



# The Holy See

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. POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Saint Peter's Square

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## The family - 20. Wounds (I)

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

In recent catecheses we have spoken about the family suffering through the frailties of the human condition, poverty, sickness and death. Today, however, we will reflect on the hurts that are incurred in family life. When, that is, we hurt one another within the family. The worst thing!

We know that in every family history there are moments in which the intimacy of loved ones is offended by the behaviour of its members. Words and actions (and omissions!) that, rather than expressing love, dismiss it or even mortify it. When these hurts, which are still rectifiable, are ignored, they deepen: they transform into impertinence, hostility and contempt. And at that point they can become deep wounds that divide husband and wife, and induce them to find understanding, support, consolation elsewhere. But often these “supports” do not consider the good of the family!

The depletion of conjugal love spreads resentment in relationships. And often this disintegration “collapses” onto the children.

There: the children. I would like to meditate a little on this point. Despite our seemingly evolved sensitivity, and all our refined psychological analyses, I ask myself if we are not just anaesthetizing ourselves to the wounds in children’s souls. The more you try to compensate with gifts and snacks, the more you lose your sense of these spiritual wounds — so painful and so deep. We talk a lot about behavioural problems, mental health, the well-being of the child, about the anxiety of parents and their children.... But do we even know what a spiritual wound is? Do we feel the weight of the mountain that crushes the soul of a child in those families where members mistreat and hurt one another to the point of breaking the bonds of marital fidelity. How much weight, do our choices have — mistaken choices, for example — how much weight do they place on the soul of our children? When adults lose their head, when each one thinks only of him- or herself, when a dad and mom hurt one another, the souls of their children suffer terribly, they experience a sense

of despair. And these wounds leave a mark that lasts their whole lives.

In the family, everything is connected: when her soul is wounded in some way, the infection spreads to everyone. And when a man and a woman, who have committed to being “one flesh” and forming a family, think obsessively of their own need for freedom and gratification, this bias affects the hearts and lives of their children in a profound way. Frequently these children hide to cry alone.... We need to understand this fully. Husband and wife are one flesh. Their own little children are flesh of their flesh. If we think of the harshness with which Jesus admonishes adults not to scandalize the little ones — we heard the Gospel passage (cf. Mt 18:6) — we can also better understand his words on the serious responsibility to guard the marital bond that gives rise to the human family (cf. Mt 19:6-9). When man and woman have become one flesh, all the father and mother’s wounds and neglect have an impact on the living flesh of their children.

It is true, on the other hand, that there are cases in which separation is inevitable. At times it becomes even morally necessary, precisely when it is a matter of removing the weaker spouse or young children from the gravest wounds caused by abuse and violence, by humiliation and exploitation, by disregard and indifference.

There are, thanks be to God, those who, sustained by faith and by love for their children, bear witness to their fidelity to a bond they believed in, although it may seem impossible to revive it. Not all those who are separated feel called to this vocation. Not all discern, in their solitude, the Lord calling them. Around us we find various families in so-called irregular situations — I don’t really like this word — and it causes us to wonder. How do we help them? How do we accompany them? How do we accompany them so that the children aren’t taken hostage by either dad or mom?

Let us ask the Lord for great faith, in order to see reality through the eyes of God; and for great charity in order to approach people with his merciful heart.

### **Special greetings:**

Having just returned from Turin, I would like to address a heartfelt thank you to the people of Turin and Piedmont for their warm welcome. I thank in particular Archbishop Cesare Nosiglia of Turin, the priests, consecrated persons and all the bishops of Piedmont for their heartfelt participation. A special thought goes to the sick of Cottolengo, who by offering their suffering sustain the life of the Church. From my heart, I thank the many young people for their courage, their witness and their will to live the values of the Gospel. I would also like to thank the civil authorities, law enforcement, volunteers, associations and movements, the regional, provincial and municipal administrators, the world of labour and all those who contributed to the realization of my visit on the occasion of the exposition of the Shroud and the bicentennial of the birth of St John Bosco. Dear people of Turin, I felt truly at home, embraced by your affection and your hospitality. May the Lord bless all of you

and your beautiful city.

I offer an affectionate greeting to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, including those from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Sweden, Australia, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, the Islands of the Bahamas, Canada and the United States. May Jesus Christ heal every wound present in the life of your families, and may he make you witnesses of his mercy and love. May God bless you all!

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