



## Putting the family at the centre to come out better together

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We have been married for 38 years, 42 years since we started our engagement and almost 50 years of membership in Catholic Action. We have 4 children, three daughters-in-law and 2 grandchildren and the extended family, Elsa, of siblings, nephews, nieces, friends. Our family vocation was born and became concrete in the school of life and holiness that our Association offers to mature our laity, disciples and missionaries of Jesus in the world and in family life.

Throughout these years we have witnessed how much good Catholic Action does in personal lives through its community, ecclesial, social, formative and essentially missionary proposal. So many couples, fathers and mothers of families have forged their role in the associative experience. So many have been accompanied in their crises along the way and how many have been embraced in their pain and sadness. So many young people nourish their faith and their life in our groups, so many boys and girls learn to pray, to share, so many, and so many grandparents in the groups have sown a path that today they also gather in bonds of fraternity that, although isolated, know that they are not alone. (In our parish group, every morning Maruca of 91 years and Gladys of 87 remind us of the celebrations of the day, who to accompany with prayer, what not to forget in the day).

Catholic Action, a family of families, has always been aware of the responsibility of forming people who, discerning their specific vocation, embrace it with generous dedication and at the same time, it has been clear that the radiation of those who are part of it, reaches first of all, the home of each one of us.

For this reason, n 59 of Amoris Laetitia resonates even more, where Pope Francis points out that "Our teaching on marriage and the family cannot fail to be inspired and transformed by this message of love and tenderness; otherwise, it becomes nothing more than the defence of a dry and lifeless doctrine " and therefore " What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them." (AL n35)

## Reality check

We are all born into a family: nuclear, single-parent, blended, etc., which will give our lives its mark, and each family, in turn, is part of this, our world, which is going through a crisis of values and meaning, which impact on personal and relational life, affecting the greatest human and social good, which is precisely the family. There is no survey or statistic that does not highlight the family as the space most valued by people and, at the same time, the one most affected by culture and current social problems.

The context we are going through with the pandemic has exposed this reality even more. Where the family offers itself as a place of love and encounter, it has been easier to overcome the problems that isolation generates: coping with illness, accompaniment in the face of loneliness and loss, dealing with fears in the face of uncertainty, solidarity in the face of work problems, resilience in organising daily tasks, caring for children and the elderly. On the other hand, the absence of it, or in situations where the bond of love is ill, has exacerbated problems of loneliness, depression, anguish and violence.

The whole world is witness to this, even here, in our Latin America where today, the inequalities and inequities of so many other pre-existing "pandemics" have become visible to all, and have worsened, we have also experienced the solidarity of the most primal bonds of families and between families in the neighbourhood.

This panorama is a powerful and prophetic invitation to redouble our trusting witness and our formative proposal to the young generations, often disenchanted by the experience of the failure of other couples, or that of their own parents, they do not want to expose themselves to. Also the fear "of something that they consider too big and too sacred, ... a purely emotional and romantic conception of love, the fear of losing their freedom and independence, the rejection of everything that is conceived as institutional and bureaucratic" (AL 40).

A FEW PINCELLATIONS on the weaknesses to be faced

We live in a society marked by a culture that emphasises "freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily, as if there were no truths, values and principles to provide guidance, and everything were possible and permissible" (AL 34) This leaves us, left to:

INDIVIDUALISM "which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading in some cases to the idea that one's personality is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute". Thus, the family becomes a "lodging" where "an overly individualistic culture, caught up with possessions and pleasures, leads to intolerance and hostility in families" (AL 33), which "denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time" (AL 56), it is no longer a gender perspective where each person contributes the best of themselves in order to build together in reciprocity, but a selfish view based on self-perception.

The PRECARIETY OF COMMITMENTS promoted by the "culture of the provisional" (AL 39) where love is conceived, as "in social networks, which can be connected or disconnected at the consumer's pleasure and even blocked quickly". "It is transferred to affective relationships what happens with objects and the environment: everything is disposable, everyone uses and throws away, wastes and breaks, makes use of and squeezes as long as it is useful. After that, goodbye!

Then, one goes through different relationships in a search that is not fulfilling, because it is emptied of the effort and dedication needed to cultivate love, so that before crises, even marital ones, "are often confronted in haste and without the courage to have patience and reflect, to make sacrifices and to forgive one another. Failures give rise to new relationships, new couples, new civil unions, and new marriages, creating family situations which are complex and problematic for the Christian life". (AL 41)

CIRCUMSTANTIALISM: The lack of a long-term horizon means that the family "can become a place of passage, to which one goes when it seems convenient for oneself, or where one goes to claim rights, while the bonds are abandoned to the fickle precariousness of desires and circumstances". This cultural decadence is observed, which does not promote love and self-giving (AL39) and throws us into LONELINESS, "the fruit of the absence of God in people's lives and of the fragility of relationships". Each one of us needs a home, people who love and shelter us, trust in a God who accompanies and blesses us, even in those circumstances where the family is going through difficulties and differences to be healed.

But our world is also going through a crisis of social sense and justice, which is why Pope Francis' call for the centrality of the poor, care for creation and universal fraternity is prophetic.

Today millions of families in the world are victims of vulnerability caused by indifference and abandonment. Poverty, war, forced immigration, lack of access to work, health, education and housing. Human trafficking, abuse, gender violence, the phenomenon of addictions linked to the drug trade, and today, we cannot fail to mention the delay in access to vaccines for the most vulnerable people and families.

Far from the cultural characteristics outlined above, but at the same time affected by the shockwave that radiates from this culture, these families are a call to commit themselves to work for integral human development, to claim to the states that it is necessary to promote family life, to care for it and to protect its rights because "we need a community that supports us, that helps us and in which we help each other to look ahead" (FT1 8).

## **A proposal as Catholic Action**

In this complex but at the same time challenging reality, where there are also many families who are encouraged to live God's plan for them, even with imperfections, "we must continue to proclaim that 'it is better in the family'" (FT1 8). that they are "true schools of tomorrow". And how can we do this?

### **1. By offering formative spaces, by being a school of holiness.**

- Let us continue to offer community and motivating spaces "where we can share our deepest questions and daily concerns, where we can discern in depth with evangelical criteria about our own existence and experience, with the aim of directing our individual and social choices towards goodness and beauty" (EG 77) supported by the Word of God, to encourage a happy friendship with Jesus and the experience of fraternal love.
- Let us be communities where intergenerational dialogue is cultivated, as a family of families, where no one feels excluded, let us accompany on the path of daily holiness, of life celebrated and offered in small daily gestures, motivating the "holiness next door".

## **2. Domestic Church that takes on the social projection of its faith**

- Let us project towards the interior of our association and towards our living environments, the profound sense of being domestic Churches rooted in the Good News, which in the gestures of love lived at home become an "uninterrupted continuity of the liturgical language" (AL 215) that becomes a commitment to others, because at the heart of the Gospel itself (EG 177) is community life with an immediate moral repercussion whose centre is charity.
- May every Catholic Action family be open to others, especially to those who need it most. The Pope in Fratelli Tutti 89 points out that, we cannot reduce life to a relationship with a small group, not even to our own family, because it is impossible to understand ourselves without a wider fabric of relationships... Our relationship, if it is healthy and true, opens us to others who broaden and enrich us. "Let us not be closed groups or self-referential families, which constitute a "we" against the whole world, because this is often an idealised form of selfishness and mere self-preservation".
- May our families develop the capacity to widen the circle (FT97) so that every sister and brother who is suffering, abandoned or ignored by society may find in our families a heart where they are welcomed, promoted and accompanied.
- May each CA family, the domestic Church, be the place to learn and leave behind the culture of discarding and assume the culture of caring. The values of freedom, mutual respect and solidarity are transmitted from the earliest childhood (FT 114) in every family and in our children's groups.

## **3. Popularity to walk as a people**

The Pope, at the 2017 Congress, asked us to be a Catholic Action in the midst of the people, sharing the lives of the people in order to learn to discover where their interests and searches are going, what their deepest longings and wounds are, and what they need from us.

He also told us that this will bring us problems, because people will want to join the institution who apparently are not in the right conditions: families in which the parents are not married in the church, men and women with a difficult past or present but who struggle, disoriented and wounded young people. But this is the challenge of the ecclesial maternity of Catholic Action: to welcome everyone and accompany them on the road of life with the crosses they carry, and to share with everyone the joy of our Faith.

May this year of the family inspire us to live this ecclesial motherhood with all and for all, promoting the family as "true centres of humanity", where the future of our common home is forged.