



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

## Easter Message 2015

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has called a special Synod of Bishops for this coming October. The theme he has designated is: "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World." This provides us with an opportunity to ask what our Easter celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ teaches us about the call of the family. Much can be said, of course, in response to this question. One dimension of the vocation of the family, especially in our day, is to be what I call the bulwark of the real.

Family is the environment where I can be myself in freedom. Indeed, not only can I be real; I *have* to be real. In the family I am known, with all my weaknesses, mistakes, gifts and talents. There is no room for pretense in the family, and this brings with it a real freedom. I am myself, I can be myself, in the family, precisely because it is there that I am known truly and loved for who I am in reality.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. We are surrounded by a world of pretense created by illusory standards of what is good and beautiful. One's appearance, possessions and position have become the measure of human worth. This can create enormous pressure on a person to try to be other than who they really are, and can result in terrible feelings of uselessness or failure when one does not think they measure up to false expectations.

In the midst of all this, the family needs to be the bulwark of the real. Here children and all members of the family should discover that it is good, that it is wonderful, just that they exist. In the family we naturally encourage one another to be the best that we can be. Yet we must never push one another to be other than who we are. If I get the message from others, especially family members, that they wish I was like someone else, then I as a distinctive individual will naturally feel that I don't matter, I don't count, and this gives rise to a terrible pain and loneliness.

The events of our Lord's passion, death and resurrection shed important light here and help the family be the bulwark of the real. The Easter events unveil our deepest roots, affirm our identity as worthy of celebration, and provide the real measure of human worth and dignity. Our roots are the love of God. In love God has fashioned us; out of that same love, God has redeemed us in his Son. In Jesus Christ, God has stepped fully into our human condition. All that we experience, all that we suffer, everything we go through, he has taken it upon himself with the exception of sin. God has entered into deepest solidarity with members of the human race and placed our burdens upon his own shoulders, even to the point of undergoing death upon the cross. In all of this he has

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demonstrated his will never to give up on us. In the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ the love of God for each and every human being is on full display.

With respect to what this means for human identity and dignity, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI once summarized beautifully the significance of God's love for us. In his first homily as Pope he said: "only where God is seen does life truly begin. Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is. We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."

This mystery, this life-affirming mystery, is the ground of human dignity and worth. Since each of us is wanted, willed and necessary, we affirm and celebrate each other simply because we exist, not for any achievements we may have accomplished, however wonderful. This mystery also grounds the mission of the family as the bulwark of the real. Spouses need to know from one another, children need to know from their parents that it is good, it is wonderful, that they simply are. In the family we need to give one another the space and the freedom to discover this beautiful truth and to live joyfully from it.

Happy Easter!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard W. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

✠Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop of Edmonton  
April 2015