

**“New Directions in Pastoral Ministry  
for Marriage & Family Life”**

*The path ahead after the World Meeting of Families & the Synod*

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**Priests Councils of New York State**

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**Prelude to the Synod**

**Vigil of World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia**

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*“All of the love that God has in Himself, all of the beauty that God has in Himself, all of the truth that God has in Himself, He gives to the family. And a family is truly a family when it is able to open its arms and receive all of this love.*

*...But let's go back. When the man and his wife made the mistake and distanced themselves from God, God did not leave them alone. There was so much love, so much love that He began to walk with humanity. He began to walk with His people, until the fullness of time arrived, and He gave the greatest sign of His love, His Son. And His Son, where did He send Him? To a palace? To a city, to start a business? He sent Him to a family! God came into the world in a family.*

*And he was able to do this because this family was a family that had its heart open to love, that had the doors open to love. Let's think of Mary, this young woman. She couldn't believe it. "How can this be?" And when it was explained to her, she obeyed. Let's think of Joseph, full of dreams to form a household. He finds himself with this surprise that he doesn't understand. He accepts. He obeys. And in the obedience of love of this woman, Mary, and of this man, Joseph, a family is created into which comes God.”*

**Pope Francis' Homily at Opening Mass of the Synod - October 4, 2015**

*“Today we experience the paradox of a globalized world filled with luxurious mansions and skyscrapers, but a lessening of the warmth of homes and families; many ambitious plans and projects, but little time to enjoy them; many sophisticated means of entertainment, but a deep and growing interior emptiness; many pleasures, but few loves; many liberties, but little freedom... The number of people who feel lonely keeps growing, as does the*

*number of those who are caught up in selfishness, gloominess, destructive violence and slavery to pleasure and money.*

*Our experience today is, in some way, like that of Adam: so much power and at the same time so much loneliness and vulnerability. The image of this is the family. People are less and less serious about building a solid and fruitful relationship of love: in sickness and in health, for better and for worse, in good times and in bad. Love which is lasting, faithful, conscientious, stable and fruitful is increasingly looked down upon, viewed as a quaint relic of the past. It would seem that the most advanced societies are the very ones which have the lowest birth-rates and the highest percentages of abortion, divorce, suicide, and social and environmental pollution.*

*...In this extremely difficult social and marital context, the Church is called to carry out her mission in fidelity, truth and love.*

*...And the Church is called to carry out her mission in charity, not pointing a finger in judgment of others, but – faithful to her nature as a mother – conscious of her duty to seek out and care for hurting couples with the balm of acceptance and mercy; to be a “field hospital” with doors wide open to whoever knocks in search of help and support; even more, to reach out to others with true love, to walk with our fellow men and women who suffer, to include them and guide them to the wellspring of salvation.”*

### **The 2015 Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family**

When he formally opened the 14th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis reminded the synod fathers that they were about to “take up again the dialogue” that began one year before with the 3rd Extraordinary Assembly (October 5-19, 2014). He said: “The Synod, as we know, is a ‘walking together’ in a spirit of collegiality and synodality, courageously adopting parrhêsia, pastoral and doctrinal zeal, wisdom, and frankness, and always having before our eyes the good of the Church and of the families, and the *suprema lex, the salus animarum.*”

270 synodal fathers, 14 fraternal delegates, 51 men and women auditors (17 couples and 17 single persons) were involved in the work of the Ordinary Synod, which lasted for three weeks, from October 4 to 25, 2015. The speeches of the synodal fathers in the aula were divided into three stages,

corresponding to the parts of the *Instrumentum laboris* that had been drafted on the basis of the conclusions of the preceding Synod, and was then completed by a synthesis of the replies to a second questionnaire that was published on December 9, 2014.

The 14th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops took place exactly fifty years after the Synod of Bishops was established set by Blessed Paul VI. This important anniversary was marked on October 17 with a special event at which Dominican Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna made a commemorative address and the Holy Father delivered a very important address on what it means to be a Synodal Church. As the Pope sees it, the Synod is a “process” that ought increasingly to shape the life of the Church; indeed, this “is what God expects from the Church of the third millennium,” because “Church and Synod are synonymous.” Episcopal collegiality must live in a Church that is totally synodal. Pope Francis had already announced this clearly in the interview he gave to the Jesuit magazines (*AMERICA*, etc), only five months after his election, with these words:

*“We must walk together: the people, the bishops, and the Pope. Synodality must be lived on various levels. Perhaps the time has come to change the methodology of the Synod, because I find the present methodology static.”*

In the Pope’s address at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of the establishment of the Synod, on October 17, 2015, Francis said:

*“...Our gaze extends also to humanity. A synodal church is like a banner lifted up among the nations (cfr. Is 11:12) in a world that even though invites participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration – often hands over the destiny of entire populations into the greedy hands of restricted groups of the powerful. As a Church that “walks together” with men and women, sharing the hardships of history, let us cultivate the dream that the rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and the exercise of authority, even now will be able to help civil society to be founded on justice and fraternity, generating a more beautiful and worthy world for mankind and for the generations that will come after us.”*

The fact that the whole synodal process began with a questionnaire shows us something of fundamental importance. As the Pope remarked, “the *sensus fidei* prevents us from making a rigid separation between the *Ecclesia docens*

and the Ecclesia discens, since the Flock too possesses its own 'sense of smell' to discern the new paths that the Lord is opening up for the Church."

Francis went on to say that it was this conviction "that guided me when I wanted the People of God to be consulted in the preparation of the double synodal event on the family." *For "how could it be possible to speak of the family without consulting the family, listening to their joys and their hopes, their pains and their fears?"*

The main work in the Synod, over three intense, October weeks, was to fashion the right response of the Church to many of these situations. In the final reflections, the Synod pointed out clearly that this must be a **patient accompaniment, a readiness to listen, a gift of time and attention to one another**. This is a pathway for us all to take, but especially for bishops and priests who are entrusted with the care of God's people.

Along this past October's Synodal journey, there was some turbulence that did not deter the Synod one minute from its mission. Many of you asked me about the so-called letter to the Pope, supposedly signed by thirteen Cardinals, who expressed serious concerns about the Synod's process and methodology. The synod was therefore not devoid of faux pas, nor of attempts to pressure it from outside and inside of the assembly - before it began and during its development - some of which found ample megaphones in the secular and even moreso in so-called "Catholic" media and blogs.

Let me simply say this: Pope Francis spoke twice of 'overcoming every conspiracy hermeneutic that is sociologically weak and spiritually unhelpful.' And this because, as he himself has observed, 'opinions are expressed freely,' but 'sometimes with methods not entirely benevolent.' Many Synod Fathers and delegates spoke openly about their distress and sadness over the public statements of some synod fathers about persons, contents, and the unfolding of the synod. Suffice to say that many at the Synod kept their distance from those who believed that the Synod was manipulated or rigged.

### **Circuli Minores**

In the Synod discussion groups Synod Fathers and participants shared together what we treasured most about our own family life during 36 hours of small group discussions. The challenges faced by families today were in

the stories shared together: about poverty; an absence of faith; a reluctance to speak of faith at home; the drama of being refugees or migrants; the devastating impact of pornography, the breakdown of a marriage in the pain of divorce and, of course, the fact of people entering a second civil marriage and finding there a new start, stability, and fruitful love.

The reflection on the situations of pain and brokenness in the light of the Gospel and faith led to key issues emerging in what was a tedious process. Every one of the 270 bishops present had the opportunity to speak in plenary session, as did married couples, three representatives of Women Religious and “Fraternal Delegates” (representatives from other churches). Despite a variety of differing, and at times opposing, interventions and reports – occasionally vigorously presented - a certain convergence began to emerge before our eyes.

The first of the major themes that emerged from the Synod was a **renewed recognition of the beauty and importance of marriage and family and its indispensable nature**, not only for the individual to achieve the very meaning of what it means to be human, but also for the good of society. In the family we form our identity as a person, learn to love and be loved, learn generosity, tolerance and forgiveness. Healthy families make a healthy society. Far from abandoning marriage or family life we have to do all we can to promote and strengthen these great, God-given gifts. How often I heard the words of St. John Paul II echoing in the Synod Hall and in the small groups: “The future of humanity passes through the family.”

A second theme that emerged was the need to be a **listening Church** – listening to the cry of those in difficult situations, who experience pain in their lives or family histories. Too often we have judged, condemned and excluded people. Learning from Christ, we need to have his tenderness and mercy and to allow these to shape our parishes and communities that they may always be places of welcome and acceptance. The Church is open to all who wish to follow Christ. It is not for the “perfect” or the “righteous” – Christ came for sinners and to call them to conversion. Many Synod Fathers spoke of the need for Church leaders to apologize and seek forgiveness for the harsh way in which we have sometimes treated people, lacking compassion and understanding of their situations.

The third theme, **discernment**, was one of the more controversial in its application to those who are in second unions. In working to integrate the

divorced and remarried more fully in the life of the Church pastors must lead them through a process of discernment regarding the broken marriage/family. Some questions would be: how did we respond to the children of your marriage in the time of crisis? Did you seek reconciliation and try to save the marriage? What is the situation of the abandoned spouse? What were the consequences of the break-up of the marriage on the families and of wider society?

The break up of the family has many consequences far beyond the individual and thus such examination of conscience, guided by the pastor, can lead to a deeper conversion and inclusion in the Christian community. It also recognizes that individual histories are different and that the notion of "one size fits all" is simply not possible. Doctrine that applies to everyone is not in question, but individual circumstances and conscience must also be taken into account - not only for those in second unions but also for those in other situations.

The fourth theme was that of **accompaniment** - at various levels. Those in irregular unions should not be abandoned or excluded but positive aspects of their relationship should be recognized and encouragement given to them. Young people entering into marriage often have little understanding of what married life entails - they need to be well prepared. Accompaniment is also about giving support to those already married especially young couples in the first years of their married life - and those who are in hurting marriages.

Experienced married couples play an essential role in accompaniment. Families are not simply objects, receiving from us who serve. The family is also an instrument of God's compassion, love and mercy towards others, especially those who are poor, marginalized and suffering. Families are **subjects**, those who give and share, inspiring others through their heroic lives often lived in very ordinary circumstances but lived in extraordinarily faithful ways. Married couples witness to appropriate sexuality in a world that sees sexuality as a commodity.

The 94-paragraph report approved October 24 highlighted the role of pastors in helping couples understand church teaching, grow in faith and take responsibility for sharing the Gospel. It also emphasized how "pastoral accompaniment" involves discerning, on a case-by-case basis, the moral culpability of people not fully living up to the Catholic ideal.

While not specifically mentioning the controversial proposal of a path toward full reconciliation and Communion for the divorced and civilly remarried, members of the Synod of Bishops on the family handed Pope Francis a report emphasizing an obligation to recognize that not all Catholics in such a situation bear the same amount of blame. To be clear, the report makes no explicit mention of absolution and the return to Communion, it seems to leave some possibility for such a solution by quoting the Catechism of the Catholic Church's affirmation that "imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified" because of different conditions. Just as the degree of guilt will differ, the report said, "also the consequences of the acts are not necessarily the same in all cases." **No doors have been shut to people who are in difficult situations.**

The "Relatio synodi" incorporates the overall criterion expressed by Saint John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*: "discerning the situation well." There is in fact a difference "between those who have made sincere efforts to save the first marriage and have been completely unjustly abandoned, and those who by their own grave fault have destroyed a canonically valid marriage" (no. 85). But there are also those who have contracted a second union in view of raising the children, and are subjectively certain in conscience that the previous marriage, destroyed beyond repair, had never been valid (cf. no. 84).

The synod therefore affirms that it is the duty of priests "to accompany the persons in question on the path of discernment according to the teaching of the Church and the guidelines of the bishop."

The Synod fathers are well aware that **cohabitation** "is often chosen because of a general mentality that is opposed to definitive institutions and commitments, but also because the couple are still awaiting an existential security (with work and a fixed salary). The analysis is careful to avoid generalizations and to tackle the situations "in a constructive way, seeking to transform them into opportunities for the path of conversion towards the fullness of matrimony and of the family in the light of the Gospel.

"The first duty of the Church is not to distribute condemnations or anathemas, but to proclaim the mercy of God, to call people to conversion, and to lead everyone to the salvation given by the Lord (see John 12:44-50)." Pope Francis expressed this clearly in his discourse at the close of the Synod: "The Church is the Church of the poor in spirit and of the sinners

who are looking for pardon – not only of the righteous and of the saints, but rather of the righteous and of the saints when they feel they are poor and sinners.”

While insisting on God's love for **homosexual persons** and the obligation to respect their dignity, the report also insisted same-sex unions could not be recognized as marriages and denounced as "totally unacceptable" governments or international organizations making recognition of "'marriage' between persons of the same sex" a condition for financial assistance.

The report also spoke specifically of: the changing **role of women** in families, the church and society; single people and their contributions to the family and the church; the heroic witness of parents who love and care for children with disabilities; the family as a sanctuary protecting the sacredness of human life from conception to natural death; and the particular strain on family life caused by poverty and by migration.

The theme of the family has too often been reduced to the theme of marriage. This led one father to point out that there are families with only one parent, families without parents, families that include the grandparents, families of grandchildren without parents, families separated by migrations – as well as the “religious families” and other forms of living together, including communitarian forms, that must also be taken into consideration.

In his final address to the Synodal Assembly, Pope Francis declared that it has not “concluded the study of all the topics that belong to the family,” but has “sought to illuminate them with the light of the Gospel, of the tradition, and of the two-thousand-year history of the Church, infusing these problems with the joy of hope, without falling into the trap of an easy repetition of what is indisputable or has already been said.” Similarly, the Synod has not “found exhaustive solutions to all the difficulties and the doubts,” but at least it has “tackled them without fear and without hiding our heads in the sand.”

## **Doctrine**

The Synod did not go about inventing a new Church, but making the existing one more effective in her pastoral care. Too often some may see this false opposition between doctrine (the past) and mercy (the future), or doctrine and reality. Sure, we can well speak of a renewed focus on mercy,



of new ways of exercising pastoral care, but not without starting from the foundation that is there. Mercy is not complete without doctrine.

Already at the end of the 2014 synod the Pope Francis had spoken of the temptation to ‘transform the bread into a stone and cast it against the sinners, the weak, and the sick, that is, to transform it into unbearable burdens.’ Doctrine is bread, not stone. At the end of the ordinary synod the pope repeated the image, saying that the synod ‘bore witness to all that the Gospel remains for the Church the living fountain of eternal newness, against those who want to indoctrinate it into dead stones to be thrown at others.’

What is expected of the Church and her bishops and priests? That they are close to the people and speak with them. That they take on “the smell of the sheep” and so find out what God’s Spirit plans for them. Discernment of the Spirit, together with mercy, could be called the keyword of that the Church is to do.

### **The train, the door, the torch, and the GPS navigation device**

It is not easy to summarize the richness of the Synod’s work, both because the speeches in the aula were many and diverse, and because the language-groups touched on every aspect of the *Instrumentum laboris*. There were however four metaphors that emerged from the Synodal interventions and discussions that I wish to leave with you: that of **the train, the closed door, the torch, and the GPS navigation device**. Each of these also surfaced in the various talks of Pope Francis.

The **train** was evoked in order to say that the Church must not be like a convoy in motion, a sort of TGV which travels through the world with the speed of an arrow, but from which it is impossible to pay any attention to the panorama that surrounds us. Is this not what Pope Francis referred to at during his homily at the closing mass of the Synod:

*“None of the disciples stops in front of the blind Bartimaeus, but Jesus does so. They keep on walking, they go on ahead as if there was nothing unusual happening. Bartimaeus may be blind, but they are deaf: his problem is not their problem. This can be our risk too: in the face of continuous problems, it is better to go ahead and not let oneself be disturbed. In this way, like those disciples, we are with Jesus, but we are not thinking like Jesus.*”

*We are in his group, but we fail to experience the opening of the heart, we dispense ourselves from the marvel, the gratitude, and the enthusiasm, and we risk becoming 'habituated to grace.' We can speak of him and work for him while we live far from his heart, which reaches out to those who are wounded. This is the temptation: a 'spirituality of the mirage.' We can walk across the deserts of the human race without seeing what really exists, while seeing what we ourselves want to see; we are capable of constructing visions of the world, but we do not accept what the Lord places in front of our eyes. A faith that does not know how to put down roots into people's lives remains arid, and instead of creating oases, it creates other deserts."*

The **door** was evoked by some Synod fathers, either as already "closed" or to be closed definitively, as in the case of giving communion to divorced persons who had remarried in a registry office. Others evoked the door as "open" or to be opened, for the opposite reasons; some spoke in general terms, evoking a fundamental pastoral attitude. Others expressed a profound sadness when they heard people speaking, even if only metaphorically, of a Church "with closed doors."

The Pope had employed the image of the door in the opening Mass of the Synod, urging the Church to "**be a field hospital**, with its doors open to welcome everyone who knocks and seeks help and support; even more, to go out from its own precincts towards the others with a true love, to walk alongside wounded humanity, to include it and to lead it to the fountain of salvation."

The **torch**, taken up by the Extraordinary Synod, is the image of the Gospel carried high "into the midst of people in order to give light to those who have lost their way" (Relatio synodi, nr. 55). This image translates the meaning of accompanying (walking together) and of discerning (the light) of the Church. Pope Francis used the image of the flame in his final discourse, where he affirmed that the Synod has "sought to look at today's reality and to read it – or better, to look at today's realities and to read them with the eyes of God, in order to kindle and to enlighten with the flame of faith the hearts of humankind."

The **GPS navigational device** tells us which road to take in order to arrive at our goal. If we go astray, or an unforeseen interruption takes place, the GPS does not demand that we return to the starting point and undertake the whole journey again from its beginning. It proposes an alternative route. By

analogy, every time we go astray because of our sin, God does not demand that we return to our starting point. The key word is “recalibrate!” God gives us a new orientation towards himself, drawing a new route for us. The Pope too, in the homily of the concluding Mass, spoke of “an accessible road, a road of consolation” that God has opened up.

It is interesting that these images evoke a path, a route, a possibility of entering (or of not entering). With regard to the path, the Pope warned the pastors in his homily at the concluding Mass of the Synod against the temptation of succumbing to a “faith like a guidebook”: “We can be walking with the people God, but we already have our own guidebook and map, which contain all the information. We know where we are going, and how long the journey will take; everyone must respect our rhythms, and anything that does not fit into this pattern disturbs us.”

The most important thing about this Synod was in fact the image of a Church that draws near to reality in order to look it in the face, to look at every person with his or her concrete history. The Church does not intend to “judge” before “looking” and touching the life of its children with a hand that is able to accompany and to heal. The 14th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod Bishops was thus a fundamental stage in a journey that the Church is taking under the guidance of Pope Francis, in the direction indicated by the Second Vatican Council.

Ultimately the hours of listening and discussions led to a **consensus** on the final document presented to the Pope. Each of the 94 paragraphs of that document achieved a 2/3 majority. This in itself was a remarkable achievement as the “Synod Fathers” came from every part of the world representing vastly different cultures and experiences.

### **Closing Address to Synod of Bishops – October 24**

For those claiming and writing that the Synod was a failure for Pope Francis, I invite you to listen to his understanding of the Synod, shared with the Synodal assembly on Saturday evening, October 24 in his concluding address:

*[The Synod] “was about urging everyone to appreciate the importance of the institution of the family and of marriage between a man and a woman,*

*based on unity and indissolubility, and valuing it as the fundamental basis of society and human life.*

*It was about listening to and making heard the voices of the families and the Church's pastors, who came to Rome bearing on their shoulders the burdens and the hopes, the riches and the challenges of families throughout the world.*

*It was about showing the vitality of the Catholic Church, which is not afraid to stir dulled consciences or to soil her hands with lively and frank discussions about the family.*

*It was about trying to view and interpret realities, today's realities, through God's eyes, so as to kindle the flame of faith and enlighten people's hearts in times marked by discouragement, social, economic and moral crisis, and growing pessimism.*

*It was about bearing witness to everyone that, for the Church, the Gospel continues to be a vital source of eternal newness, against all those who would "indoctrinate" it in dead stones to be hurled at others.*

*It was also about laying bare the closed hearts which frequently hide even behind the Church's teachings or good intentions, in order to sit in the chair of Moses and judge, sometimes with superiority and superficiality, difficult cases and wounded families.*

*It was about making clear that the Church is a Church of the poor in spirit and of sinners seeking forgiveness, not simply of the righteous and the holy, but rather of those who are righteous and holy precisely when they feel themselves poor sinners.*

*...In the course of this Synod, the different opinions which were freely expressed – and at times, unfortunately, not in entirely well-meaning ways – certainly led to a rich and lively dialogue; they offered a vivid image of a Church which does not simply "rubberstamp", but draws from the sources of her faith living waters to refresh parched hearts.*

*And – apart from dogmatic questions clearly defined by the Church's Magisterium – we have also seen that what seems normal for a bishop on one continent, is considered strange and almost scandalous for a bishop*

*from another; what is considered a violation of a right in one society is an evident and inviolable rule in another; what for some is freedom of conscience is for others simply confusion. Cultures are in fact quite diverse, and each general principle needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied.”*

**In his concluding homily the following morning (October 25, 2015) in St. Peter’s Basilica, Francis said:**

*“There are, however, some temptations for those who follow Jesus. Today’s Gospel [of the story of Bartimaeus] shows at least two of them. None of the disciples stopped, as Jesus did. They continued to walk, going on as if nothing were happening. If Bartimaeus was blind, they were deaf: his problem was not their problem. This can be a danger for us: in the face of constant problems, it is better to move on, instead of letting ourselves be bothered. In this way, just like the disciples, we are with Jesus but we do not think like him. We are in his group, but our hearts are not open. We lose wonder, gratitude and enthusiasm, and risk becoming habitually unmoved by grace. We are able to speak about him and work for him, but we live far from his heart, which is reaching out to those who are wounded. This is the temptation: a “spirituality of illusion”: we can walk through the deserts of humanity without seeing what is really there; instead, we see what we want to see. We are capable of developing views of the world, but we do not accept what the Lord places before our eyes. A faith that does not know how to root itself in the life of people remains arid and, rather than oases, creates other deserts.*

*There is a second temptation, that of falling into a “scheduled faith”. We are able to walk with the People of God, but we already have our schedule for the journey, where everything is listed: we know where to go and how long it will take; everyone must respect our rhythm and every problem is a bother. We run the risk of becoming the “many” of the Gospel who lose patience and rebuke Bartimaeus. Just a short time before, they scolded the children (cf. 10:13), and now the blind beggar: whoever bothers us or is not of our stature is excluded. Jesus, on the other hand, wants to include, above all those kept on the fringes who are crying out to him. They, like Bartimaeus, have faith, because awareness of the need for salvation is the best way of encountering Jesus.”*

## **Conclusion**

The 2015 Synod did not set out to resolve all the complexities of family life. Pope Francis said at the beginning of the synod that church doctrine on the meaning of marriage as a lifelong bond between one man and one woman open to having children was not up for debate. The final report strongly affirmed that teaching as God's plan for humanity, as a blessing for the church and a benefit to society.

In the heart and mind of Pope Francis, we need “a church that is again capable of restoring citizenship to so many of its children that walk as if in exodus. Christian citizenship is above all the result of God’s mercy. If the church is truly a mother, it needs to respond to its children from its “guts of mercy” (Lk 1:78). Not only from its heart, but precisely from its “guts.” The two Synods have been *kairos* moments when misery and mercy met, and in fidelity to the Lord of the Church, and faithful to the rich teaching of the Church, mercy has triumphed.

It was a privilege and deeply moving to be part of these great Synods. They will certainly have consequences way beyond the particular issue of family. The relationship between bishops and the Pope, always *cum Petro and sub Petro* (“with Peter and in obedience to Peter”) has become one of listening to each other and discerning.

In *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, the magnificent opening address of the Second Vatican Council on October 11, 1962, St. John XXIII said:

*“Therefore, we must not only conserve this precious treasure, as if all that concerned us was its antiquity. We must continue eagerly and without fear the work that our epoch demands, continuing along the path that the Church has taken for nearly twenty centuries. ...At present, the need in our own times is for Christian teaching in its entirety to be submitted by everyone to a new examination, with a serene and peaceful mind, without taking anything away from this teaching.”*

Let’s go back to Benjamin Franklin Parkway on that unforgettable night of September 26, 2015:

*“All of the love that God has in Himself, all of the beauty that God has in Himself, all of the truth that God has in Himself, He gives to the family. And*

*a family is truly a family when it is able to open its arms and receive all of this love. ...And His Son, where did He send Him? To a palace? To a city, to start a business? He sent Him to a family! God came into the world in a family."*

God sent his only Son into a human family. And God sends us, as Church, into the human families today, to pitch our tents once again in the midst of families, and to remind people how much they are loved, cherished, admonished, challenged, forgiven and blessed because God saw something so beautiful among us that he wanted to make his home with us. That is what the Synod on the Family is all about. That is the mission of the Church: to be close to humanity.