


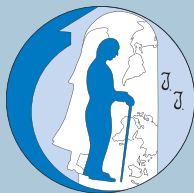
Serenity

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A photograph of Pope Francis, dressed in white papal attire, leaning over and placing his hands on the hands of an elderly nun seated in a wheelchair. The nun is wearing a black habit and a light purple veil. Other nuns in similar habits are visible in the background, some smiling. The setting appears to be indoors with large windows in the background.

Called by God in old age
to watch over the unity
of the Church ...

Pope Francis among us



Our Mission

Continuing the work of Saint Jeanne Jugan, our MISSION is to offer the neediest elderly of every race and religion a home where they will be welcomed as Christ, cared for as family and accompanied with dignity until God calls them to himself.

Cover Photos: Front Cover: Pope Francis greets Sr. Marie Mathilde, 102, during his visit to Jeanne Jugan Residence, Washington, D.C. (photo l.s.p.). Inside front cover: The Pope waves to police in Manhattan (photo by the nephew of a Little Sister). Inside back cover: The Pope embraces a young disabled man during the Festival of Families Prayer Vigil (photo © L'Osservatore Romano, used with permission). Back cover: Little Sisters in Philadelphia's LOVE Park on their way to the Family Fest (photo l.s.p.).

Serenity

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Acknowledgments

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So Close to Us!

Pope Francis' first visit to the United States was interpreted from diverse perspectives, many of them political. But more than anything else, Francis came among us as a pastor who was happy to be with his flock, to embrace them and hold them close. Whether we shook his hand or just watched him on television, what deeply moved us was his closeness, his warmth and the intensity of his attention to everyone he met, as if each person — just for a few seconds — was the only one that mattered to him.

In speaking to Congress about refugees Pope Francis said that “we must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation.” This is how he encountered each and every person he met. What an example as we enter into the Jubilee Year of Mercy!

May these words, spoken to the U.S. Bishops the first day of his visit, encourage us as we remember his passage among us:

“May no member of Christ’s Body and the American people feel excluded from the Pope’s embrace. Wherever the name of Jesus is spoken, may the Pope’s voice also be heard to affirm that: ‘He is the Savior!’ From your great coastal cities to the plains of the Midwest, from the deep South to the far reaches of the West, wherever your people gather in the Eucharistic assembly, may the Pope be not simply a name but a felt presence, sustaining the fervent plea of the Bride: ‘Come, Lord!’”

“Whenever a hand reaches out to do good or to show the love of Christ, to dry a tear or bring comfort to the lonely, to show the way to one who is lost or to console a broken heart, to help the fallen or to teach those thirsting for truth, to forgive or to offer a new start in God ... know that the Pope is at your side, the Pope supports you. He puts his hand on your own, a hand wrinkled with age, but by God’s grace still able to support and encourage.”

Thank you, Holy Father! 🌹



“

The right to religious liberty remains one of America's most precious possessions.

White House Papal Welcome
September 23

Mr. President,

I am deeply grateful for your welcome in the name of all Americans. As the son of an immigrant family, I am happy to be a guest in this country, which was largely built by such families. I look forward to these days of encounter and dialogue, in which I hope to listen to, and share, many of the hopes and dreams of the American people.

Mr. President, together with their fellow citizens, American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination. With countless other people of good will, they are likewise concerned that efforts to build a just and wisely ordered society respect their deepest concerns and their right to religious liberty.



September 23 began with a visit to the White House for the superiors of our homes in Washington and Baltimore and a third Little Sister. At the invitation of Archbishop Carlo Viganò, apostolic nuncio, they had the privilege of attending the White House Papal Welcoming Ceremony. Mother Mary Michael of the Trinity was also given the honor of personally meeting the Holy Father after the ceremony. But this wasn't even the most exciting moment of the day! ...

That freedom remains one of America's most precious possessions. And, as my brothers, the United States Bishops, have reminded us, all are called to be vigilant, precisely as good citizens, to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it.

— Pope Francis



As Mother Mary Michael waited to be introduced to Pope Francis inside the White House she was suddenly approached by Archbishop Viganò, who whispered to her that the Pope desired to meet with the Little Sisters after the canonization of Junipero Serra that afternoon. A flurry of activity then ensued to prepare a place of encounter in the home for over forty Little Sisters and the Holy Father.

Then came the dilemma of whether or not the Sisters should attend the canonization Mass at the Natinal Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, with the hope of slipping out and running home in time to greet the Pope. Washington's Cardinal Donald Wuerl had given them a block of over thirty tickets in a front section, and so the Sisters knew that their absence would be conspicuous. They decided to take a chance and go to the Mass, but were sent home by the Secret Service before the Mass even began.





Canonization of Junípero Serra

National Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception

Mission Mission is never the fruit of a perfectly planned program or a well-organized manual. Mission is always the fruit of a life which knows what it is to be found and healed, encountered and forgiven. Mission is born of a constant experience of God's merciful anointing.

Today we remember one of those witnesses who testified to the joy of the Gospel in these lands, Father Junípero Serra. He was the embodiment of "a Church which goes forth," a Church which sets out to bring everywhere the reconciling tenderness of God. Junípero Serra left his native land and its way of life. He was excited about blazing trails,

“
Father Serra had
a motto which
inspired his life
and work:
siempre adelante!
Keep moving
forward!

going forth to meet many people, learning and valuing their particular customs and ways of life. He learned how to bring to birth and nurture God's life in the faces of everyone he met; he made them his brothers and sisters. Junípero sought to defend the dignity of the native community, to protect it from those who had mistreated and abused it. Mistreatment and wrongs which today still trouble us, especially because of the hurt which they cause in the lives of many people.

Father Serra had a motto which inspired his life and work, not just a saying, but above all a reality which shaped the way he lived: *siempre adelante!* Keep moving forward! For him, this was the way to continue experiencing the joy of the Gospel, to keep his heart from growing numb, from being anesthetized. He kept moving forward, because the Lord was waiting. He kept going, because his brothers and sisters were waiting. He kept going forward to the end of his life. Today, like him, may we be able to say: Forward! Let's keep moving forward!

— from Pope Francis' homily



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After the Little Sisters made their way home — led by Secret Service agents — they settled in to watch the canonization Mass, taking place just two blocks away, on television.

A highlight of the Mass was seeing the crucifix hanging in the stage area outside the Basilica, which had been borrowed from our own chapel! Returned to the home the next day, it now bears a brass plaque commemorating its role in the Papal Mass.



Visit to Jeanne Jugan Residence



Looking at the novices the Holy Father exclaimed, “Es un milagro! ... It’s a miracle!”

Our Our Little Sisters in Washington recount what happened after the canonization Mass: “A helicopter overhead and a number of police vehicles signaled the Holy Father’s arrival in his little Fiat. Pope Francis exited his car and greeted Mother Mary Michael, who led him into the chapel. On the way she said, ‘Holy Father, you must be so tired.’ He responded that the bishops are tired, as are the priests and sisters, but the sisters do not complain! As he entered the chapel we all began to applaud, and then quite spontaneously Pope Francis made his way around the circle, shaking hands and speaking with each Little Sister. Many kissed his ring and others spoke to him, offering a word of thanks, assuring him of our prayers....”

“The four novices were standing together, along with Angela, an aspirant. He held her hand for quite a while as Mother Mary Michael explained to him that she was going to enter soon, and that those next to her were our novices. ‘Uno, dos, tres, cuatro!’ He counted. ‘Es un milagro!’ (It’s a miracle!).”

One member of the community in Washington recounts a particularly poignant moment: “For several of us the most touching moment of the Holy Father’s visit was his encounter with one of our elderly Little Sisters who has suffered from dementia for many years. Sister is no longer able to speak and as I knelt a few feet away ready to snap a photo I didn’t think that she even made eye contact with him. But that didn’t matter! Our Holy Father leaned over her, took her hand in his and listened as our superior told him Sister’s name and a few details about her life. His gaze went from her hands to her face and back again, and then he traced the sign of the cross on her forehead before moving on.”

“What struck me so deeply,” she continued, “was that even though Sister was not able to communicate with him in any discernable way, Pope Francis gave her just as much attention as he gave the rest of us. That moment helped me to understand the culture of encounter as an acknowledgment of human dignity. God is mysteriously present in each and every person, and each of us manifests God’s love in a way no one else can. To encounter another person as our Holy Father does is to realize their inherent dignity and their unrepeatable uniqueness in God’s eyes; it is to believe that they have something worthwhile to say, something unique to offer. I will never know what our elderly





“

Pope Francis asked us to remember that it is Jesus whom we care for in them, to sing to them and caress them, to treat them tenderly....

Little Sister gave Pope Francis in his brief encounter with her, but I am convinced that she did indeed give him something of value.”

The Little Sisters continue their account: “After making his way around the group to greet each one of us (44 in all), the Holy Father came back to the center of the circle and began to speak to the whole group, gazing around at each of us but directing his gaze toward the novices several times. It’s hard to describe the power of his presence and his gaze, as well as his contagious joy, or even more, to recount his exact words, since the experience was quite overwhelming. He told us, through his translator, how much he appreciated the work we do with the elderly, since this is a work not valued by a society which tends to discard the elderly in our ‘throw-away culture.’”



“Pope Francis asked us to remember that it is Jesus whom we care for in them, to sing to them and caress them, to treat them tenderly.... Finally, looking around at all of us he ended by saying something like this: ‘But one day, you’ll have a big surprise. You’ll see the gates open, and Jesus will be standing there, and he’ll say to you, It was Me!’”

“Before giving us his blessing, he motioned to Msgr. Miles, his interpreter, to begin the Hail Mary in English. He bid us goodbye, and Mother Mary Michael presented him with a letter in Spanish from Mother General. As he did at each stop on his trip, Pope Francis asked us to pray for him, saying, ‘Because I have a difficult task.’ His entourage, including his two trusty security guards, hopped in the cars and soon, the Pope was gone.”

“

I was overwhelmed with joy and a deep peace. His visit, his personal touch and the joy he radiated when he greeted us will give me courage to face any difficulties in the future.

– Sr. C. M.



“

Thank you,
Pope Francis,
for confirming us
in our beautiful,
hospitaller
vocation!

– Sr. M. G.

“

I really enjoyed
that the visit to the
home was unknown
to the outside world
because it is like our
hidden life.

–Sr. F. C.



“

The Holy Father's
visit was for me an
encounter of great
joy, a moment of
grace, and a life-long
memory in fifteen
minutes.

– Sr. M. A.

“

His smile was so
fatherly, and I felt that
he was truly enjoying
the moments he was
able to spend with us.

– Sr. A. M.



Visit to St. Patrick's in the City September 24

After speaking before a joint session of Congress on the morning of September 24, Pope Francis visited St. Patrick's, the oldest parish in Washington. While there he paused for this prayerful moment with Our Lady and then met with individuals served by Catholic Charities, speaking to them about St. Joseph. With our devotion to this great saint we found his words particularly meaningful.

You You make me think of Saint Joseph. Your faces remind me of his.

Joseph had to face some difficult situations in his life.

One of them was the time when Mary was about to give birth, to have Jesus. The Bible tells us that, “while they were [in Bethlehem], the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (Lk 2:6-7).

The Bible is very clear about this: there was no room for them. I can imagine Joseph, with his wife about to have a child, with no shelter, no home, no place to stay. The Son of God came into this world as a homeless person. The Son of God knew what it was to start life without a roof over his head. We can imagine what Joseph must have been thinking. How is it that the Son of God has no home? Why are we homeless, why don't we have housing? These are questions which many of you may ask, and

do ask, every day. Like Saint Joseph, you may ask: Why are we homeless, without a place to live? And those of us who do have a home, a roof over our heads, would also do well to ask: Why do these, our brothers and sisters, have no place to live? Why are these brothers and sisters of ours homeless? ...

Joseph was someone who asked questions. But first and foremost, he was a man of faith. Faith gave Joseph the power to find light just at the moment when everything seemed dark. Faith sustained him amid the troubles of life. Thanks to faith, Joseph was able to press forward when everything seemed to be holding him back.

In the face of unjust and painful situations, faith brings us the light that scatters the darkness. As it did for Joseph, faith makes us open to the quiet presence of God at every moment of our lives, in every person and in every situation. God is present in every one of you, in each one of us.

I want to be very clear. There is no social or moral justification, no justification whatsoever, for lack of housing. There are many unjust situations, but we know that God is suffering with us, experiencing them at our side. He does not abandon us.

Jesus not only wanted to show solidarity with every person. He not only wanted everyone to experience his companionship, his help, his love. He identified with all those who suffer, who weep, who suffer any kind of injustice. He says this clearly: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35).

Faith makes us know that God is at our side, that God is in our midst and his presence spurs us to charity. Charity is born of the call of a God who continues to knock on our door, the door of all people, to invite us to love, to compassion, to service of one another ... Jesus keeps knocking on our door in the faces of our brothers and sisters, in the faces of our neighbors, in the faces of those at our side.

– from Pope Francis' talk to the homeless

“

I waited
100 years to see
a Pope, but it was
worth it!

– Mary Frances



After two days in Washington, Pope Francis arrived at New York's J.F.K. International Airport on the afternoon of September 24. A delegation of two Little Sisters, two Residents and an employee from our home in Queens were privileged to be among those who greeted our Holy Father at the airport. Mary Frances, pictured here, was celebrating her 100th birthday that very day. Informed about our centenarian, the Pope went straight to her to wish her a happy birthday and give her a rosary. Mary Frances was thrilled! Michael, 95, pictured to the left of the Pope in sunglasses, also felt honored to represent our New York Residents.



Pope Francis moves on to New York ...

Arrival at J.F.K. International Airport, September 24



Photo © L'Osservatore Romano, used with permission.

Hope

In the hope of helping you to persevere on the path of fidelity to Jesus Christ, I would like to offer two brief reflections. The first concerns the spirit of gratitude. The joy of men and women who love God attracts others to him; priests and religious are called to find and radiate lasting satisfaction in their vocation. Joy springs from a grateful heart. Truly, we have received much, so many graces, so many blessings, and we rejoice in this. It will do us good to think back on our lives with the grace of remembrance. Remembrance of when we were first called, remembrance of the road traveled, remembrance of graces received... and, above all,

remembrance of our encounter with Jesus Christ so often along the way. Remembrance of the amazement which our encounter with Jesus Christ awakens in our hearts. My brothers and sisters, men and women of consecrated life, and priests! Let us seek the grace of remembrance so as to grow in the spirit of gratitude. Let us ask ourselves: are we good at counting our blessings, or have we forgotten them?

A second area is the spirit of hard work. A grateful heart is spontaneously impelled to serve the Lord and to find expression in a life of commitment to our work. Once we come to realize how much God has given us, a life of self-sacrifice, of working for him and for others, becomes a privileged way of responding to his great love.



Photo © L'Osservatore Romano, used with permission.



Vespers with Clergy, Men and Women Religious
 St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, September 24



Once again, one of our Residents was privileged to meet Pope Francis in New York! On September 24 Most Rev. Peter L. Gerety, archbishop emeritus of Newark, New Jersey and a Resident of our home in Totowa, NJ, was able to accompany a group of Little Sisters to New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral for Vespers with the Holy Father. At 103 Archbishop Gerety is the oldest living bishop in the world!

Yet, if we are honest, we know how easily this spirit of generous self-sacrifice can be dampened.... We can get caught up measuring the value of our apostolic works by the standards of efficiency, good management and outward success which govern the business world. Not that these things are unimportant! ... But the true worth of our apostolate is measured by the value it has in God's eyes. To see and evaluate things from God's perspective calls for constant conversion in the

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I would like to express my esteem and my gratitude to the religious women of the United States. What would the Church be without you?

first days and years of our vocation and, need I say, it calls for great humility.

The cross shows us a different way of measuring success. Ours is to plant the seeds: God sees to the fruits of our labors. If at times our efforts ... seem to fail and produce no fruit, we need to remember that we are followers of Jesus ... and his life, humanly

speaking, ended in failure, in the failure of the cross.

The other danger comes when we become jealous of our free time, when we think that surrounding ourselves with worldly comforts will help us serve better. The problem with this reasoning is that it can blunt the power of God's daily call to conversion, to encounter with him. Slowly but surely, it diminishes our spirit of sacrifice, our spirit of renunciation and hard work. It also alienates people who suffer material poverty and are forced to make greater sacrifices than ourselves, without being consecrated.... We need to learn how to rest in a way that deepens our desire to serve with generosity. Closeness to the poor ... will teach us a different way of resting, one which is more Christian and generous....

In a special way I would like to express my esteem and my gratitude to the religious women of the United States. What would the Church be without you? Women of strength, fighters, with that spirit of courage which puts you in the front lines in the proclamation of the Gospel. To you, religious women, sisters and mothers of this people, I wish to say "thank you," a big thank you... and to tell you that I love you very much.

– from Pope Francis' homily



Interreligious Meeting at Ground Zero

New York, September 24

Photo © L'Osservatore Romano, used with permission.

Remembrance

In this place of sorrow and remembrance I am filled with hope, as I have the opportunity to join with leaders representing the many religious traditions which enrich the life of this great city. I trust that our presence together will be a powerful sign of our shared desire to be a force for reconciliation, peace and justice in this community and throughout the world. For all our differences and disagreements, we can experience a world of peace. In opposing every attempt to create a rigid uniformity, we can and must build unity on the basis of our diversity of languages, cultures and religions, and lift our voices against everything which would stand in the way of such unity...

This can only happen if we uproot from our hearts all feelings of hatred, vengeance and resentment. We know that that is only possible as a gift from heaven. Here, in this place of remembrance, I would ask everyone together, each in his or her own way, to spend a moment in silence and prayer. Let us implore from on high the gift of commitment to the cause of peace. Peace in our homes, our families, our schools and our communities. Peace in all those places where war never seems to end. Peace for those faces that have known nothing but pain. Peace throughout this world that God has given us as the home of all and a home for all. Simply PEACE.

– from Pope Francis' speech



World Meeting of Families September 22–27, Philadelphia



Sound the Bell of Holy Freedom (Official WMOF Hymn)

Sound the bell of holy freedom; call all nations of the earth.
Sons and daughters of one Father, sent to spread God's saving Word.
Come, and gather, as one fam'ly at the table of the Lord.

David branch from root of Jesse, Mary that vine's flow'ring rose.
She brought forth for us the Savior as the angel did propose;
Overshadowed by the Spirit, by her "yes" new life arose.

Blessed Joseph, spouse of Mary, teacher of your God and Lord,
You did shelter and provide for wondrous child by kings adored.
Open to God's Word in dreaming saved your child from Herod's sword.

Jesus, youth in low'ly Naz'reth, faithful son, and loving child,
Guest and host at Cana's wedding, finest wine you did provide.
You, our rock and you our shelter, keep us ever by your side.

At the cross a grieving mother, on the cross, her only son,
With all mothers and their children, Blessed Mary, you are one.
In our joys, and in our sorrows may we do as you have done.

Sound the bell of holy freedom; call all fam'lies of the world
To be fed by love incarnate; to proclaim God's holy Word;
Through the love of Christ our brother, in the Spirit make us one.

Text: Andrew D. Ciferni, O., Praem, b. 1942



The Little Sisters participated in the World Meeting of Families in diverse ways. During the preparatory phase of the event several members of the community in Philadelphia were among the 10,000 volunteers who helped with set-up and the registration of pilgrims.

During the Meeting itself a delegation of fifteen Little Sisters attended various liturgies, workshops and cultural events and helped staff our booth in the WMOF Marketplace, a great lieu of encounter where over 900 exhibitors presented their ministries or sold Catholic products.

In the Marketplace the Sisters met people from all over the world, including the seminarian brother of one of our Little Sisters (opposite page), Bishop Mario Iceta Gabcigogeoascoa of Bilbao, Spain, who knows our new superior general (above), and Saint Nicholas!

What I learned from my grandparents

"My grandfather once wrote me in a letter, 'Never stop learning.'"

"My grandparents taught me that no matter what my situation in life is, always to be small and humble before God, and to trust!"

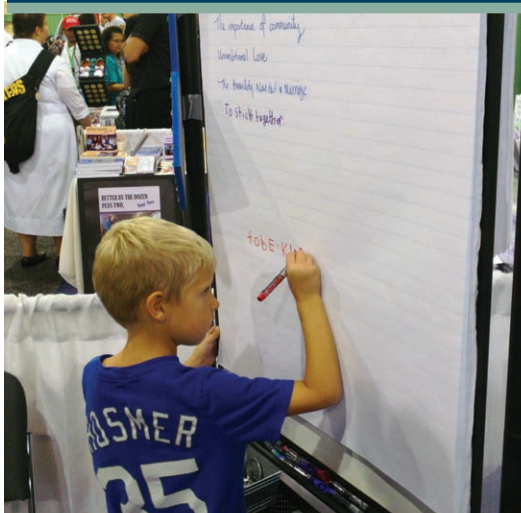
"My grandparents taught me that I was worth their love and that no matter what happens God loves me."

"I learned the value of family and honoring commitment, hard work."

"They taught me patience, gentleness and unconditional LOVE."

"From my grandparents I learned that 'Every life matters.'"

We created our booth as an opportunity to promote the role of the elderly in the family, especially grandparents. We distributed buttons emblazoned with, "I love my grandparents," and "I love my grandkids;" and on a large flip chart we invited participants to tell us "What I learned from my grandparents." These reflections were then posted to our blog.





“The gift of laughter, music, family, love, how to sew, play the piano and make spaghetti sauce! Yum!”

“Love is the most important thing in life. You don’t have to like what a person does but you must love them.”

“I learned hospitality from my Grandma.”

“I learned to respect others and to always be patient.”

“I learned to read and to play checkers!”

“I learned to tie my shoes.”

“I learned to be cool!”

“They taught me to stick together.”

“To save a little each week, and that food is a celebration of family and hospitality/love for others.”

“A smile costs nothing.”

“The importance of hard work.”

“Anytime is a good time for an adventure!”

“My grandparents taught me that love is the answer to everything.”

“They taught me self-sacrifice”

“To love God and family!”

“From my grandparents I learned the importance of community.”

What did you learn from your grandparents?



Mass with Clergy, Priests & Men and Women Religious September 26, Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul, Philadelphia

Saint Most of you know the story of Saint Katharine Drexel, one of the great saints raised up by this local Church. When she spoke to Pope Leo XIII of the needs of the missions, the Pope — he was a very wise Pope! — asked her pointedly: “What about you? What are you going to do?” Those words changed Katharine’s life, because they reminded her that, in the end, every Christian man and woman, by virtue of baptism, has received a mission. Each one of us has to respond, as best we can, to the Lord’s call to build up his Body, the Church.

“What about you?” I would like to dwell on two aspects of these words in the context of our specific mission to transmit the joy of the Gospel and to build up the Church, whether as priests, deacons, or men and women who belong to institutes of consecrated life.

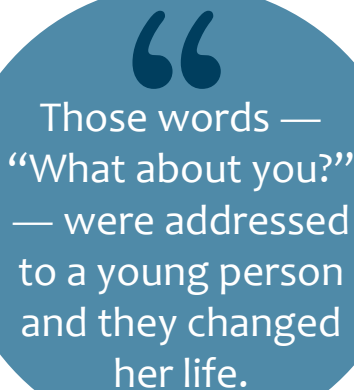
First, those words — “What about you?” — were addressed to a young person, a young woman with high ideals, and they changed her life. They made her think of the immense work that had to be done, and to realize that she was being called to do her

part. How many young people in our parishes and schools have the same high ideals, generosity of spirit, and love for Christ and the Church! I ask you: Do we challenge them? Do we make space for them and help them to do their part? To find ways of sharing their enthusiasm and gifts with our communities, above all in works of mercy and concern for others? Do we share our own joy and enthusiasm in serving the Lord? ...

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for the way in which each of you has answered Jesus' question which inspired your own vocation: "What about you?" I encourage you to be renewed in the joy and wonder of that first encounter with Jesus, and to draw from that joy renewed fidelity and strength. I look forward to being with you in these days and I ask you to bring my affectionate greetings to those who could not be with us, especially the many elderly priests and men and women religious who join us in spirit.

During these days of the World Meeting of Families, I ask you in a particular way to reflect on our ministry to families, to couples preparing for marriage, and to our young people. I know how much is being done in the local Churches to respond to the needs of families and to support them in their journey of faith. I ask you to pray fervently for them, and for the deliberations of the forthcoming Synod on the Family.

Now, with gratitude for all we have received, and with confident assurance in all our needs, we turn to Mary, our Blessed Mother. With a mother's love, may she intercede for the growth of the Church in America in prophetic witness to the power of her Son's Cross to bring joy, hope and strength into our world. I pray for each of you, and I ask you, please, to pray for me.



“
Those words —
“What about you?”
— were addressed
to a young person
and they changed
her life.

— from Pope Francis' homily

Symbolic

In this place which is symbolic of the American way, I would like to reflect with you on the right to religious freedom. It is a fundamental right, which shapes the way we interact socially and personally with our neighbors whose religious views differ from our own....

Religious freedom certainly means the right to worship God, individually and in community, as our consciences dictate. But religious liberty, by its nature, transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families. Because religion itself, the religious dimension, is not a subculture; it is part of the culture of every people and every nation....

The Quakers who founded Philadelphia were inspired by a profound evangelical sense of the dignity of each individual and the ideal of a community united by brotherly love. This conviction led them to found a colony that would be a haven of religious freedom and tolerance. That sense of fraternal concern for the dignity of all, especially the weak and the vulnerable, became an essential part of the American spirit. During his visit to the United States in 1987, Saint John Paul II paid moving homage to this, reminding all Americans that: "The ultimate test of your greatness is the way you treat every human being, but especially the weakest and most defenseless ones" (September 19, 1987).

I take this opportunity to thank all those, of whatever religion, who have sought to serve God, the God of peace, by building cities of brotherly love, by caring for our neighbors in need, by defending the dignity of God's gift, the gift of life in all its stages, and by defending the cause of the poor and the immigrant. All too often, those most in need of our help, everywhere, are unable to be heard. You are their voice, and many of you — men and women — have faithfully made their cry heard. In this witness, which frequently encounters powerful resistance, you remind American democracy of the ideals for which it was founded, and that society is weakened whenever and wherever injustice prevails.

— *from Pope Francis' speech at Independence Hall*

“
The ultimate test
of your greatness
is the way you treat
every human being,
but especially the
weakest and most
defenseless ones.

– JP II



Meeting for Religious Liberty
September 26, Independence Hall, Philadelphia



Festival of Families and Prayer Vigil September 26, Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia

Family

I want to stress two little points about the family. I would ask you to think about them. We have to care in a special way for children and for grandparents. Children and young people are the future; they are our strength; they are what keep us moving forward. They are the ones in whom we put our hope. Grandparents are a family's memory. They are the ones who gave us the faith, they passed the faith on to us. Taking care of grandparents and taking care of children is the sign of love — I'm not sure if it is the greatest, but for the family I would say that it is the most promising — because it promises the future. A people incapable of caring for children and caring for the elderly is a people without a future, because it lacks the strength and the memory needed to move forward.

The family is beautiful, but it takes hard work; it brings problems. In the family, sometimes there is fighting. The husband argues with the wife; they get upset with each other, or children get upset with their parents. May I offer a bit of advice: never end the day without making peace in the family. In the family the day cannot end in fighting. May God bless you. May God give you strength. May God inspire you to keep moving forward. Let us care for the family. Let us defend the family, because there our future is at stake. Thank you. God bless you, and please pray for me.

— from Pope Francis' homily



WMOF Closing Mass
September 27

Faith opens a “window” to the presence and working of the Spirit. It shows us that, like happiness, holiness 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). 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 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 his own living and active presence in our world.

So we might ask ourselves, today, here, at the conclusion of this meeting: 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?

– from Pope Francis’ homily

☀️ I can't thank God enough for permitting me to be in Philadelphia for the World Meeting of Families and to be in the presence of Our Holy Father Francis! Even though distant, he was truly close! And I was proud of my hometown! City Hall was decked in Papal colors and there were banners with the Holy Father's image and words flying from lampposts throughout the city.

People of all colors and religions greeted visitors. Schools (even public) and businesses were closed. I couldn't help thinking that this warm welcome was a reflection of deeper longings in people's hearts for the Goodness and Truth embodied in Pope Francis. I was so happy to be Catholic and consecrated, at home with this awesome throng....

The World Meeting of Families, climaxed by the presence of our Holy Father Francis in Philadelphia, was truly an ecclesial experience! What touched me most was the emphasis on the close link between consecrated

life and family life. The presence of so many priests and religious intermingling with the multitude of beautiful families was a sight for sore eyes! The Church, in her glorious diversity, was just so alive. Our Holy Father, on this last leg of his journey to the States, seemed as invigorated by this sight as the crowds were encouraged by his warm, pastoral manner.

– Sr. K. M.

☀️ The single most memorable moment for me was when the Holy Father spoke at the prayer vigil Saturday night. As the various families gave their testimonies he took notes, and I assumed he was somehow going to incorporate their stories into his talk. But then when it was his turn to speak, he came bounding down the steps, seemingly ahead of his cue, stood in front of the podium and started speaking in a tone so animated that it was both touching and amazing! "Before he created the world, God was in love, because God is love," he proclaimed with a huge smile on his face. "The



IN OUR OWN WORDS ...

Our lasting impressions of the World Meeting of Families

love he had within himself, the love between the Father and the Son, in the Holy Spirit, was so great, so overflowing — I'm not sure if this is theologically precise, but you will get what I am saying — that love was so great that God could not be selfish. He had to go out from himself, in order to have someone to love outside of himself. So God created the world. God made this wonderful world in which we live and which, since we are not too smart, we are now in the process of destroying. But the most beautiful thing God made — so the Bible tells us — was the family. He

created man and woman. And he gave them everything. He entrusted the world to them: 'Grow, multiply, cultivate the earth, make it bear fruit, let it grow.' All the love he put into that marvelous creation, he entrusted to a family."

Although we were quite tired after walking a lot and sitting out on the Parkway for hours, we were completely energized by Pope Francis' boundless enthusiasm!

— Sr. C.

☀ What struck me the most about Pope Francis' trip to Philadelphia was the atmosphere of the city. It was

peaceful; people were helpful, not complaining, being very patient with everything and everyone. People did not seem to mind waiting for hours to go through the security checkpoints. They also had no problem standing or sitting on the ground, being in uncomfortable positions for hours eagerly awaiting the Pope's arrival. You could sense their love for him and they were eager to hear what he had to say.

– Sr. C. M. J.

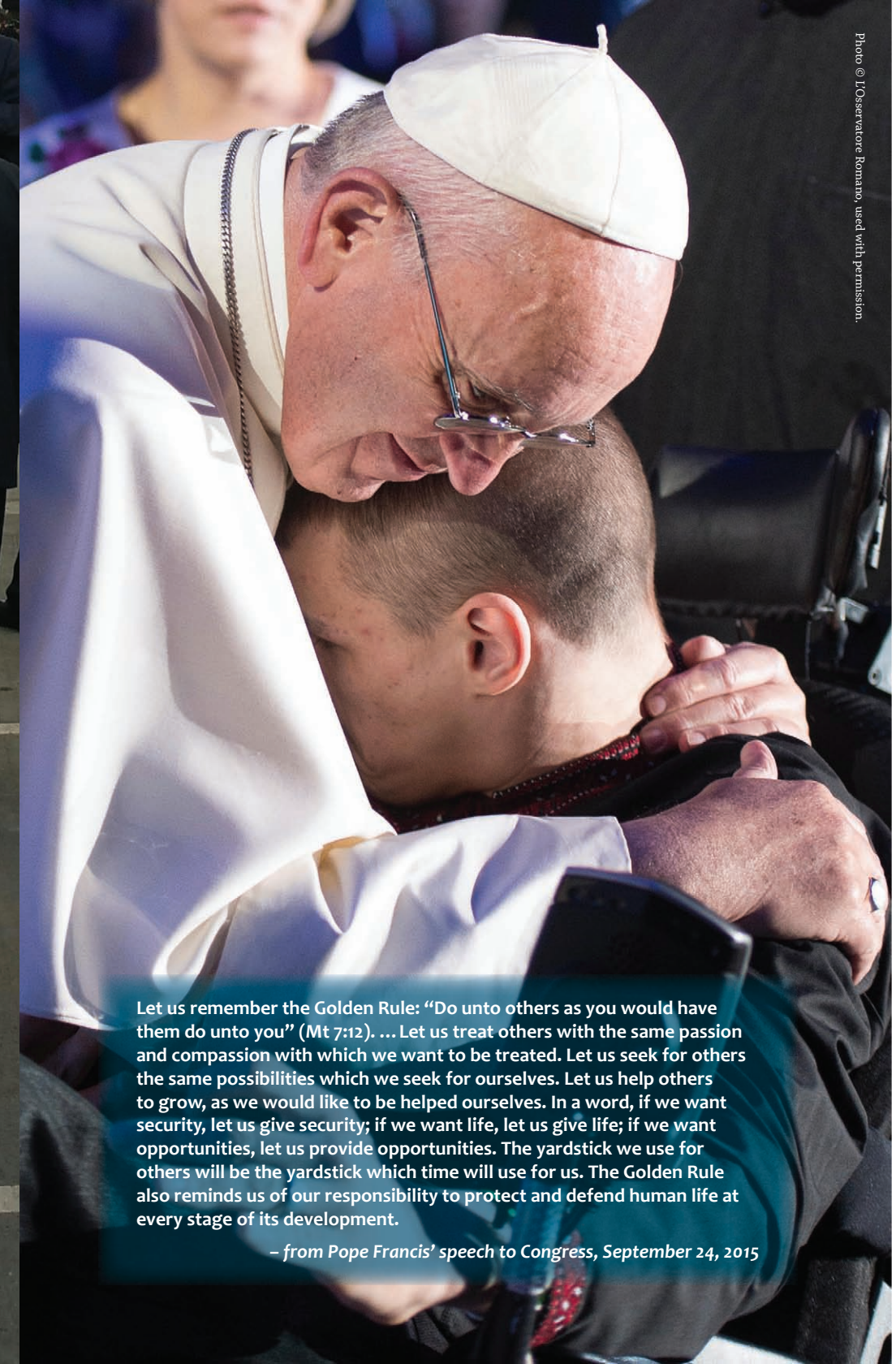
☀ It was truly an experience of the World Church, people from different nations and backgrounds, priests, religious, families, single people, worshipping God, united in the love of God and neighbor. It gave me hope for the future, which sometimes can seem dark, when one considers the statistics and news reports. But the lives of people are more than that. We have in us the desire to live in harmony and peace, and we are capable of working toward it, even in very difficult circumstances, as we heard in testimonies of

ordinary families. The vision of Pope Francis of embracing every person, no matter their personal history, as a child of God, worthy of love and concern, was always present during the discussions, encounters and talks.

It occurred to me that there is no perfect family, just as there is no perfect community, and the perfection we should strive for is not so much not to have any differences or disputes, but holiness. It is very countercultural, though, because nowadays, we think there must be a cure for everything, but holiness is a journey, and the journey is also the goal.

I also learned that little things make a big difference — an encouraging word, carrying the bag for someone, letting someone sit down, without him/her having to ask, just looking out for the good of the other, instead of being so focused on what I need, what I want to do, and my plans. I truly hope we can recover some of this in our society.

– Sr. C. M.

A close-up photograph of Pope Francis, wearing his white zucchetto and glasses, leaning forward to embrace a young man. The Pope's hands are gently resting on the young man's shoulders. The young man is wearing a dark jacket and a red patterned scarf. The background is blurred, showing other people in a crowd.

Let us remember the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Mt 7:12). ... Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us. The Golden Rule also reminds us of our responsibility to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development.

– from Pope Francis’ speech to Congress, September 24, 2015



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