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## "Man and Woman"

In his April 15 general audience, Pope Francis spoke about the difference and complementarity of man and woman, foundation of marriage and families.

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*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today's catechesis is dedicated to an aspect central to the theme of the family: the great gift that God gave to humanity with the creation of man

and woman and with the sacrament of marriage. This catechesis and the next one will treat the difference and complementarity between man and woman, who stand at the summit of divine creation; then the two after that will be on other topics concerning marriage.

Let us begin with a brief comment on the first narrative of creation, in the Book of Genesis. Here we read that God, after having created the universe and all living beings, created his masterpiece, the human being, whom He made in his own image: "in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27), so says the Book of Genesis.

And as we all know, sexual difference is present in so many forms of life, on the great scale of living beings. But man and woman alone are made in the image and

likeness of God: the biblical text repeats it three times in two passages (26-27): man and woman are the image and likeness of God. This tells us that it is not man alone who is the image of God or woman alone who is the image of God, but man and woman as a couple who are the image of God. The difference between man and woman is not meant to stand in opposition, or to subordinate, but is for the sake of communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God.

Experience teaches us: in order to know oneself well and develop harmoniously, a human being needs the reciprocity of man and woman. When that is lacking, one can see the consequences. We are made to listen to one another and help one another. We can say that without the mutual enrichment of this relationship — in thought and in action, in affection and in work, as well as in faith — the

two cannot even understand the depth of what it means to be man and woman.

Modern contemporary culture has opened new spaces, new forms of freedom and new depths in order to enrich the understanding of this difference. But it has also introduced many doubts and much skepticism. For example, I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution. In order to resolve the problems in their relationships, men and women need to speak to one another more, listen to each other more, get to know one another better, love one another more. They must treat each other with respect

and cooperate in friendship. On this human basis, sustained by the grace of God, it is possible to plan a lifelong marital and familial union. The marital and familial bond is a serious matter, and it is so for everyone not just for believers. I would urge intellectuals not to leave this theme aside, as if it had to become secondary in order to foster a more free and just society.

God entrusted the earth to the alliance between man and woman: its failure deprives the earth of warmth and darkens the sky of hope. The signs are already worrisome, and we see them. I would like to indicate, among many others, two points that I believe call for urgent attention.

The first. There is no doubt that we must do far more to advance women, if we want to give more strength to the reciprocity between man and

woman. In fact, it is necessary that woman not only be listened to more, but that her voice carry real weight, a recognized authority in society and in the Church. The very way Jesus considered women in a context less favourable than ours, because women in those times were relegated to second place. Jesus considered her in a way which gives off a powerful light, which enlightens a path that leads afar, of which we have only covered a small stretch. We have not yet understood in depth what the feminine genius can give us, what woman can give to society and also to us. Maybe women see things in a way that complements the thoughts of men. It is a path to follow with greater creativity and courage.

A second reflection concerns the topic of man and woman created in the image of God. I wonder if the crisis of collective trust in God, which does us so much harm, and makes us

pale with resignation, incredulity and cynicism, is not also connected to the crisis of the alliance between man and woman. In fact the biblical account, with the great symbolic fresco depicting the earthly paradise and original sin, tells us in fact that the communion with God is reflected in the communion of the human couple and the loss of trust in the heavenly Father generates division and conflict between man and woman.

The great responsibility of the Church, of all believers, and first of all of believing families, which derives from us, impels people to rediscover the beauty of the creative design that also inscribes the image of God in the alliance between man and woman. The earth is filled with harmony and trust when the alliance between man and woman is lived properly. And if man and woman seek it together, between themselves,

and with God, without a doubt they will find it. Jesus encourages us explicitly to bear witness to this beauty, which is the image of God.

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