



**Message for National Week for Life and the Family
11-18 May 2014**

In the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, we hear these powerful words of Jesus: “I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10.10). How can we not hear these words and give thanks for families which give life and give it in abundance? Families open our hearts to life, and give birth to our vision of life. Families enable us to come alive, sustain us in life, and give us our most important reasons to live, even when in difficulty. Families teach us to appreciate life. Is it any wonder that a few years ago, the Bishops of Canada made the decision to link life issues with family life when they launched the national initiative for life and family, of which this National Week is an integral part?

I give thanks to God for my family: it is with them I learned to believe, forgive, love, share, trust, to give thanks and show respect, to be honest and be filled with awe and wonder. In a Catholic family, moments such as Baptism, First Confession, First Communion, and Confirmation mark our journey in life, just as do marriage, ordination and the Anointing of the Sick. In a faith-filled family, even death manifests this continuity of faith and life, as brothers and sisters, parents and children gather to support one another in hope and trust. Families truly are schools of life!

I have just returned from the canonizations of two new Saints, gifts of God to the Church. As I think of Saint John XXIII, I recall the night of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, when he spoke to the crowds with a real father's heart, saying: “As you go back home, you will find your children. Give them a hug and tell them: ‘This is the Pope's hug!’ Perhaps you will find a few tears that need drying. Have a word of comfort for whoever is suffering.... Let us be filled with life, singing, sighing, crying, but always full of faith in Christ who helps us and listens to us, and let us once again take up our journey” (*Discorso alla luna* [“The Moonlight Speech”], 11 October 1962).

I also remember the words of Saint John Paul II as he reflected on the family: “The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do.... Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, become what you are!” (Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, *Familiaris Consortio*, 17).

Following in the footsteps of these two great Saints, Pope Francis has also made the family one of his chief concerns. This October, I will participate in an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops he has called to reflect on the challenges facing families in today's cultures. This will be followed one year later by a second, Ordinary Synod that will propose concrete ways the Church can help all of Christ's faithful respond to these challenges. I invite all of us to start praying now for the success of both these Synods. Let us pray too for all families as they strive to become what they are meant to be: “Families united in the joy of the Lord.”

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