

## **Families Light Up the Synod - Prayer Vigil of Families with Pope Francis**

St. Peter's Square, Rome

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### **Talk by Maria Voce, President of the Focolare Movement**

Last year's extraordinary Synod on the Family directed the whole Church to consider its mission to care for all families especially in their woundedness and weaknesses.

How can we not recognize Jesus Crucified in many families afflicted by moral and material poverty, divisions, failures and betrayals, by war, and the loss of hope in the future? Yet, Jesus proved to us that these very circumstances – in which it seems that God has withdrawn, abandoning humanity to its fate – can be transformed into steps towards resurrection, if we allow ourselves to be accompanied by him.

This is the experience of our families in their daily commitment to build and rebuild family bonds as required by the new commandment: *Love one another as I have loved you* (cf Jn 13:34). Each time we forgive and listen to one another, or maintain an open dialogue between generations, rejecting judgements, we feel our hearts kindled with a new light and we experience a new joy. We have gratefully recognized in this experience the presence of Jesus among us, according to his faithful and constant promise: *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them"* (Mt 18:20). This is the presence of the Risen Lord that the disciples of Emmaus experienced. It gave them light, courage and missionary zeal. It is this same presence of Jesus in our families, a presence nourished especially by the Eucharist which brings about the gift of unity with God and with one another, that we never wish to lose. We would like Him to be among us so as to accompany all our brothers and sisters. We would like Him to be the one who speaks to the hearts of everyone, rekindling hope.

Many people here could testify that they have seen small miracles in everyday life. These happen when we open our hearts and our arms to those around us who experience suffering and confusion, who might be on the edges of social and ecclesial communities. They happen when we try to share life's journey respectfully and with few words. Then mutual trust and understanding develop. These brothers and sisters often feel consoled. They find their dignity again and can begin to move forward in life.

In one of his recent Wednesday catecheses, Pope Francis encouraged families to *"take the initiative and feel the responsibility for bringing their precious gifts to the community"*<sup>i</sup>. We want to take his words to heart as a family of families who live mutual love also among ourselves. We want to do this in partnership with our parishes and with ecclesial movements and associations, because we believe that the beauty and the joy of the Christian family shine out more if they express the life of the Church as the "home and school of communion"<sup>ii</sup>.

When families build these relationships among themselves, they weave a network which begins locally and can reach out to the whole world. This is vital so as to promote and support social cohesion. The Gospel of the family is written with words of welcome for the least, reciprocity of gifts and faithfulness to the fundamental vocation to love. It is the seed of a new culture that is urgently needed for the survival of humanity. This Gospel is the seed of universal brotherhood, of a united world living in peace.

Today the entire human family is facing new and crucial global challenges. This means that all Christians should renew their commitment to be "neighbours" to others. Recently, the Focolare Movement took up the Pope's invitation to welcome refugees who knock on the doors of our country, but also on the door of our heart.

Christian families are entrusted with the mandate to work towards a society healed by mercy. They can show all people the tenderness and strength of God's love. In this way, as the Pope says, they can write a page of sacred history every day. It is not the history found only in books but one that remains forever in the heart of the Father.

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<sup>i</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience of 9 September 2015.

<sup>ii</sup> St. John Paul II, *NMI*, n. 43.