



Homily at the closing Mass of the International Gathering of Teams of Our Lady

Cardinal MANUEL Clemente
Patriarch of Lisbon

Here, where the "yes" of the Little Shepherds resounds

Dear participants in the International Gathering of Teams of Our Lady and all of you gathered here in this Eucharistic Celebration:

We heard the Word of God and retain Christ's remark, as direct as surprising: "If you do not become like little children, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven." He answered in this way to the disciples who had asked him, "*Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?*"

In the light of this dialogue we must rethink our lives. More precisely our family life and the feelings of humility and availability which support the family, as well as everything that concerns the Kingdom of **Heaven**.

"Who is the greatest?" They asked. The Lord gave them the opposite answer of what they were expecting, referring to the spiritual childhood, to the need of recovering the spirit of innocence they had already had when they were children. It means simplicity, trusting God as a father, transparency and readiness.

With such sentiments, we give space to God to reign in us and in our lives. We enter into the divine mode of being, for God himself has his center in another: the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father, in a Spirit of mutual gift. The same Spirit that unites couples and families by the marriage bond.

We can only be in the Kingdom of Heaven, which is the world of God, as children, as sons and daughters, as Jesus himself before the Father. The Father, whom we can call "**Abba**" (Rom 8:15), is a term that expresses intimacy and entire trust between a son and his father. It is our baptismal condition, of children in the Son and only thus fully children of God and with a place in his Kingdom

This is also the necessary condition for fraternity, for we have a common Father, the One who is in heaven (Mt 23: 9). In the parable of the Prodigal Son, who inspired us these days, the elder brother had not learned to be the son of that



father, for he had not inherited his compassion. So he did not rejoice at his brother's return. The youngest son had learned better and had continued to trust his father's heart. And so there could be reunion and celebration, a sign of the Kingdom to which Jesus calls us. Jesus, our true "elder brother," who, unlike the brother in the parable, fetches us to bring us back to the paternal house.

With Christ and in Christ we learn to be children of God, children surrendered to his love. And we learn to overflow our love to others, in the spontaneity of the good that can only be enjoyed through sharing. With Christ we have learned the "Our Father", simple to recite but always hard to fulfill. Because the sentence "Thy kingdom come to us" only happens in the sharing of bread and life, in full and constant reconciliation.

Let us look at the Little Shepherds of Fatima. Notice how sensitive and immediate they were to the signs of the Kingdom. The Mother of Christ enveloped them in a flash of heaven, which dazzled them. She made them glimpse their opposite for a moment. At last she drew them to her Immaculate Heart - there, where the will of God is fulfilled, everything is reunited and the world is saved, so that the Little Shepherds could feel it this way and the Kingdom could happen through them.

We know what happened next: The decided "yes" of the little Shepherds, following the "let it be to me according to your word" with which Mary responded to the Angel of the Annunciation (cf. Lk 1:38). It is this "yes" that the Teams of Our Lady want to reproduce in each couple and each family's daily life. So they ask the Little Shepherds for their candor and firmness in the same feeling of surrender to God's love.

Jesus said to the first disciples, as He is saying now to us: "Let your words be: Yes, yes; no, no" (Mt 5:37). So it will be with us, before God and men, before each one's family, before the whole society. Note that children rarely say "maybe". Also in this we must imitate them, and especially the Shepherds of Fatima in their immediate and definitive yes to what the Mother of Heaven asked them.

In your case, the same thing happens in the Christian marriage experience you are fortunately witnessing. The "yes" you said before God and the Church, the "yes" that sustains you as a couple and family, participates in Christ's "yes" to the Father and in Mary's "yes" to the will of God.

When you were children, you were naturally confident and adherent to those who protected your first steps. Thus you will continue to be supernaturally now, in the Spirit that sustains your conjugal and familiar union. A Spirit that precedes



you, accompanies and even exceeds you, in an ever more divine life. As Peter's Second Letter says, referring to how God grants you everything you need: so that "*you become participants in the divine nature*" (2 Pet 1:4).

It is in this filial, unitive, persistent and triumphant spirit by the grace of God, that lies the matrimonial spirituality, as Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* defines it, in phrases such as these: "*The pastoral care of engaged and married couples should be centred on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties.*" (No. 211). And also: "*In the end, marital spirituality is a spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells.*" (no. 315).

It is also Pope Francis who gives you concrete indications of good Christian practices for this to happen always and more. I especially recommend the fourth chapter of *Amoris Laetitia* when it applies to married and family life the magnificent charity hymn by St. Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians. I quote this step, which is of particular importance in marital and family relations: "*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...*" (nº 108). This has a strong connection with these days reflection on the parable of the prodigal son and the joy of reunion with the father. It can always be linked to the daily life of each family as the school of God's family, which is the Church (cf. Eph 2:19): from the domestic Church to the Church of us all, "the family of families" (No. 202).

More recently, in the apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, the Pope reminds us that the vocation to holiness is common to all Christians and to the various stages of life. So in the lives of families, attention to others has to be a constant priority. He then provides righteous and beautiful considerations like these: "*I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families... In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence...*" (nº7)

Very dear couples of the Teams of Our Lady: This is your vocation and mission.

To be happy and faithful witnesses of matrimonial holiness for the others and in the Church, showing this is possible, with the divine grace, God grants you. - I



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thank God for making you who you are, I thank God for everything you do among us!

And so you will live, ever more and more, in the whole confidence that you have in God, returning to the spiritual childhood that defines you as His children. In this place full of Mary's presence, Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of the Family. Here, where the "yes" of the little Shepherds resounds.

+ Manuel Clemente

Fátima, July 21, 2018