

RENEWAL IN THE HOLY SPIRIT
TENTH NATIONAL PILGRIMAGE OF FAMILIES FOR THE FAMILY

HOLY MASS

16 September 2017, 7:00 p.m. - Sanctuary of Pompeii

HOMILY

(XXIV Sunday of Ordinary Time Sir 27:30–28:7; Rom 14:7–9; Mt 18:21–35)

We have the joy of receiving Jesus now in the Eucharist, at the end of this pilgrimage of families. His Word has resounded in our midst, and he has spoken to us about forgiveness. You know better than me how necessary forgiving is in married life and the wider family environment: between parents and children, brothers and sisters, and relatives. Without forgiveness, the family does not survive for long! Without forgiveness, the family atmosphere is soon “polluted” with the poison of resentment, revenge, retaliation, and hatred. And, so it becomes suffocating, while daily life is made strenuous and unbearable. In fact, in every human relationship, even in relationships with the people we love and esteem, we end up, more or less consciously, hurting our neighbor and being injured. This is inevitable! Closeness in daily life provokes frustrations, misunderstandings, and clashes. All this is caused by our selfishness, our scant humility, lack of attention and patience, and sometimes by mere tiredness. This explains the need to forgive the faults of the brother who “sins against me” even without wanting to do so and to forgive him “up to seventy times seven,” that is, not occasionally, once in a while, but repeatedly, over and over again. This applies, first and foremost, to the spouse. I invite you to meditate on *Amoris Laetitia*’s profound teachings on forgiveness. I would like to mention some of them. Pope Francis first teaches that the spouses’ mutual forgiving “is rooted in a positive attitude that seeks to understand other people’s weaknesses and to excuse them. As Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’ (Lk 23:34)” (AL

105). It is, therefore, important to get used to not always supposing that the spouse has “bad intentions” and to avoid “being unduly harsh with the failings of others,” otherwise “the just desire to see our rights respected turns into a thirst for vengeance rather than a reasoned defense of our dignity” (*ibid.*).

Secondly, the ability to forgive presupposes the experience of having been forgiven by God, as the parable Jesus told in today’s Gospel very clearly shows us. The failings that the Lord has forgiven in our lives are infinitely greater than those for which we can forgive others. Our failings in our relationship with God, who is infinitely good and generous with us, cannot be compared with what we have suffered because of others, and for which we too are often, at least in part, responsible. The Pope says: “We have known a love that is prior to any of our own efforts, a love that constantly opens doors, promotes, and encourages. If we accept that God’s love is unconditional, that the Father’s love cannot be bought or sold, then we will become capable of showing boundless love and forgiving others even if they have wronged us” (AL 107).

The Pope also adds another element, we could say of a more psychological and personal nature, but that is equally important: the liberating experience of fully understanding and forgiving oneself: “Often our mistakes, or criticism we have received from loved ones, can lead to a loss of self-esteem. We become distant from others, avoiding affection and fearful in our interpersonal relationships. Blaming others becomes falsely reassuring. We need to learn to pray over our past history, to accept ourselves, to learn how to live with our limitations, and even to forgive ourselves, in order to have this same attitude towards others” (*ibid.*).

The Pope recognizes, however, that forgiveness in married life is by no means easy. He says, “it requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance... to reconciliation.” Now, we can add, that it also requires a special gift of grace that must be asked for in prayer. Often our forces alone are not enough; God has to touch our hearts with his grace to make us capable of forgiving.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us also ask for the Lord's help in this Holy Mass so that we may forgive heartily in our families and always start again with a free heart, without holding on to the offenses received, even in the most serious and humiliating situations. Never allow the joy of walking together as spouses and families to dwindle. A great task awaits every Christian family at this time: being a place of hope where uninterested love, generosity, altruism, benevolence, and care for the weakest continue to exist. A place where the young can receive a healthy and serene education that prepares them for life. A Place where faith is experienced and transmitted in a simple and authentic way. Where the elderly are listened to and respected. Where one learns the fatigue and the intimate satisfaction of doing one's work well, as a contribution to the good of all. Where one learns sincerity in relationships with others. Where every new life is welcomed with joy and respected in all its phases, even where it is marked by limits and illness. A Christian family is all of this!

Dear families, here in this place so dear to Marian devotion, I invite all of you to address your prayer to Mary, our mother, asking her help so that all the world's families, and especially those living here in Italy, may never fail in their mission to become domestic churches, cenacles of the Holy Spirit, and living images of God, a communion of persons. Let us ask for the Virgin Mary's intercession, so that even in civil culture and institutions, the harmony and the solidity of Christian marriage and the family may never be endangered by the promotion of values or unjust laws that are contrary to true human dignity; but that we may, on the contrary, always increasingly understand that the survival and well-being of the family are linked to the well-being and survival of society as a whole.

May the Lord always bless all your families. Amen