

***Homily by Bishop Cullinan for the opening ceremony for
World Meeting of Families***

Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* –the Joy of the Gospel

“Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world” (E G, 11).

To return to the source. What is the source? It is always God.

The icon for the World Meeting of Families which we have here in our Cathedral depicts a family built around God. Icons can look strange to us. The people in them are deliberately different from real life. This strangeness is meant to cause us to reflect. The sides of this icon fold in like the doors of a house. At each door we have the Archangels, Michael and Gabriel. They are robed quite splendidly as they reflect the beauty of God. The angels feature on the outside of the icon as they carry with them the desire of God to protect the family.

The icon is saying to us - every family is sacred. It is holy and must be respected by everybody no matter what its difficulties. Every family home is a sanctuary to the members of that family, or at least it is meant to be. It is the one place in the world where they should always feel safe, secure, accepted and be themselves. Every family is precious and deserves the highest respect. It is holy ground.

When you open the doors of the icon and enter in, so to speak, you will see three scenes; one on the left, one on the right and one in the centre. The scene on the right is of the Wedding Feast of Cana - Jesus’ first miracle, helping a particular couple starting out in married life together. They had invited him to the wedding. Jesus is now part of their lives.

On the left – the raising of the daughter of Jairus, amid tears and pain. Tears and pain are part of the life of every family. In the centre the Holy Family seated around a table. How many family memories are made around a table? A meal? And so we are asked to have faith – God who is with us. Have faith in Jesus. Open the door and let him in - to your heart, to your family life. He knows you. He knows your family.

No family is perfect. We all know that. We need God. Pope Francis writes: Faith opens a “window” to the presence and working of the Spirit. In hearts, in homes. Faith lived out in holiness. Holiness is good. How misunderstood it is!

It is always tied to little gestures. “Whoever gives you a cup of water in my name will not go unrewarded”, says Jesus (cf. *Mk 9:41*). As Pope Francis writes in a homily of his: “These little gestures are those we learn at home, in the family; they get lost amid all the other things we do, yet they do make each day different. They are the quiet things done by mothers and grandmothers, by fathers and grandfathers, by children, by brothers and sisters. They are little signs of tenderness, affection and compassion. Like the warm supper we look forward to at night, the early lunch awaiting someone who gets up early to go to work. Homely gestures. Like a blessing before we go to bed, or a hug after we return from a hard day’s work. Love is shown by little things, by attention to small daily signs which make us feel at home. Faith grows when it is lived and shaped by love. That is why our families, our homes, are true domestic churches. They are the right place for faith to become life, and life to grow in faith”.

“Jesus”, Pope Francis says, “tells us not to hold back these little miracles”. Instead, he wants us to encourage them, to spread them. He asks us to go through life, our everyday life, encouraging all these little signs of love as signs of God’s own living and active presence in our world.

So we might ask ourselves, today, here now: How are we trying to live this way in our homes, in our societies? What kind of world do we want to leave to our children (cf. *Laudato Si’*, 160)?

We cannot answer these questions alone, by ourselves. It is the Spirit who challenges us to respond as part of the great human

family. And so we gather together. The World Meeting of Families is a time for families to gather and support each other. What does a family do when it is in trouble? – it comes together, at least it should come together. When my sister died all the family, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews, aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws, we gathered together. That is what families do, especially when faced with some difficulty, or pain. And now we have this huge gathering of families from all over the world, to help build up family life. What an inspiration of St. John Paul, to be inspired to hold the WMF!

To gather families with their own uniqueness, worries, hopes, joys, fears and pains.

But Jesus knows that, and says - “I am with you always.”

And we see family members who have been abused and ill-treated and hungry and uncared for. And our hearts should break for them - especially for children. And as with problems in all families, we try to face them, to learn, to find healing and try to move on. And we also see the huge problems of our time:

*We are faced with homelessness, drug addiction, family breakup.

*Many young and not so young who seem to have no reason for living?

*We see an economy that sometimes serves the market more than people

*We how often the desires of adults win out over the needs of children?

*The want of good role models that will inspire society.

*The weakest being used by the strong.

Pope John Paul in Phoenix Pk. in 1979, said in his homily:

“The most sacred principles, which were the sure guides for the behaviour of individuals and society, are being hollowed out by false pretences concerning freedom, the sacredness of life, the indissolubility of marriage, the true sense of human sexuality, the right attitude towards the material goods that progress has to offer. Many people now are tempted to self-indulgence and consumerism, ... Prosperity and affluence, tend to make people assume that they have a right to all that prosperity can bring, and

thus they can become more selfish in their demands. Everybody wants a full freedom in all the areas of human behaviour and new models of morality are being proposed in the name of would-be freedom. When the moral fibre of a nation is weakened, when the sense of personal responsibility is diminished, then the door is open for the justification of injustices, for violence in all its forms, and for the manipulation of the many by the few. The challenge that is already with us is the temptation to accept as true freedom what in reality is only a new form of slavery.”

Are these prophetic words? And so Pope Francis has come to speak to us.

Pope Francis has come to shine the light of Jesus Christ on us and on our country today, to encourage us, to help to heal the past and give us courage for the future. To make us face our own selves and our situation, but to show us that God is with us, to help us. Pope Francis will encourage us to return to the source, to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, to find new avenues arise, new ways to speak to today’s generation, to find better and more eloquent signs and words with meaning for today’s world. (Evangelii Gaudium, 11). Especially for our families. May God bless them all.

I thank him for choosing to come to Ireland. I hope you do too.

It is a grace on us all.

As we begin the World Meeting of Families and, next Saturday, we will welcome the Holy Father to our shores, my prayer for all of us is that these days will not just be something to look back on with nostalgia. Rather, through God’s grace and Mary’s help, may it be the beginning of a richer, more fully human and faith-filled living of family life, in our Church and in our society.

With 37,000 people coming per day to the events in the RDS, 70,000, in Croke Park for the Festival of Families, 45,000 in Knock, 500,000 Phoenix Park, countless others watching on TV and many more besides, may they all be inspired may they, may we, see ourselves as in need of God, may we go back to the source and then be God’s disciples.

