

"Protect family's beauty and truth in God's plan"

On January 16, in a Meeting with Families in Manila, Pope Francis warned against a "new ideological colonization" seeking to destroy the family and praised Paul VI for strongly defending openness to life.

01/16/2015

Dear Families,

Dear Friends in Christ,

I am grateful for your presence here this evening and for the witness of your love for Jesus and his Church. I thank Bishop Reyes, Chairman of the Bishops' Commission on Family and Life, for his words of welcome on your behalf. And, in a special way, I thank those who have presented testimonies and have shared their life of faith with us.

The Scriptures seldom speak of Saint Joseph, but when they do, we often find him resting, as an angel reveals God's will to him in his dreams. In the Gospel passage we have just heard, we find Joseph resting not once, but twice. This evening I would like to rest in the Lord with all of you, and to reflect with you on the gift of the family.

It is important to dream in the family. All mothers and fathers dream of their sons and daughters in the womb for 9 months. They dream

of how they will be. It isn't possible to have a family without such dreams. When you lose this capacity to dream you lose the capacity to love, the capacity to love is lost. I recommend that at night when you examine your consciences, ask yourself if you dreamed of the future of your sons and daughters. Did you dream of your husband or wife? Did you dream today of your parents, your grandparents who carried forward the family to me? It is so important to dream and especially to dream in the family. Please don't lose the ability to dream in this way. How many solutions are found to family problems if we take time to reflect, if we think of a husband or wife, and we dream about the good qualities they have. Don't ever lose the memory of when you were boyfriend or girlfriend. That is very important.

Joseph's rest revealed God's will to him. In this moment of rest in the

Lord, as we pause from our many daily obligations and activities, God is also speaking to us. He speaks to us in the reading we have just heard, in our prayer and witness, and in the quiet of our hearts. Let us reflect on what the Lord is saying to us, especially in this evening's Gospel. There are three aspects of this passage which I would ask you to consider: resting in the Lord, rising with Jesus and Mary, and being a prophetic voice.

Resting in the Lord. Rest is so necessary for the health of our minds and bodies, and often so difficult to achieve due to the many demands placed on us. But rest is also essential for our spiritual health, so that we can hear God's voice and understand what he asks of us. Joseph was chosen by God to be the foster father of Jesus and the husband of Mary. As Christians, you too are called, like Joseph, to make a home for Jesus.

You make a home for him in your hearts, your families, your parishes and your communities.

To hear and accept God's call, to make a home for Jesus, you must be able to rest in the Lord. You must make time each day for prayer. But you may say to me: Holy Father, I want to pray, but there is so much work to do! I must care for my children; I have chores in the home; I am too tired even to sleep well. This may be true, but if we do not pray, we will not know the most important thing of all: God's will for us. And for all our activity, our busy-ness, without prayer we will accomplish very little.

Resting in prayer is especially important for families. It is in the family that we first learn how to pray. And don't forget when the family prays together, it remains together. This is important. There we

come to know God, to grow into men and women of faith, to see ourselves as members of God's greater family, the Church. In the family we learn how to love, to forgive, to be generous and open, not closed and selfish. We learn to move beyond our own needs, to encounter others and share our lives with them. That is why it is so important to pray as a family! That is why families are so important in God's plan for the Church!

I would like to tell you something very personal. I like St Joseph very much. He is a strong man of silence. On my desk I have a statue of St Joseph sleeping. While sleeping he looks after the Church. Yes, he can do it! We know that. When I have a problem or a difficulty, I write on a piece of paper and I put it under his statue so he can dream about it. This means please pray to St Joseph for this problem.

Next, rising with Jesus and Mary. Those precious moments of repose, of resting with the Lord in prayer, are moments we might wish to prolong. But like Saint Joseph, once we have heard God's voice, we must rise from our slumber; we must get up and act (cf. *Rom 13:11*). Faith does not remove us from the world, but draws us more deeply into it. Each of us, in fact, has a special role in preparing for the coming of God's kingdom in our world.

Just as the gift of the Holy Family was entrusted to Saint Joseph, so the gift of the family and its place in God's plan is entrusted to us so we can carry it forward. To each one of you and us because I too am the son of a family.

The angel of the Lord revealed to Joseph the dangers which threatened Jesus and Mary, forcing them to flee to Egypt and then to settle in

Nazareth. So too, in our time, God calls upon us to recognize the dangers threatening our own families and to protect them from harm. We must be attentive to the new ideological colonization.

Beware of the new ideological colonization that tries to destroy the family. It's not born of the dream that we have from God and prayer – it comes from outside and that's why I call it a colonization. Let us not lose the freedom to take forward the mission God has given us, the mission of the family. And just as our peoples were able to say in the past "No" to the period of colonization, as families we have to be very wise and strong to say "No" to any attempted ideological colonization that could destroy the family. And to ask the intercession of St Joseph to know when to say "Yes" and when to say "No"....

The pressures on family life today are many. Here in the Philippines, countless families are still suffering from the effects of natural disasters. The economic situation has caused families to be separated by migration and the search for employment, and financial problems strain many households. While all too many people live in dire poverty, others are caught up in materialism and lifestyles which are destructive of family life and the most basic demands of Christian morality. The family is also threatened by growing efforts on the part of some to redefine the very institution of marriage, by relativism, by the culture of the ephemeral, by a lack of openness to life.

I think of Blessed Paul VI in the moment of that challenge of population growth, he had the strength to defend openness to life. He knew the difficulties families

experience and that's why in his encyclical (*Humanae Vitae*) he expressed compassion for specific cases and he taught confessors to be particularly compassionate for particular cases. But he looked further; he looked at the peoples of the earth and saw this threat of the destruction of the family by depriving it of children. Paul VI was courageous, a good pastor and he warned his sheep about the wolves that were approaching. And from the heavens he blesses us today.

Our world needs good and strong families to overcome these threats! The Philippines needs holy and loving families to protect the beauty and truth of the family in God's plan and to be a support and example for other families. Every threat to the family is a threat to society itself. The future of humanity, as Saint John Paul II often said, passes through the family (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 85).

So protect your families! See in them your country's greatest treasure and nourish them always by prayer and the grace of the sacraments. Families will always have their trials, but may you never add to them! Instead, be living examples of love, forgiveness and care. Be sanctuaries of respect for life, proclaiming the sacredness of every human life from conception to natural death. What a gift this would be to society, if every Christian family lived fully its noble vocation! So rise with Jesus and Mary, and set out on the path the Lord traces for each of you.

Finally, the Gospel we have heard reminds us of our Christian duty to be prophetic voices in the midst of our communities. Joseph listened to the angel of the Lord and responded to God's call to care for Jesus and Mary. In this way he played his part in God's plan, and became a blessing not only for the Holy Family, but a

blessing for all of humanity. With Mary, Joseph served as a model for the boy Jesus as he grew in wisdom, age and grace (cf. *Lk* 2:52). When families bring children into the world, train them in faith and sound values, and teach them to contribute to society, they become a blessing in our world. God's love becomes present and active by the way we love and by the good works that we do. We extend Christ's kingdom in this world. And in doing this, we prove faithful to the prophetic mission which we have received in baptism.

During this year which your bishops have set aside as the Year of the Poor, I would ask you, as families, to be especially mindful of our call to be missionary disciples of Jesus. This means being ready to go beyond your homes and to care for our brothers and sisters who are most in need. I ask you especially to show

concern for those who do not have a family of their own, in particular those who are elderly and children without parents. Never let them feel isolated, alone and abandoned, but help them to know that God has not forgotten them.

I was very moved after the Mass today when I visited that shelter for children with no parents. How many people in the Church work so that that house is a home, family? This is what it means to take forward, prophetically, the meaning of family. You may be poor yourselves in material ways, but you have an abundance of gifts to offer when you offer Christ and the community of his Church. Do not hide your faith, do not hide Jesus, but carry him into the world and offer the witness of your family life!

Dear friends in Christ, know that I pray for you always! I pray that the

Lord may continue to deepen your love for him, and that this love may manifest itself in your love for one another and for the Church. Pray often and take the fruits of your prayer into the world, that all may know Jesus Christ and his merciful love. Please pray also for me, for I truly need your prayers and will depend on them always!

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(01/20/2026)