



Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 20, 2015 B

POPE FRANCIS' MESSAGE TO FAMILIES NINE SUGGESTIONS

Pope Francis cares deeply about the health and happiness of today's families. Just seven months into his papacy, he announced that he would host an Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to discuss the pastoral challenges facing modern families. The discussions on the family began in October 2013 in Rome, and they have since sparked conversations in millions of homes and parishes around the world.

Whether you are young or old, married or single, engaged, widowed, or divorced, may Pope Francis' words strengthen you, refresh you, and illuminate the pages of your own life story.

Here are some suggestions he offers to do just that.

1. Say these Three Words.

In order to have a healthy family, three words need to be used. And I want to repeat these three words: please, thank you, sorry. Three essential words! We say please so as not to be forceful in family life: "May I please do this? Would you be happy if I did this?" we do this with a language that seeks agreement. We say thank you, thank you for love! Be honest with me, how many times do you say thank you to your wife, and you to your husband? How many days go by *without* uttering this word? And the last word: sorry. We all make mistakes, and on occasion someone gets offended in the marriage, in the family and harsh words are spoken. But please listen to my advice: don't ever let the sun set without reconciling. Peace is made each day in the family.

2. Do the Little Things.

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 . . . and many times the husband and wife become a little fractious and argue between themselves. . . . Yet we must not become saddened by this. 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!

3. Keep Dreaming!

I am very fond of dreams in families. For nine months every mother and father dreams about their baby. Am I right? They dream about what kind of child he or she will be. . . . You can't have a family without dreams. Once a family loses the ability to dream, children do not grow, love does not grow, life shrivels up and dies. So I ask you each evening, when you make your examination of conscience, to also ask yourselves this questions: Today did I dream about my children's future? Today did I dream about the love of my husband, my wife? Did I dream about my parents and grandparents who have gone before me? Dreaming is very important. Especially dreaming in families. Do not lose this ability to dream! How many difficulties in married life are resolved when we leave room for dreaming; when we stop for a moment to think of our spouse and dream about the goodness present in everything around us. So it is very important to reclaim love by what we do each day. Do not ever stop being newlyweds!

4. Make Time to Play.

About trying to reconcile working hours with family time . . . Let me tell you one thing. . . . When a young mom or dad comes, I ask: "How many children do you have?" and they tell me. And I ask another questions, always: "Tell me: do you play with your children?" Most of them answer: "What are you asking, Father?"

"Yes, yes: do you play? Do you spend time with your children?" We are losing this capacity, this wisdom of playing with our children. The economic situation pushes us to this, to lose this. Please, spend time with our children!

5. Pray Together.

It is in the family that we first learn how to pray. Don't forget: the family that prays together stays together! This is important. There we come to know God, to grow into men and women of faith, and 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! So important! That is why families are so important in God's plan for the Church!

6. Accept Your Imperfections.

More than anywhere else, the family is where we daily experience our own limits and those of others, the problems great and small entailed in living peacefully with others. A perfect family does not exist. We should not be fearful of imperfections, weakness, or even conflict, but rather learn how to deal with them constructively. The family, where we keep loving one another despite our limits and sins, thus becomes a school of forgiveness. Forgiveness is itself a process of communication. When contrition is expressed and accepted, it becomes possible to restore and rebuild the communication which broke down. A child who has learned in the family to listen to others, to speak respectfully, and to express his or her view without negating that of others, will be a force for dialogue and reconciliation in society.

7. Be Patient.

Are you married? Be a saint by loving and taking care of your husband or your wife, as Christ did for the Church. ...Are you a parent or a grandparent? Be a saint by passionately teaching your children or grandchildren to know and to follow Jesus. It takes so much patience to do this: to be a good parent, a good grandfather, a good mother, a good grandmother; it takes so much patience and with this patience comes holiness: by exercising patience.

8. Look to Our Elders.

Grandparents, who have received the blessing to see their children's children are entrusted with a great responsibility: to transmit their life experience, their family history, the history of a community, of a people; to share wisdom with simplicity, and the faith itself—the most precious heritage! Happy is the family who has grandparents close by! A grandfather is a father twice over and a grandmother is a mother twice over.

9. Set an Example.

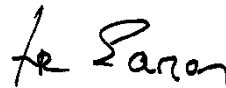
The "Good news" of the family is a very important part of evangelization, which Christians can communicate to all, by the witness of their lives. Already they are doing so; this is evident in secularized societies. Truly Christian families are known by their fidelity, their patience, their openness to life, and their respect for the elderly . . . The secret to this is the presence of Jesus in the family. Let us therefore propose to all people, with respect and courage, the beauty of marriage and the family illuminated by the Gospel! And in order to do this let us approach with care and affection those families who are struggling for any reason; let us approach married couples in crisis or separated. Let us be close to everyone through the proclamation of this Gospel of the family, the beauty of the family.

10. Light the Way.

The future passes through the family. So protect your families! 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, by 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.

This article is excerpted from the book *The Blessing of Family: Inspiring Words from Pope Francis* (Franciscan Media), edited by Alicia von Stamwitz. It is also available as an audiobook at shop.franciscanmedia.org.

Have a blessed week,



Tweets on the Family from @Pontifex

"The family is where we are formed as people. Every family is a brick in the building of society."

"The Christian family is missionary: It announces the love of God to the world."

"The family is the greatest treasure of any country. Let us all work to protect and strengthen this, the cornerstone of society."

"It is so important to listen! Husbands and wives need to communicate to bring happiness and serenity to the family life."

"Let us pray for peace, and let us bring it about, starting in our own homes!"

"The family is essential to sustaining human and social development."

"A family enlightened by the Gospel provides a school for Christian living! There one learns faithfulness, patience, and sacrifice."