

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
August 2, 2015
The Synod on the Family and the World Meeting of Families
Dr. John Grabowski

It's wonderful to be here, to be back here among so many old friends .. old there is a description of the relationship, not those in it, necessarily...sorry about that!

Last fall, during the two weeks of the extraordinary Synod, which I'll say a little bit about, it felt like I got more calls from reporters in that two week period than I had in the 14 years prior; everyone wanted to talk about the Synod. And I think we're going to see a similar thing this coming fall. But what I noticed was, people were fixating on this issue or that issue, or this pastoral situation, or that pastoral situation, and missing the big picture of what is going on in the Church, what the Lord is doing in the Church right now in regard to family. It was literally missing the forest for the trees; people were wrapped around this tree or that tree, depending on the person .. and this wasn't just the secular press, this was the Catholic press, this was people who .. pundits, observers, people who study and think about these things, just kind of missing the big picture, and so I thought, gee, this really seems unfortunate that we have this wonderful moment of grace in the life of the Church, and we're kind of missing it. So, I put together some slides, and we first did it for a little informal presentation with a colleague for some of our students on campus, and then our university president wanted a more formal presentation on our campus and invited Archbishop Kurtz, so he and I did a presentation together on the Synods, and I guess he thought these slides were on the right track because he subsequently borrowed them so he could use them in later presentations, so that's the genesis of this. So what I'm going to try to do is say: what's the bigger picture of what the Lord is doing right now in the Church in regard to family?

First: what are the Synods? The Synod of Bishops is an institution established by Paul VI in the wake of the Second Vatican Council in light of its teaching on episcopal collegiality, the teaching of the bishops, the function of the bishops together. Prior to this past year we have had 13 ordinary Synods, two extraordinary Synods, and nine special or regional Synods.

So first, a little bit about last year's extraordinary Synod: there have been two previous extraordinary Synods. The Code of Canon Law tells us that extraordinary Synods are called to "deal with matters which require a speedy solution, and which demand immediate attention for the good of the entire Church." So things of special urgency, in other words. So last year we had an extraordinary Synod to deal with issues related to the family, we had a fairly small, or a smaller, number of bishops in attendance: there were four from the US delegation, I'll show you them in a moment – this Synod happened, you may recall, last October 5th through 19th. The theme of that Synod: *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*. And, again, a lot of the reporting on the Synod, and there was a lot of it, I think was an exercise in getting lost in particular trees, as opposed to seeing the bigger picture. So the US delegation [slide]: Fr. Bill Donovan, who is the liaison from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to the Synods - he was there because the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is hosting the World Meeting of

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
August 2, 2015
The Synod on the Family and the World Meeting of Families
Dr. John Grabowski

Families in just a couple of months now; Archbishop Kurtz, the president of the USCCB; Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Wuerl, and Archbishop Skurla. So this was the extraordinary Synod, last year's meeting.

Coming up, and kind of sandwiched inbetween the two Synods, we have the World Meeting of Families (WMOF), which will take place in Philadelphia this coming September. The theme of the WMOF is "*Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive.*" The WMOF is a gathering ... I'll say more about it in a moment, but ... in this case, it's the Pontifical Council for the Family working together with the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to pull together, to kind of host this event. There is, I believe there's some limited copies here, there is a preparatory catechesis for the WMOF which actually I think is a really helpful overview of that bigger picture, of what really is going on in terms of Pope Francis' vision for the Church, the family, and the New Evangelization, which is kind of what we're focused on here.

So the WMOF: This was something that was begun by Pope St. John Paul II in 1994 – John Paul II also founded the Pontifical Council for the Family, back in 1980 actually. He was actually on his way across St. Peter's Square to announce the formation of the Pontifical Council for the Family when he was struck by the would-be assassin's bullets. There's a spot in St. Peter's Square that marks where that attempt on his life took place, and he took that as a sign of the opposition of the powers of evil, the powers of darkness, to the family. You'll hear Pope Francis in an upcoming slide say something very similar: the attack on the family, and the confusion about the family that we're seeing today is not simply of human origin, clearly.

So the WMOF, begun a little over ten years later by Pope John Paul II, to bring together families from across the world, people who minister to families, to celebrate families, to celebrate the church's ministry to families. The world meeting takes place every three years; the last meeting took place in Milan. At that meeting, then-Pope Benedict announced that the next meeting would take place in Philadelphia, announced his own intention of attending, and then he stepped down. So there was some question about whether Pope Francis would actually come, and he started dropping hints, and the Vatican press office kept saying, no, no, no, that's not official, it's not official until a year before. But we now know that of course Pope Francis will be at the World Meeting, which I think also says something significant about him.

So, we had the extraordinary Synod on Family, we have the WMOF, then we will have the upcoming ordinary Synod on Family in October. There have been, as I mentioned, 13 previous ordinary Synods of bishops, the most recent was in 2012 on the New Evangelization. The purpose of the upcoming Synod is to continue the work of the extraordinary Synod by "reflecting on the points discussed so as to formulate appropriate pastoral guidelines." It probably will also be formulating propositions which will be submitted to the Pope, which the Pope will then take under consideration for his own

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
August 2, 2015

The Synod on the Family and the World Meeting of Families
Dr. John Grabowski

response, probably an apostolic exhortation to the Church. There will be a slightly larger number of bishops in attendance, but apparently not a whole lot larger. The theme of the upcoming Synod: Jesus Christ reveals the mystery and vocation of the family. So kind of a more forward-looking treatment of family, and the role of the family in the plan of salvation. So if you want more information on the Synods, the USCCB has a very helpful information page on their website, giving you an overview. There's also further information on the Vatican website.

So – what's going on here, and how do we connect this to the ministry of Pope Francis, his vision for the Church at this moment in time? People point out that St. Pope John Paul II, one of his titles is “The Pope of the Family” and Pope Francis mentioned this at the Mass of Canonization, that this was a title that Pope John Paul II hoped to be given some day, that he would be identified with his love for, his ministry to the family. Among the first things that Pope John Paul II did at the beginning of his pontificate was to call a Synod on the family, a gathering of bishops to discuss family, to discuss the situation of family in the Church. That Synod ended up giving input that led to Pope John Paul II's teaching in his apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*.

Sometimes it is said that Pope Francis, unlike his predecessors, is not interested in family, at least not in the same way or to the same degree. But think about this: among the first major acts of Pope Francis' pontificate was to call not one, but two Synods on family. There's a narrative about Pope Francis out there in the media, that he's unconcerned about family, he's unconcerned about the Church's moral teaching or its pastoral practice. It's really not true, especially if you consider the facts – again, we have two Synods on family, we have the fact that he, probably in spite of a little hesitation on his part because of his facility in English, he is coming to the WMOF, he'll be here in the United States as you know, in Washington, in New York, and in Philadelphia. So he's following thru on the commitment made by his predecessor Pope Benedict. And since December of this last year, he has been devoting his weekly general audiences, his Wednesday audiences, to an extended catechesis on family. This is not a man who is uninterested in family. That's simply a misreading, a mischaracterization of this Pope. But with Pope Francis, what we have is, taking the Church's ministry to families, and placing it in the context of the New Evangelization, which for him is the heart of his own pontificate and the heart of the Church's mission right now. In the first major document that he authored (of course he issued the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* but he told us that was 80% written by Benedict and 20% by himself) in his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, *Evangelii Gaudium*, at the beginning of the document we find these words: "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since [quoting Pope Paul VI] 'no one is excluded from the joy of the Lord.'" This is kind of the dominant note of Pope Francis' ministry – this invitation to an encounter with the person of Christ. And in doing this, he's simply extending, and repeating, an

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
August 2, 2015
The Synod on the Family and the World Meeting of Families
Dr. John Grabowski

idea that you have in the teaching of his predecessors. Anybody know the first Pope to use the term New Evangelization? Anybody? Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, was the first to use that phrase. Pope John Paul II, though, this was a central theme in his teaching as well – in his 1993 encyclical on moral theology *Veritatis Splendor* he said: The Church exists to make the encounter with Christ possible. That’s the purpose of the Church’s existence, so that people can encounter Christ. Pope Benedict, in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, says “Christianity is not a moral code, it’s a decisive event, an encounter with a person, the person of Christ.” Pope Benedict actually established a new Vatican dicastery on the New Evangelization. But Pope Francis has made this kind of the dominant note of his pontificate. He wants the Church to be all in on evangelization. And this he believes has to be characteristic of the Church as a whole – we have to be a missionary church, he says (this is still from his first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*) “Missionary outreach, he says, is paradigmatic for all of the church’s activity. Everything we do as a church should be ordered to enabling people to encounter the person of Christ.” And what we need is, he writes, “a definite style of evangelization, which I ask you to adopt in every activity which you undertake.” So, this is the task of the Church, to communicate Christ, to make this invitation possible. And this isn’t just the clergy or those who are officially in some kind of pastoral capacity or ministry within the church, this is everyone. This is everyone in the church. He writes in the same document “in virtue of their baptism, all the members of the people of God have become missionary disciples; everyone has been empowered, equipped, in virtue of our common baptism into Christ, to share Christ with others, to bring Christ to others. The new evangelization calls for a personal involvement on the part of each and every one of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged here and now to be actively engaged in evangelization.” So this is the task, this is the call of every Christian.

So how does this bear upon the family, and what’s going on with family in terms of these major events in the life of the Church: the Synods, the WMOF? Pope Francis, speaking to representatives of the Charismatic Renewal, meeting in Rome at Rome’s Olympic stadium, had this to say: “Families are the domestic Church, where Jesus grows; he grows in the love of the spouses, he grows in the lives of children. That is why the enemy so often attacks the family. The devil does not want the family; he tries to destroy it, to make sure there is no love there. Married couples are sinners, like us all, but they want to go forward in faith, in fruitfulness, in their children and their children’s faith. May the Lord bless families and strengthen them in this time of crisis when the devil is seeking to destroy them.”

So, like St. John Paul II, Pope Francis sees the confusion about family, the opposition to family in our world, as the result of the evil one and his influence, which is why it’s so important that families be aware of their dignity, but also their capacity to be agents of the New Evangelization. So that phrase, and Bob mentioned this in his exhortation to us, domestic Church, *ecclesia domestica* – this is a term that was used frequently in the early

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
August 2, 2015

The Synod on the Family and the World Meeting of Families
Dr. John Grabowski

church, in part because churches often met in people's homes, in people's families – we didn't have church buildings dedicated for worship, so people met in the house of, in the family of ... so we had house churches. The Second Vatican Council, though, in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, returned to that idea, but realized, especially as that was then later understood and unpacked by great Christian teachers like St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine, that the family is meant to be a church in miniature, a place where all the activities that are characteristic of the universal Church, the Church as a whole, are present. And the way in which *Lumen Gentium* references this, but also Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation on family, *Familiaris Consortio*, is through the threefold munera, the threefold offices of Christ: Christ as priest, Christ as prophet, Christ as king. So this is how we can understand the family as a little church.

The family is priestly, in that family is a place of prayer, family is a place where spouses pray together, where parents pray with their children, where siblings pray together, and then where people from outside of the home are invited in to the home to experience that family prayer, to experience hospitality. And those of you who are parents, and grandparents, know that the way you pray within your family changes over time. Because you can't pray with 15 year olds the way you pray with five year olds. And you can't pray with 15 year olds the way you pray with 25 year olds. So the way you pray as a family changes, it grows, it develops, as the family grows and develops. The parents who are called to be the first witnesses of their faith to their children, and to pass on their faith by creating a school of prayer within the family, have to be attentive to that; have to be attentive to the way in which the Lord is moving you to pray with your children, grandchildren, as they grow, as their faith grows.

But the family is also prophetic, both in its lived witness of not being part of the consumer culture, what Pope Francis calls the throwaway culture around us, which sees not just things as disposable, but increasingly people as disposable. By enabling people to see the dignity of persons, especially vulnerable persons: the poor, the unborn, the elderly, the sick. The family becomes a witness through its dedication to its service to life. But the family is also a place where that witness is accompanied by words, by words of invitation. The family, John Paul II writes in *Familiaris Consortio*, both "hears the word of God and speaks the word of God." The family is both evangelized and evangelizing, and now we're getting to where I think Pope Francis is going with the Synods on family and with what he wants to encourage people to in the WMOF, is to see the family as a locus of evangelization, a place where the word of God is witnessed by people's lives, but also witnessed in people's words, words of invitation.

And finally, the family is kingly. And even in the Church's earliest life, Christian kingship has always been understood as service. Reading the Gospel, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for the many." So

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
August 2, 2015

The Synod on the Family and the World Meeting of Families
Dr. John Grabowski

too, disciples of Christ exercise their kingship, their royal dignity, through service, through washing each other's feet, through laying down their lives in acts of service, and the place where that starts is the family – family is the place where we learn to care for each other, serve each other, as Pope Francis often says, say things like please, thank you, and I'm sorry. Those day-to-day acts of forgiveness, reconciliation, service, that make family life possible, but also make it attractive and inviting, a place where people can come and experience hospitality and welcome. So how does the family evangelize? By being what it's called to be. As priestly, prophetic and kingly; by living its Christian dignity. The purpose of this, Pope Francis says, is so that the Church can be a visible sign, a visible image of God's mercy in the world. He writes: "Being Church means being God's people, in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love. This means that we are to be God's leaven in the midst of humanity. It means proclaiming and bringing God's salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel" (*EG*, no. 114).

You might remember that in an interview given in the first year of his pontificate, Pope Francis used the image to describe the Church of a field hospital, a field hospital where we come in to have our wounds treated. He says: "The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. ... And you have to start from the ground up." (Pope Francis, From the Interview "A Big Heart Open to God," *America Magazine*, Sept. 19, 2013). This was a favorite image of St. Augustine, Christ the Great Physician. So the Church is a field hospital, where we come to encounter Christ, to have our wounds tended; but the Christian family as a church in miniature, a domestic church, is meant to be a little field hospital, a place where the healing presence of Christ is lived, experienced, where our wounds begin to be (and sometimes the wounds of living with other members of our family) begin to be healed. And we can then invite others to that same healing.

So what's the purpose of the Synods? What's the purpose of the WMOF? When Clare and I were last in Rome in the fall of 2013, for a meeting of the Pontifical Council, what we heard very often from the leadership of the Pontifical Council but also from Pope Francis, was a vision that families need to be equipped so that they are not just objects of evangelization but active subjects of evangelization. We need to bring families into the forefront of living out the New Evangelization, of bearing witness to Christ in the world. So families are meant to be, if you will, orderlies of Christ the Great Physician in the field hospital of the Church, inviting other people to come and begin to experience the healing that we've begun to experience, not because we're better or morally superior;

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
August 2, 2015
The Synod on the Family and the World Meeting of Families
Dr. John Grabowski

we're all wounded sinners ourselves, we're all recovering sinners ourselves. Pope Francis' motto, if you look on his emblem: "sinful yet chosen." That's true for all of us. All of us are sinners. And yet we've been touched by the healing love of Christ, and then therefore, empowered to offer that same healing to others. And that's meant to start in our families.

When you hear, and you will, the reporting crank itself up again as the ordinary Synod gets underway this October, for four weeks this time, and you hear the discussion about this issue or that issue, focus on the big picture. Yes, there are important pastoral issues that the Church needs to think through in regard to situations of people who are for example divorced and civilly remarried. But that's not the overall point of the Synod. The overall point of the Synods is, how can we enable and equip families to become active participants, active subjects of the New Evangelization, inviting people as the disciples at the beginning of the Gospel of John: Come and see, come and see this person who's changed my life, who's begun to heal our family. Come and encounter Christ! I think this is Pope Francis' vision and I think this is what many people in the media, even in the Church, can lose sight of. It's about putting the focus, Pope Francis' focus, on being all in on the New Evangelization, together with the Church's understanding of family, and seeing those two in light of one another. So – hope to see many of you in a few weeks in Philadelphia for the upcoming world meeting.

I'm told that there's a little time for questions if anyone has a question or two.

Yes, please -- ? [*regarding reliable media outlets*] Certainly Zenit is a good source, Catholic News Service is another good source. But the best thing ... I find it very interesting ... Pope Francis will sometimes say things that are a little enigmatic, and I think he does it deliberately because he knows it's gonna get people's attention, but the best place to get your understanding of Pope Francis is by actually reading what he says, reading his audiences, reading the documents. Get your Pope Francis from Pope Francis. And even Pope Francis at one point challenged people and said, "don't listen to what the media is saying, come and listen to what I'm saying, and listen to the whole of what I'm saying." So, go to the source as much as you can, and then I think you get past some of the people getting wrapped around individual trees. But that's a great question.

[*regarding meeting of German cardinals and dissension among cardinals*] I hear the concern, I certainly do. I think, there are a couple of things by way of response. One, part of this is Pope Francis' leadership style – if you watched him at the last Synod, he was there for every meeting, every session, and at the very end he gave a very profound and very Ignatian discernment of spirits, in terms of clearly pointing out where the Synod itself confronted temptations to go astray, and had subsequently pointed out and

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
August 2, 2015

The Synod on the Family and the World Meeting of Families
Dr. John Grabowski

reaffirmed that there was no doctrinal change, he's not interested in making doctrinal change. There's a debate over: can we better calibrate the Church's pastoral practice in some areas, in a way that doesn't touch the Church's teaching. Pope Francis, I think is fine kind of taking a hands-off approach, but on the other hand don't confuse the opinions of individual theologians or even bishops, with the universal Church. There's an old saying: the Pope hasn't spoken until the Pope speaks. The opinion of an individual theologian or bishop is just that. What we need to hear, and I think what we will hear at the end of this process is Pope Francis himself, probably in an apostolic exhortation, teaching his vision for family and the New Evangelization. So I think we'll hear Pope Francis articulating the big picture for us. But he does not have a problem with allowing different voices to speak and then offering a critical discernment of it.

Transcribed by Teri Stief 8/25/2015