourth Catechesis: The Holy Spirit and the Church

1. Opening hymn.
2. Recitation of the "Our Father".
3. A reading from the Bible: *Ac 2, 1-12*.
4. A reading from the Teaching of the Church:

1. Once the task of redemption was completed, the Father sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost to sanctify believers and given them access to Him through Christ in the one same Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple, and he works in them and gives witness to their adoption as children of the Father.

2. The Holy Spirit guides the Church to the full truth, governs it with different gifts, and embellishes it with his fruits. Through the power of the Gospel, he rejuvenates the Church and leads it to complete unity with Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church. In this way the whole Church appears to be one People assembled together by virtue of the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The condition of this People is the dignity and freedom of the children of God; it has as its law the new commandment to love as Christ loved us, and as its end, to expand the kingdom of God. This is destined to all men, and even though it may appear at times to be a small flock, it is a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for all humankind.

3. The Holy Spirit prepares men and reaches out to them with his grace in order to draw them to Christ. He manifests the risen Lord to them, recalls his Word to them, and opens their minds to understanding his death and Resurrection. He makes present the mystery of Christ, supremely in the Eucharist, in order to reconcile them, to bring them into communion with God, that they may bear much fruit. (Cf. CCC, 737).

4. Moreover, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with signs too deep for words. His grace arouses faith in us, the conversion of heart and adherence to the Father's will.

5. Parents transmit faith in the Holy Spirit to their children from their first moments of existence when they live according to the Spirit. When the children are capable of understanding, an adequate explanation is needed in addition to a coherent life. Some fundamental moments for this are: the preparation and celebration of the Sacraments of Christian initiation, especially Confirmation; listening to the Word of God and reflection on its requirements, and participation in the sacramental life of the Church. An especially effective moment is when they are helped to translate the requirements of their incorporation into Christ into ordinary life and get interested in transmitting the joy of Jesus' message to their friends and peers.

5. Reflections of the reader.

6. Dialogue:

- Can it be said that Christian families know the Spirit? How is this knowledge manifested?
- What are the main functions carried out by the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the family, the "domestic church"?
- What role does the Holy Spirit play in the Sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion, and how can children discover this?

7. Commitments.

8. Recitation of the "Hail Mary" and invocation: "*Regina familiae. Ora pro nobis*".

9. Prayer for the family: *Almighty and eternal God, you sent your Spirit to the Apostles. Lavish this Spirit of love upon us too so that we will give faithful witness to the love you wanted as the distinctive mark of the your Son's disciples. You who live and reign forever and ever.*

10. Closing hymn.

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Pontifical Council
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Preparatory Catecheses for the Fifth World Meeting of Families



Archbishop
of Valencia

Fifth Catechesis: The sacraments, special moments for the transmission of the faith

1. Opening hymn
2. Recitation of the "Our Father".
3. A reading from the Bible: *Mt 28, 16-20*.
4. A reading from the Teaching of the Church:

1. The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life that is in them (Cf. LG, No. 10)..The faithful exercise their priesthood above all through a holy life and by receiving the sacraments.

2. The sacraments are God's masterpieces because the great saving events are made present and operational in them, especially the Resurrection of Christ through which we were reconciled with God and share in his same divine life. By virtue of the Church's mediation, the saving grace of the seven sacraments comes to us throughout our whole lives: Baptism regenerates us as children of God and introduces us into his family; Confirmation increases our insertion into Christ and the Church; the Eucharist brings to completion our incorporation into Christ and our belonging to the Church, Penance repairs the wounds and restores the communion broken by sin; the Anointing comes to our aid so that we will live our sickness with Christ and give a co-redeeming meaning to our suffering; Matrimony sanctifies the human love between a man and woman making them a visible sign of the union of Christ and the Church; the Sacrament of Orders consecrates priests as ministers of Christ and enables them to preach, sanctify and govern the people of God.

3. The coherence of family life as the domestic church, both in the most important and in the most common, ordinary moments, is of the greatest importance in transmitting the faith to children. For this it is very advisable to give them an appropriate and suitable explanation and thus aid the preparatory catechesis for each sacrament. In this way each child will understand and incorporate into his/her life the differences and the riches of grace signified by each one of the sacraments.

4. In this regard, early reception of the Sacrament of Baptism indicates in the facts the importance the parents give to generating their children to God's life together with natural life. Something similar occurs when children are prepared from a very tender age, through an

adapted catechesis and taking advantage of the circumstances, to look forward to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. When the time comes for their First Communion, their preparation through the family and/or parish catechesis will be facilitated and enriched. The same can be said about the Sacrament of Penance: if children see their parents going to receive forgiveness from Christ in this sacrament, the desire to receive it will grow in the children. The preparation for Confirmation is a delicate period that can either strengthen them in their adherence to Christ or be a transition towards a certain abandonment of devotion. For this reason it requires special follow-up by parents. The same should be said about choosing a state in life when they are youths. While respecting their personal decision scrupulously, parents should guide their children in choosing a state whether it is self-giving in Marriage or the state of virginity.

5. Reflections of the leader.

6. Dialogue:

- Why do the sacraments let us take part in the mission of Jesus Christ?
- How can we make children appreciate and have a desire to receive the sacraments?
- How can we help them to overcome the difficulties they may encounter?

7. Commitments.

8. Recitation of the "Hail Mary" and invocation: "*Regina familiae. Ora pro nobis*".

9. Prayer for the family: *Grant us, Lord, that we who have received the sacraments will manifest in all the circumstances of life the mysteries of the death and resurrection of your Son in which we have shared. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord.*

10. Closing hymn.

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Preparatory Catecheses for the Fifth World Meeting of Families



Sixth Catechesis: The Commandments of God's Law

1. Opening hymn.
2. Recitation of the "Our Father".
3. A reading from the Bible: *Mt 19, 16-22*.
4. A reading from the Teaching of the Church:

1. 'Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?' To the young man who asked this question, Jesus answers first by invoking the necessity to recognize God as the 'One there is who is good', as the supreme Good and the source of all good. Then Jesus tells him: 'If you would enter life, keep the commandments.' 'You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and your mother.' Finally Jesus sums up these commandments positively: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (CCC, 2052).

2. Therefore, following Jesus Christ requires keeping his Commandments: "Not all those who say, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father". The Commandments are contained in the so-called "Decalogue"-which means "ten words"-that summarize and proclaim God's law. For this reason, the Magisterium of the Church teaches that it is necessary to keep the Ten Commandments in order to obtain salvation because they express man's fundamental duties towards God and neighbor, and reveal his grave obligations in this regard: for example, the protection and inviolability of life, respect for indissoluble mutual conjugal self-giving, the duty to procreate and educate children...

3. The commandments get their full meaning within the New Covenant, for it is in this context of correspondence to God's fidelity where human action takes on its meaning. So moral existence is the "response" to the Lord's loving initiative expressed in his Covenant: it is recognition, homage and cooperation with the design God pursues in history. Therefore, the commandments must be considered not only as precepts, but also as a joyful possibility to respond to God's will.

4. The first three commandments state the requirements of God's love; the remaining ones refer to the requirements of love of neighbor. They teach us the true humanity of man: that is, they highlight the essential duties and thus the fundamental rights inherent in the human person. Even though the human mind can attain knowledge of these commandments on its own, given man's sinful condition, he needs God's Revelation to attain complete and certain knowledge of this natural law.

5. Parents' respectful and religious attitude towards God's Law lets their children perceive in their hearts who the real author and lawmaker is of natural law and the divine precepts. It is very helpful in forming children's right conscience if the parents are capable of distinguishing in their

behavior between what is commanded by God's Law and what is left to each person's free decision since not everything falls under the precept of divine law. Moreover, if parents recognize their errors and omissions of God's Law properly, they will contribute to their children's recognition of their own in a climate of sincerity, without having recourse to easy excuses or unhealthy guilt.

6. Parents transmit adherence to the commandments to their children when they develop and apply the demands of each commandment by taking advantage of family or social events and helping them to apply the theoretical knowledge they have acquired to personal circumstances. In this way parents perfect in a practical way the institutional catechesis and religious instruction given at school.

5. Reflections of the leader.

6. Dialogue:

- How can we discover God's will in each commandment?
- What is the principal commandment of the Law?
- Can we love Jesus Christ without doing his will? Why?

7. Commitments.

8. Recitation of the "Hail Mary" and invocation: "*Regina familiae. Ora pro nobis*".

9. Prayer for the family: *O God, you put the fullness of the Law in love of you and of neighbor. Grant us to keep your commandments so that we may attain eternal life. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord.*

10. Closing hymn.

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Preparatory Catecheses for the Fifth World Meeting of Families



Seventh Catechesis: Sunday, The Eucharist and other expressions

1. Opening hymn.
2. Recitation of the "Our Father".
3. A reading from the Bible: *Ac 20, 7-20*.
4. A reading from the Teaching of the Church:

1. Sunday is the heart of the entire liturgical year because it celebrates the Lord's death and resurrection, which is the center of the whole of history and the source from which all saving grace springs. This is how it was understood and celebrated by the Apostles and the first Christian communities.

2. From the beginning, the Eucharist has been the center of Sunday. This is what the martyrs of Abitene said when they were caught celebrating the Eucharist on a Sunday. When they were interrogated as to why they had transgressed the emperor's severe command, they replied, "Sine dominico non possumus": that is, if we do not meet in assembly on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist, we cannot live. We would lack the strength to face our daily problems and not succumb.

3. However, Sunday is not exhausted in the celebration of the Eucharist. It is prolonged in other celebrations and experiences, such as family gatherings, concern and attention for the poor, rest, etc.

4. For this reason it is necessary to emphasize and highlight the Sunday Eucharist and Sunday itself as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and the gift of the Spirit. Participation in the Eucharist should be the center of Sunday for every baptized person. This is an inescapable duty that must be carried out not only to fulfill a precept, but also as a requirement of a truly conscious and coherent Christian life. The duty to take part in the Eucharist every Sunday is one specific aspect of the Christian community's identity, even when it is living in circumstances where it is a small minority, or in isolated or difficult conditions.

5. By bringing Christians together weekly as the family of God around the table of the Word and the Bread of Life, the Sunday Eucharist is also the most effective antidote against dispersion because it is the privileged place where communion is cultivated and lived continuously.

6. For all these reasons, the Sunday Eucharist must be the center of the parents' and the family's devotion. When children see their parents taking part with them in the Sunday Eucharist, they will incorporate it into their lives and make it the main sustenance of their devotion. Participation as a family in the Sunday Eucharist is an ideal to strive for, thereby signifying its supremacy over all the other noble and worthy activities on Sunday.

7. If there is proper participation in the Eucharist, especially by receiving Holy Communion, this urges us to live the dimension of Christian charity. For this reason, parents must be a living example for their children of concern for the poor and needy.

8. To receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist worthily, when someone is conscious of having committed a mortal sin, it is necessary to have recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation because as Saint Paul says, "Anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is answerable for the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27).

5. Reflections of the leader.

6. Dialogue:

- Which dimensions of the faith does Sunday highlight?
- Why is it so important to take part as a family in Sunday Mass?
- After Mass is finished, can we feel carefree because we have "already fulfilled" our obligation?

7. Commitments.

8. Recitation of the "Hail Mary" and invocation: "*Regina familiae. Ora pro nobis*".

9. Prayer for the family: *O God, you gather us together every Sunday around the table of your Word and your Son's Body and Blood to celebrate the memorial of the Risen Lord. We ask that when the Sunday without sunset comes, you will let us live as a united family and praise your mercy forever. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord.*

10. Closing hymn.

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Archbishop
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Eighth Catechesis: Popular piety

1. Opening hymn.
2. Recitation of the "Our Father".
3. A reading from the Bible: *Lc 2, 41-52*.
4. A reading from the Teaching of the Church:

1. Although the liturgy is the summit toward which all the Church's activity tends and the source from which all its strength emanates, it does not exhaust all its activity or the spiritual life of the faithful. So in addition to participation in the liturgy, the Church encourages and recommends some celebrations and exercises of popular piety. Sometimes popular piety adopts manifestations that clearly spring from the Christian people's authentic experience of faith and religiosity; at other times the Church must purify these manifestations from omissions, excessive emphases or even superstitious elements.

2. The age-old experience of the Church attests that this kind of piety has produced abundant fruits of Christian life in families and peoples. Supported by this experience and the light of the Holy Spirit, the Church believes that this piety can continue to lend great services to a truly inculturated faith, according to the diversity of peoples and continents.

3. Popular piety has many manifestations throughout the Liturgical Year, especially during Lent, Holy Week and the Easter Triduum. During Ordinary Time, there are many manifestations around the Virgin Mary, the deceased faithful and the Saints. Pilgrimages, visits to shrines and cemeteries, processions, etc. are an inseparable part of this piety.

4. The Christian family has been very closely linked to these manifestations of piety, especially pilgrimages and visits to Marian shrines, some of which are famous worldwide today, and the family has passed these customs down from parents to children. Still today many Christian families go with their children to the shrines of the Virgin Mary where in addition to paying their devotion, they also receive the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist.

5. Together with these manifestations, there are other everyday ones such like grace at meals, praying the rosary as a family, house or car blessings, pilgrimages to the shrine of the patron saint, entreaties for rain or protection from calamities, etc.

6. Since faith has shaped these religious customs and practices, it is good for parents to continue them, to transmit this simple, solid spirit to their children, and to live their relations with God in the midst not only of the extraordinary situations in their lives, but also the more common ones.

7. Moreover, these practices have exerted and still exert great influence on the identity of peoples and the external expressions of the faith professed. When these manifestations are translated into social expression, they turn into joyful witness to one's faith for non-believers and encouragement for the weak.

5. Reflections of the leader.

6. Dialogue:

- Why is popular piety important in Christian life? Isn't it something that has little value?
- Does popular piety lead to exalting Mary and the Saints over God? Why?
- Can you list some misguided manifestations of popular piety?

7. Commitments.

8. Recitation of the "Hail Mary" and invocation: *"Regina familiae. Ora pro nobis"*.

9. Prayer for the family: *God, Our Father, you proposed the Holy Family as a wonderful example for your People. Grant us that by imitating its domestic virtues, and united by the bonds of love, we will enjoy the everlasting rewards in our home in heaven. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord.*

10. Closing hymn.

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Archbishop
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Ninth Catechesis: The Blessed Virgin Mary

1. Opening hymn.
2. The Lord's Prayer.
3. A reading from the Bible: *Jn 19, 25-27*.
4. A reading from the Teaching of the Church:

1. The Virgin Mary is united by an indissoluble bond to the life and saving work of her Son. This union was manifested from the moment of Christ's virginal conception until his death: at his birth when she presented her first-born Son to the shepherds and the Magi; in the Temple when she made the offering of the poor and presented him to God and heard Simeon prophesize that a sword would pierce her soul; in his public life, when through her intercession at the marriage feast of Cana, she encouraged Jesus to begin his miracles; during his Passion, through her faithful union to Christ at the foot of the Cross as she suffered deeply with Him and associated herself with a Mother's heart with his sacrifice; at the moment when he left this world to go to the Father and the dying Jesus gave her to his disciple as his Mother; and at Pentecost, when she, together with the Apostles, begged for the gift of the Spirit and exercised her motherhood from the beginning of the Church.

2. By conceiving Christ, generating him, feeding him and presenting him to the Father in the Temple, by suffering with Him when he was dying on the Cross, she cooperated in an incomparable way in the Savior's work-with obedience, faith, hope and ardent charity-of restoring supernatural life in souls. In this way she became the mother of all men in the order of grace. Nevertheless, this maternal mission does not obscure or diminish the unique mediation of Christ, but rather it serves to show his power.

3. Mary is also deeply united to the life and mission of the Church. In fact, by contemplating her deep holiness, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will, the Church also becomes our Mother. By preaching the Word of God, accepted with fidelity and baptism, the Church generates to a new and immortal life the children conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of God.

4. Moreover, the Church admires Mary, extols her as the most splendid fruit of the redemption, and contemplates her joyfully as a purest image of what the whole Church itself yearns for and hopes to be.

5. For all this, the Church presents Mary to the faithful to contemplate her as the first work of redemption, to venerate her as the Mother of Jesus and our mother, and to implore her intercession both in liturgical worship and in the pious practices and devotions to her that have been recommended by the Magisterium over the ages.

6. In the same way the Church reminds the faithful that real devotion to Mary does not consist of sterile, transitory sentimentalism or vain credulity; on the contrary, it comes from authentic faith that leads us to recognize the excellence of the Mother of God, to filial love for her, and to imitate her virtues.

7. We are all aware that we have received devotion to the Virgin Mary in our homes, like a precious heredity, through the example and witness of our parents: praying the rosary as a family, the Angelus and the Hail Holy Queen, the celebration of Marian feasts, the month of May, visits to a shrine, etc.

8. The Marian feasts have always been special moments for receiving the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. The patron of many parishes is often a mystery in the life of Mary, which then becomes an important point in the life of that Christian community.

5. Reflections of the leader.

6. Dialogue:

- What relation is there between Mary and Christ, the Sole Mediator?
- Does devotion to Mary favor, make difficult or impede love of God? Why?
- Which natural and supernatural virtues would you highlight in Mary's life?

7. Commitments.

8. Recitation of the "Hail Mary" and invocation: "*Regina familiae. Ora pro nobis*".

9. Prayer for the family: *Our Lord and God, through Mary's virginal birth you gave men the fruits of salvation. Grant that we may know the intercession of Mary from whom we received your Son, Jesus Christ, the Author of life. You who live and reign forever and ever.*

10. Closing hymn.

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