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PRO FAMILIA

**Message of His Em. Card. Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga
and of H.E. Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia to the Synod Fathers**

Only a few days are left before the opening, on 5 October, of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly convened by Pope Francis ahead of the 2015 Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the theme of the family¹.

In our message of 24 February 2014, addressed to the Presidents of the Episcopal Commissions for the Family and the Presidents of the national Caritas as a contribution to the preparation of this ecclesial event, we already emphasised its prophetic and providential nature.

Indeed, the theme of the family is a pressing current issue, not only because of the threats looming over it as a result of the "globalisation of indifference"², but also due to the opportunities the family offers for those who wish to commit themselves to bringing about a more human and supportive society.

Today the family is at the centre of great paradoxes. On the one hand, economic and financial globalisation, which has encouraged the establishment of an economic system and mindset centred on the individual and the market, growth and the flattening of cultural diversity. On the other, the widespread crisis and the recession, which have upset this system, laying bare its contradictions: wealth increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few, while inequality and tales of lives on the margins, fleeing from war and poverty, are on the increase.

For the first time in history parents as well as young people are unable to find work and never get a permanent job, and the lives of families engulfed by the crisis have become insecure for two generations, those in their 20s and those in their 50s. It's a life increasingly hanging in the balance between atypical work and unemployment, with uncertain incomes and no possibility of planning for the future. The social network of the family, which has always acted as a cushion in times of difficulty, risks having its foundations undermined.

In this period of our history, placing high value on the sad experience of the two world wars, we've been able to develop a culture of respect for the rights of the person and families have been able to experience a new freedom and wealth of relations, interchange, and sharing of human and spiritual experiences. At the same time, however, the uncertainty of existence and values has made feelings and attachments more

1 "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization".

2 Homily of Pope Francis in Lampedusa (8 July 2013).



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fragile, and children and the elderly more lonely. It's difficult to put “us” at the centre and dialogue with each other, especially between generations. So young people lose the thread of memory and the richness of their roots, and the elderly no longer manage to share and support children's dreams with their wisdom. They end up feeling useless and wasting the great treasure they bear.

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts”³.

For the Church, “expert in humanity”⁴, always called on to “give the reason for the hope that you have”⁵, the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Family represents a *kairós*, a propitious moment for listening to the Holy Spirit, to hear what he has to say to the Church⁶ and, through her, to the world. And it's also the moment to listen to the families of our time, to gather their deep feelings, concerns, expectations, proposals and hopes.

On 18 September this year the Pontifical Council for the Family together with Caritas Internationalis organised a day of reflection on the theme: “The family: a resource to overcome the crisis”. The participants included priests, families and lay people engaged in pastoral care of the family, of migration, of employment, and in development cooperation.

We aimed to focus on the current situation to try and understand what the Gospel has to say about families living in uncertainty, and how best we can reach out to them and accompany and support them along their path in a spirit of evangelical love.

We were deeply moved by the testimonies, experiences and proposals shared during those days. We drew from this all the human and spiritual strength of today's families which, despite being in difficulty, are still able to imagine and plan for the future, and to do it together through community experiences. It's so wonderful to experience evangelical hope with courage and perseverance, and to trust humankind and our ability to build friendship and solidarity! This hope, built up by families day by day, aims to appeal to all of us not to give up heeding the voice of the Lord⁷ and to draw on the ever fresh and inexhaustible resources of our faith. As we believe in a God of Life who made himself one of us and shared the life of a modest and simple family, from whom he received love and everything that is truly vital for human and spiritual growth. In this specific family from Nazareth Jesus learnt to work with his hands and earn a living with

3 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, Preface, no. 1.

4 Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, no. 13.

5 1 Pet 3:15.

6 Ap 2:11.

7 Sal 94:8.



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sweat of his brow, in solidarity, dignity and joy.

Dear brothers, the family has always been a privileged space of love and the Church's concern. But at this time of great uncertainty the entire ecclesial community is called on even more than before to restart creativity and instead of continuing to resign ourselves to "it's always been done like that" find new roads to reach out to families in need especially those that, for one reason or another, are far from the life and circuits of our local churches.

We're called on to be an "outward Church", a Church "with open doors", which knows how to slow down when necessary "to look people in the eye and listen" and "accompany those left by the wayside"⁸. And we want to go out on the roads together rather than alone to be, in words and above all in deeds, communities that dialogue, comfort and sustain, without clinging to the comfort of entrenched certainties, while humbly bringing the beauty of the Gospel of the family, in a spirit of friendship and fraternal sharing.

The reflections and pastoral proposals we're offering you today, dear Synod Fathers, are the outcome of our Seminary, a little help in exploring new pastoral paths in the light of the experiences of so many people and families in different parts of the world. We strongly hope they may be of use to you in your reflections and decisions on the occasion of this Extraordinary Assembly and the Synod that will follow it.

Dear brothers, we entrust the work of this Assembly to the Family of Nazareth and pray to Jesus, Mary and Joseph to make the hearts of all the members of the Church and the people who have the destinies of nations in their hands aware of the legitimate aspirations of those most affected by the crisis of our times and all t

building + *Vincenzo Paglia* ng the way, so that none of them ever stops hoping and joyfully

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Vatican City, 1st October 2014