

CHIARA AND THE FAMILY – Loppiano 11 March 2017

The Family: a creative resource for the social fabric of every people

Maria Voce

President of the Focolare Movement

This evening I invite you to dream with me about a different world, the one we would like to live in.

We have heard many stories, reflecting the commitment and experiences of many families here with us today. These testimonies have helped us grow, and I thank you for that.

Many of us, in different ways and at different times, came into contact with the charism of unity. God placed this charism in Chiara Lubich's heart and she disseminated it throughout the world. This charism has forged and continues to forge each one of us. It guides our lifestyle and the key choices we make about the challenges of every day. We have seen this today too.

What is more, this charism encourages us to look at the world and history from a different point of view. It helps us understand the bond that connects us with the whole of humankind, and which is not merely personal. This bond embraces the whole of our being, our affections, our relationships, our weaknesses, emotions, sufferings, commitments and dreams.

On 6th September 1949, Chiara wrote:

582. I feel I live in me all the creatures of the world, all the Communion of Saints. Really: because my I is humanity with all the people that were, are, and will be. I feel and I live this reality: because I feel in my soul both the delight of Heaven and the anguish of humanity that is all a great Jesus Forsaken. And I want to live Him totally, this Jesus Forsaken. I live Him adding the drop of my pain of the moment (which is my life, me made: Pain as He is) to His.ⁱ

Today we are talking about the family, our own families, and the nuclear family we all belong to. We are emphasising the life rooted in love that renews and refreshes the family on a daily basis, enabling it to rise to new life out of greater or lesser deaths. Life rooted in love makes the presence of God shine out at the heart of the family and among its members. Jesus becomes part of the family, drawn by this love.

Today, it is he who urges us to go further and say, in the light of Chiara's words we have just read: "my I (my family) is humanity with all the people that were, are, and will be. I feel (we feel) and I live this reality: because I feel (we feel) in my soul (in our souls) both the delight of Heaven and the anguish of humanity that is all a great Jesus Forsaken."

When Chiara founded the New Families Movement on the 19th July 1967, she said: «... **it is important that you (...) have in your own family life an experience you can share with others**»ⁱⁱ.

And looking at the little group of families she had in front of her -- and almost prophetically at the vast Movement that would later develop, she went on « **(...) as a Movement we now take this task upon ourselves (to be) another Jesus: Jesus who looks at the world, at the crowds, and has pity on them. Because within this section of the world ... I place upon your shoulders those most broken, most like Him forsaken.**»ⁱⁱⁱ

Today I believe we can say that this invitation to families is being made once more, to every family. God is calling us to be fathers and mothers to humanity, to help give our contribution to encourage and sustain universal fraternity.

What kind of family can create a world imbued with brotherhood? Only families that can make their own all that is being lived by the community around them, and do so out of love, being able truly to say, "My self is humanity".

Only families renewed from within in this way, despite being weak and imperfect, as we all are, can give the world the healing light and love it needs, so that society can find genuine models to follow.

This is stated clearly in *Amoris Laetitia*:

"...the family itself introduces fraternity into the world. From this initial experience of fraternity, nourished by affection and education at home, the style of fraternity radiates like a promise upon the whole of society"^{iv}.

Families, you who are here – and those following us now on live streaming throughout the world – can fulfil these hopes:

- By sharing material and spiritual goods, freely, because they know the value of the culture of giving, of an economy of sharing.
- Accepting others for what they are, caring for them, living alongside one another happily. In this way, peoples in our world today can rediscover the value of acceptance and the walls of selfishness will break down.
- This will enable the handing on values from one generation to the next. Grandparents will still recognise the meaning of their life and hand on to their grandchildren the deep roots they need to avoid personal fragility and being at the mercy of the world.

Family life is the place where for the first time in life young people benefit from correction, which is so necessary for human development, but also forgiveness, which gives the strength to go ahead afresh and overcome one's own mistakes. This experience can lay foundations for the exercise of justice at home as well as in society.

All this encourages every family member to take the initiative to meet the real needs of those nearby, for example caring for an older person who lives alone, for a friend out of work, or relatives who are quarrelling... This will prevent families being closed in on themselves and fruit in a responsible and constructive society.

Values like fellowship, solidarity, self-sacrifice and reciprocity, which are "normal" so to speak in family life, can bring new approaches that break through inflexible institutional structures and thus become reference points for a new social order.

There are many institutions and bodies already in place dedicated to work for the good of communities and individuals. I vividly remember a talk in which Chiara said to us:

"They need to be made more human and given a soul so that the spirit of service reaches the same level, the same spontaneity and the same spirit of love for the individual that one experiences in a family."^{v vi}

The irreplaceable task of families, as "the model and prototype for every other type of human community" is "to keep love always alive in homes, giving new life to the values that God gave the family, and to bring them everywhere in society, generously and tirelessly".^{vii}

It is a tough task, but we cannot let hope escape us, as Pope Francis would say, "because – and these are his words – if we perceive the threatening and invasive presence of evil, there is still goodness, an ocean of goodness, at work in the world".^{viii}

Among the countless associations that make up this ocean of good are the families of the Focolare Movement and all they do.

- Founding family networks that contribute to social cohesion
- Enabling ongoing formation for families and couples, with special help to families in crisis
- Accompanying young people preparing for marriage

You are these families and every day I see this in your experiences:

- Your efforts to enable children to become rounded citizens as they mature during their teenage years and beyond: it is one of the best things you are doing.
- The New Families Association, which you are part of, supports projects throughout the world to give dignity and a future to children and families. Now you are caring for 11,643 children in 49 countries. Through international adoptions, you have been able to give 1,070 children a family.
- You are actively engaged in situations of crisis and emergency helping those in need, for example people fleeing war or poverty, or those caught up in natural disasters. You have established projects for this purpose.

Keep on doing this! Do not be discouraged when it is difficult or you feel you are alone. God's providence will help you and you will leave to your children a genuine legacy, which will not waste away.

All this usually starts when one family sees the needs of those nearby and helps them.

I am reminded of something that happened in a town near Chicago, Carole realised that other families struggled with the same problems she faced in caring for her severely disabled son David. She organised a series of activities bringing young disabled people together, engaging many families from her part of the town and involving the town council, which was then awarded a prize for social development.

In Spain, two couples in the Movement saw there were many families in their city who needed help in caring for their elderly/older members. They got together and opened a day centre with 25 places. Very soon, a huge network of help developed, involving relatives, the local people and the local authority. They were able to employ various people and some time later opened a second centre given the demand there was for places. All this bore witness to the value of every person seen truly as a "goldmine," and The Goldmine is the name they gave the project.

It might seem a dream. These experiences show it is already a reality, which might be very small or just beginning, but which contain the overwhelming power of life.

So, then, let's nourish this life with love so that it can invade the world. Let's start now and go out with joy to meet people around us and bringing our gift.

This flower, which we will now take outside, is a symbol of the experience we have had and which we wish to bring into the whole world.

ⁱ C. LUBICH, appunto del 6 settembre 1949, pubblicato su *Nuova Umanità* 2008/3, n.177, pp. 335.

ⁱⁱ C. LUBICH, Alla prima scuola di focolarini/e sposati/e, fondazione del Movimento Famiglie Nuove, Rocca di Papa, 19.7.1967, Trascrizione.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} *Amoris Laetitia* n. 194.

^v C. LUBICH, "Semi di comunione per l'umanità del terzo millennio", Messaggio al Familyfest 5 giugno 1993.

^{vi} C. LUBICH, "Semi di comunione per l'umanità del terzo millennio", Messaggio al Familyfest 5 giugno 1993.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Papa Francesco a La Stampa nel suo 150°, 9 febbraio 2017.