



MARFAM 2023. "OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES"



DAILY THOUGHTS AUGUST THEME: SEXUALITY A FAMILY GIFT

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Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = *Laudato Si*. AL = *Amoris Laetitia*. FT = *Fratelli Tutti*. EG = *Evangelii Gaudium*. CV = *Christus Vivit* - Pope Francis letter to youth.

AUGUST OVERVIEW. Sexuality, a Family Gift. God looked on his creation and was pleased. Particularly good was the ability for creation to continue and evolve through its sexual reproductive capability in almost every life form. Because of the special attributes of humans, including free will, human sexuality is a special gift and blessing in its most profound expression in marriage. As an ideal it is often poorly presented and understood, is still often a taboo subject or seen negatively. The consequences of sin have resulted in situations such as gender-based violence and abuse. Women's empowerment, complementarity of men and women and positive education for youth are important. Gender-related changes and the existence of LGBTIQ+ persons is a reality today. Sexuality and procreation are core aspects of all of creation, human, animal and plant. Other than manipulating this in nature, for our human benefit, we no doubt know too little of the psycho-social aspects of sexual behaviour in animals for the common good of all of creation.

Pope Francis: *In assessing the environmental impact of any project, little attention is paid to studying reproductive patterns and some species face extinction.* LS35. *Each person, regardless of sexual orientation ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while every sign of unjust discrimination is to be avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence.* AL 250. *Sexuality can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love and for mutual self-giving.* AL 280. WORLD YOUTH DAY AUGUST 2023. In a podcast just before WYD he responded to questions from youth, one of whom spoke of her struggle with transgenderism. His reply, *"God loves us just as we are." "the Lord always accompanies us, always. Even if we are sinners, he draws near to help us,"*

SETTING THE SCENE. Sexuality a Family Gift. As this is such an important area it was considered best to address it from diocesan level with different departments discerning and working together, picking up on aspects relevant for them and taking these back to the parishes and families. Most basic is the understanding of sexuality which begins and is lived within any and every family.

Each of the reflections includes a Look at Life, an extract from a scripture passage of the day and quotations from Pope Francis. They can be used as individuals and groups but also valuably for faith sharing in families and end with a prayer.

August 1. Gender Justice. The bishop called a diocesan meeting, in a synodal format, to dialogue, listen and plan a programme to address the serious overarching issue of gender justice. There had been some conflict about different aspects as individual groups were passionate about their own particular focus. Some wanted to focus on sex in marriage, some on sexual orientation recognising LGBTI issues, some on women's rights, some on Natural Family Planning or Theology of the body, or Pro-Life, or teenage sexuality. The bishop gave everyone a chance to express their views and then outlined his own understanding. The outcome of the meeting was that every group had been listened to and should be accepted and supported whether one agreed with their particular standpoint or not. It was a difficult experience but also a powerful moment of reconciliation.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *The good seed means the sons of the kingdom, the weeds are the sons of the evil one, the harvest is the close of the age and the reapers are angels.* Matthew 13:36-43 **Pope Francis.** *Dialogue develops the habit of giving real importance to the other person. This means appreciating them and recognising their right to exist, to think as they do and to be happy. Everyone has something to contribute because they have their life experiences, they look at things from a different standpoint and they have their own concerns, abilities and insights.* AL 138.

August 2. NFP. When Jocelyn and Peter had first been exposed to Natural Family Planning they rather poo-hooed the idea, but after trying for some years to have a baby they decided on a careful study of her fertility cycle. When at last they

did achieve a pregnancy they were keen to do all they could to promote the method. "It has been a real treasure for us," they shared.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Matthew 13: 44-46.* **Pope Francis.** *The Church's teaching is meant to help couples to experience in a complete and harmonious and conscious way their communion as husband and wife together with their responsibility for procreating life. Humanae Vitae highlights the need to respect the dignity of the person in morally assessing methods of regulating birth. AL82*

August 3. Treasure. After their session with the bishop all the diocesan groups dealing with issues around sexuality felt challenged to reflect and study the topics raised. Further formation workshops were planned for them and for parishioners as part of a diocesan family ministry programme on "Catholics, the Church and Sex in the Modern World." Knowledgeable speakers on different aspects would be invited to lead the discussions.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *The kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. Matthew 13: 47-53.* **Pope Francis.** *In AL 50-56 the responses given to the two pre-synodal consultations are noted. They spoke of a great variety of situations and the new challenges that they pose to families due to stress, time, distractions and fears about the future. Situations and challenges included: heterosexual marriage, same-sex unions, temporary unions, women's rights, role of fathers in families and various forms of gender ideology. AL 50- 56.*

August 4. Rayhab, a social worker was brought in to facilitate discussions on gender balance in the work place. She began by asking, "How open as individuals but particularly as men and women are we to change? Is there a need for change." She looked around the room. Some people looked sceptical, some were frowning, others looked interested. She explained that with a focus on strengthening families, and taking into consideration that changes had come about in society, adjustment had to be made. People sometimes resist change and are only able to change when they are forced to do so by circumstances.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *"Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honour except in his own country and in his own house." And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief. Matt 13:57-58.* **Pope Francis.** *We need to acknowledge the great variety of family situations that can offer a certain stability but de facto or same-sex unions for example may not simply be equated with marriage. No union that is temporary or closed to the transmission of life can ensure the future of society. But nowadays who is making an effort to strengthen marriages? AL 52.*

August 5. One study group considered the question, "How do you all here, men and women feel about women using their feminine wiles to manipulate men and get their own way, and even colluding and using other women for this? Talk to one another, as men and women about this for a moment." Feedback was almost unanimous from men and women that manipulation is not the way to achieve any kind of balance. It is not fair. "Thanks for that," Rayhab concluded. We are definitely going to unpack this much more."

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *When Herod's birthday came the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. Prompted by her mother she said, "give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." Matthew 14: 1-12.* *The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear, and within families there is a growing reciprocity. From AL 54*

August 6. Transfiguration. Sunday 18A. Fr Joseph, the parish priest had prepared his Sunday homily with the topic for the month, of Sexuality as a Family Gift and with the upcoming Women's Day in mind. "Some gender topics are challenging from a negative point of view; we are well aware of oppression, exploitation and abuse and violence, but there is also a positive challenge, for good gender relationships. These don't happen naturally and need a lot of hard work." Later Tracy, one member of the family team shared, "today's feastday for us, Catholics has been one of my favourites for a long time. The feast of the Transfiguration. The three apostles chosen by Jesus to witness his

transfigured self were overcome with wonder and exclaimed. 'Lord it is good for us to be here.' That is my hope and dream for all our gender relationships."

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *Jesus was transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun and his garments became white as light. And behold there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord it is well that we are here." Matt 17:1b-9. The joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church. For all the signs of crisis in the institution of marriage, the desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant, especially among young people and this is an inspiration to the Church. AL1.*

August 7. Breadwinning. Johnson, from Justice and Peace one day asked who in their families were breadwinners and also the main ones. They were not surprised to find that almost all the men did have that responsibility and many but not all of the women. Irrespective of the issue of gender balance as they listened to one another it was enlightening to share on how heavy a burden they each felt this to be. "Do you ever pray in your families about this?" he asked.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *Moses said to the Lord, "I am not able to carry all this people alone, the burden is too heavy for me." Numbers 11:4b-15. "Man" is presented as a labourer who works the earth, harnesses the forces of nature and produces the bread of anxious toil in addition to cultivating his own gifts and talents. AL 23 We can appreciate the suffering created by unemployment and the lack of steady work as reflected in the Book of Ruth. AL 25*

8 August. Introducing the topic for group discussion Rayhab said, "In a talk I went to recently it was stressed that good leadership is not based on positional power or status. Just because you are the CEO or a manager you might be given some deference but are you really a leader? In politics and business men are still mostly in leadership. In churchy matters women might be in the majority in caring for the sick and belonging to sodalities, but when it comes to leadership e.g. on the PPC we do still find a higher proportion of men. But that is changing too. The issue of leadership has cultural dimensions too that we need to take into consideration.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *The man Moses was very meek, more than any men that were on the face of the earth. The Lord spoke to Aaron and Miriam. "My servant Moses is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth clearly and not in dark speech." Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses and said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses?" The Lord's anger was kindled against them and Miriam became leprous. Numbers 12:1-13 Even though significant advances have been made in the recognition of women's rights and their participation in public life, in some countries much remains to be done to promote these rights. AL 54*

AUGUST 9. WOMEN'S DAY SA. "Racism and sexism are both serious issues in our day that affect both women and men but also often underlie the violence against women." Angela referred the group to a discussion Fr Thabo had held with catechists on discrimination. They were quite a culturally mixed parish so it was interesting to hear their opinions. "Deep down inside ourselves how do we look at men and women of different races and cultures? Do we respect a German woman differently from a Nigerian woman? Do we take a Chinese man or a Zulu more seriously? What is our attitude towards people but also towards them as "gendered" people? I think that in the last twenty years we have been becoming more accepting and tolerant of one another. Jesus lived in a racist society too, where Canaanites were not acceptable to the Jews and for a Canaanite woman to approach him for her sick daughter might even have been a shock.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *Jesus said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." The Canaanite woman replied, "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered her, "O woman great is your faith! Let it be done as you desire." Read Matt 15:21-28. The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear. AL 54*

The groups had decided to hold an interfaith church service to commemorate Women's Day. "We don't want to forget the importance of God in our lives. We thank God for his role in all our liberation, as women and men but right now in our country we pray for an end to violence in particular against women and children. We pray for victims but also for perpetrators that they may recognise the evil they have committed and experience a conversion of heart. We pray for healing for every family that has been effected."

PRAYER FOR THE WOMEN OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Almighty God,

You are father and mother to us, your children.

We thank you for the particular and special gifts you have given to women,
the gift of nurturing life, of sustaining and supporting life,
the qualities of compassion, commitment, generosity and a willingness to share.

As they progress towards their rightful place in society we request your blessing on all women
that they may continue also to hold their rightful place in the family.
that women and men together may build a society
which will bring about the Kingdom You have promised us.

We call on Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who nurtured and cared for her son and now reigns with Him in heaven
to inspire the women of South Africa,
to pray with them in their joys and in their struggles,
and to intercede for them with her Son.

Mary, Queen assumed into heaven, patroness of South Africa, pray for us.

August 10. "Who do you say I am?" Together Fr Joseph and Rayhab led a reflection on religion and human relationships. "Our world is now so secular one wonders what role religion plays in the events and actions of our daily lives. It's not just about remote spiritual things. How does God or religion come into our personal growth as a sexual being? Does God come into your issues around sexual orientation, as youth or adults? Does God's Spirit of love help us discern who and how we are meant to be?"

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *Jesus said, "Who do you say I am." You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Read Matthew 16:13-23.*

Pope Francis: *Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching drawing certain consequences from it. This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth. AL 3. Families with persons who experience same-sex attraction should be given respectful pastoral guidance so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God's will in their lives. AL 250*

August 11. Rayhab, the facilitator picked up the threads, "Yesterday we considered the value of religion for forming human development and relationships too. Today we look at the fact that all religions from the most primitive until today have certain laws, rules, norms and standards, in other words a moral code. To live a good life as an individual man or woman or also as a couple and family demands sacrifices. The group members were given time to think and share. "I think I have carried my cross with dignity." "My cross is still very hard." "My cross was taken away from me after we joined AA and Alanon to deal with the alcohol abuse in our home." "I thank God, but pray to him to give me strength."

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *If any man or woman would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up his cross and follow me. Matt 16:24* **Pope Francis:** *using inclusive language) Families often experience problems when one of their members is emotionally immature because he or she still bears the scars of earlier experiences. An unhappy childhood or adolescence can breed personal crises that affect one's marriage. AL 239*

August 12. Thandi, one of the catechists, asked of the parents, or whoever was responsible for parenting the children, which of them reads to their children, or teaches them what is right and wrong. Reading a variety of stories to children and having family faith sharing time are great forms of imparting values. In the end they decided that everyone has different ways but within a family there needs to be unity about discipline.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *These words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart and you shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way. Deut 6:4-13* **Pope Francis:** *"Parents" always influence the moral development of their children, for better or for worse. It follows that they should take up this essential role and carry it out consciously, enthusiastically, reasonably and appropriately. AL 259*

August 13. Sunday 19A One parish had not had a Women's Day commemoration but asked Fr Michael to focus on the topic of gender balance on the Sunday, with particular reference to women of course. "But women are better at balance anyway, aren't they?" he told them. "What is gender balance or balance of any kind and how is it achieved? Maybe I can take a leaf out of the prophet Elijah's book for today's reading. Elijah was waiting for the Lord to address him standing outside a cave. There came a strong wind, an earthquake and a fire but the Lord was not in any of them. After these came a still small voice and that was where he found the Lord. We have big conferences and meetings where all kinds of issues including gender balance are discussed. For now I invite each of you to sit quietly and look into your own soul and allow the Lord to speak to you whatever your current life situation. That is where you will find an answer."

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *The word of the Lord came to Elijah and said, Go forth and stand upon the mountain before the Lord.... Lord was not in the earthquake, and after that came a fire but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. 1 Kings 19-9a, 11-13a.* **Pope Francis.** *Unexpected situations present themselves, disrupting family life and requiring a process of forgiveness and reconciliation. In resolving sincerely to forgive the other, each has to ask quietly and humbly if he or she has not somehow created the conditions that led to the other's mistakes. AL 236*

August 14. Taxes. On a very practical level the groups were discussing taxes. There is income tax, sales tax, e-tolls as road tax but there are also the different grants. Comments came. "We give, but it is mostly others who get. Is that fair?" "I think the principle of the common good is a good one. For me it puts a positive spin on the fact that life isn't fair." "Don't women on the whole carry heavier financial burdens as so many of our families are headed by single mothers?" "But what about young girls who they say get pregnant just so that they can get a child grant, which they don't always even use for the baby?" "Shouldn't all that be balanced out for the common good?" "I think we need to look more holistically at family units rather than at men's or women's perspectives. What about family income tax and family grants?"

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *"The collectors of the half-shekel tax went up to Peter and said, "Does not your teacher pay the tax?" Matthew 17:22-27* **Pope Francis:** *Families have the right to be able to count on an adequate family policy on the part of public authorities in the juridical, economic, social and fiscal domains. Families and homes go together. This makes us see how important it is to insist on the rights of the family and not only those of individuals. AL 44.*

August 15. Child rape. A serious topic needing an urgent response from the groups was the question of abuse and rape of children. "Are our children precious to us, are they a fruit of our love to be guarded and protected?" "Should we not consider all children in the same light?" "How?" "Child rape can of course never ever be justified but how can it be explained? What could be going through a child rapist's mind? Surely that is an unnatural act? Is there some substance-induced behaviour underlying this?" Rayhab agreed to organise some professional input on this subject and some possible responses.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of My Father who is in heaven. Matthew 18: 1-5.* **Pope Francis.** *The sexual exploitation of children is a scandalous and perverse reality in present-day society. Societies experiencing violence due to war, terrorism, organised crime are witnessing the deterioration of the family, above all in large cities where the phenomenon of street children is on the rise. Sexual abuse of children is scandalous when it occurs where they ought to be most safe, e.g. in families, schools, communities and Christian institutions. AL 45*

August 16. The family and youth groups presented insights into sibling relationships too. Thandi said, "Think of your own families. Is there rivalry between brothers or sisters and brothers, or jealousy, or resentment or possibly even sexual abuse or serious conflict for one or other reason? The intimacy in family units is unique among all other human relationships and should be cherished rather than abused." Claire said "I personally admire the young people who manage their own child-headed homes but I also know that they do need more help than they get. It is not fair on teenage boys and girls to be responsible for younger siblings when they themselves have hardly developed their own personal identity. Sometimes they are just left behind in a different town, alone or with a carer or relative. These little units are very vulnerable on many fronts. Do we know of any?"

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his faults between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen take one or two others along with you that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. Matthew 18: 15-20.* **Pope Francis** *Growing up with*

brothers and sisters makes for a beautiful experience of caring for and helping one another. We see the care and love that surround a little brother or sister who is frail or disabled. Children do need to be patiently taught to treat one another as brothers and sisters. This can be quite demanding and is a true school of socialisation. AL 195.

August 17. Money. Everyone discussed the issue of money and its many implications for causing or dealing with conflict and distress in the area of sexuality. Giving money instead of love is only too common in families where parents cannot find the needed time. In cases of abuse money may be paid to ensure silence. Sugar-daddies or “blessers” give money for luxuries to teenage girls in exchange for sex. “I find that term really offensive” Jane said “This is really a form of prostitution.” In cases of extreme poverty women and girls may resort to selling their bodies. Even parents sometimes sell their own children. Women become surrogate mothers for financial reward. Trafficking of girls is an increasing problem, Girls may be abducted or unwittingly lured into the situation.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts. One was brought to him who could not pay. The servant fell on his knees imploring him, “Lord have patience with me.” From Matt 18:21 - **Pope Francis.** Migration, extreme poverty and other situation of family breakdown sometimes lead families to sell their children for prostitution or organ trafficking. AL 46.*

August 18. Marriage crises. Paula shared, “Sexual issues can and do have an impact on couple relationships in various ways but we as individuals and couples seldom bring these issues to the Church. Are we embarrassed or think we won’t be listened to or accepted?” “There are competent experts who are able to speak to life from a “God-perspective,” Joan replied, “but it is also good to consult professionals in this area to help us explore our concerns and experiences, e.g. childhood abuse in the past and its present effects.”

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *The Pharisees tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause”? Jesus said, “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one.”? **Pope Francis.** Situations will arise involving human weakness and these can prove emotionally overwhelming. One spouse may not feel fully appreciated, or may be attracted to another person. Jealousy and tensions may emerge or new interests that consume the other’s time and attention. Physical changes naturally occur in everyone. These and so many other things rather than threatening love are so many occasions for reviving and renewing it. AL 237*

August 19. Children and divorce. A serious topic needing a response from the group too was the question of children and various forms of family violence. Rayhab shared her experience as a social worker. “Divorce almost invariably has a negative impact on children in a whole variety of ways but so does the experience of ongoing violence. Divorce is very common today and we need to ask if it is chosen too quickly. Careful discernment with qualified and competent counsellors and possibly even mediation can be very helpful in deciding on the best course of action.” Everyone agreed in principle but knew that it is a difficult situation to deal with, especially alone and when one is feeling really desperate.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *“Let the children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” And he laid his hands on them and went away. Matt 19:14-15. **Pope Francis:** At times separation becomes morally necessary as a last resort, when it is a matter of removing the more vulnerable spouse or young children from serious injury due to abuse and violence, from humiliation and exploitation, and from disregard and indifference. AL241*

August 20. 20th Sunday Assumption, patron feast of South Africa. Fr Joseph spoke about the many different images we have of Mary. He asked, “Is she a patroness to you, and in what way? I am asking you when you get home to share your own devotion to Mary with your family. Different people see her as a powerful queen, a mother, a sorrowing mother, at times possibly angry at events in her life and that of her son. She had experienced exile, and losing a child is very painful as some have also experienced. Some like the “gentle woman” that we see on Christmas cards.” The sharing at home was enlightening and all agreed with the words she herself used, “The Lord has done great things for me” and they agreed a patroness can be all those things. Every family could pray together regularly, “Mary, Queen assumed into heaven, patroness of South Africa, pray for us.” *Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the lowly estate of his handmaiden. For behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed: for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name. Luke 1:46-49. **Pope Francis:** Mary, Virgin and Mother, you who moved by the Holy spirit welcome the word of life in the depths of your humble faith as you gave yourself*

completely to the eternal One, help us to say our own "yes" to the urgent call, as pressing as ever to proclaim the good news of Jesus. From EG 288.

August 21. Harassment. There was quite some discussion around the subject of sexual harassment especially in the workplace. Both the men and women needed to have their say. "You men....." and "You women....." went on for a bit. "It's the way you dress." "But why can't we?" "You know what," Joan said, "I wonder if we are sufficiently conscious of our commitment to our husbands, partners, children etc. when we are at work. Do we separate our private and work lives?" Martin admitted, "I have found it quite a challenge when the women at work look so sexy and my wife at home may not be looking her best,"

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *In those days the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and forsook the Lord. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he gave them over to plunderers. Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them. And yet they did not listen to their judges for they played the harlot after other gods. Judges 2:11-19.* **Pope Francis.** *We treat loving relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable: everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes the last drop. Narcissism makes people incapable of looking beyond themselves, beyond their own desires and needs. AL 39*

August 22. Money management. The conversation in the group came back to possessions and money management again. This is a sore point in many relationships Men complain that women are spenders, women complain that men are mean and irresponsible, drink or gamble. "My husband refuses to tell me what he earns." "I need to ration the money I give to my wife because she just spends it all." So comments came from all around the groups. Are there gender traits when it comes to managing finances or is it to do with one's ideology, be it socialist or capitalist? They also came to recognise that not everyone is called to give up all worldly possessions. That is a special calling. Everyone is called, however, to have a proper balance even recognising that wealth and greed and corruption can be problems at any level.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."* From Matt 19:23-30. **Pope Francis:** *Many things have to change but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, our mutual belonging and a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. LS 202.*

August 23. Work. The speaker kicked off with, "Equal work for equal pay," is a popular slogan and goes to the heart of much of the gender question today in almost every sphere. But should there be discrimination about the type of work men and women can do?" "Women cannot or would not necessarily want to do hard physical labour, although that seems to be changing also in the area of sport, especially when it comes to payment. Are we built differently physically and mentally to work differently too?" Many relevant points were raised but once again the conclusion was that it had to do with balance and attitudes. "It even starts at home with the way we teach our kids, boys and girls, about money and give them pocket money or expect them to contribute their time to making things work in the family." "And not necessarily in stereotypical ways," Robert added. Everyone was encouraged to go and discuss the issue further with their children at home.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *The kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. Matt 20:1-16.* **Pope Francis.** *Masculinity and femininity are not rigid categories A rigid approach turns into an over accentuation of masculine and feminine and does not help children to appreciate genuine reciprocity. Taking on domestic chores or some aspects of raising children does not make a man any less masculine or imply failure, irresponsibility or shame. AL 286.*

August 24. Wedding feasts. "Why would someone not want to go to a wedding especially a traditional one that goes on for a day or two with lots of food and drink, I wonder." "Maybe too busy." "Can't afford to dress up." "Not really interested, or in the people involved." Reasons came from men and women. "I think it's mostly men, who don't see such religious or cultural things as relevant, like why are there so few men in church these days?"

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son and sent his servants to call those invited but they would not come. Matt 22:1-14.* **Pope Francis.** *Catechesis is a*

proclamation of the word and is always centred on that word, yet it also demands a suitable environment, an attractive presentation and the use of eloquent symbols. Every dimension of the person should be inserted in a communal journey of hearing and response. EG 166

August 25. Extended family. The issue of extended families came up for discussion too. One married woman shared her frustration that she found her husband more concerned about his parents and siblings than about her. "Maybe that is why I don't get on well with my mother-in-law," she said. Another woman shared, "My mom-in-law is a treasure, I love her to bits," The men listened with interest, for most of them this issue of mother- and daughter-in-law was somewhat of a mystery.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *Ruth said to her mother-in-law, "Wherever you go I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge, your people shall be my people and your God my God." Book of Ruth. Pope Francis. The larger family includes in-laws and all the relatives of the couple. One particularly delicate aspect of love is learning not to view relatives as competitors, threats or intruders. Marriage demands respect for their tradition and customs, an effort to understand their language and to refrain from criticism, caring for them and cherishing them while maintaining the legitimate privacy and independence of the couple. AL 198*

August 26. Evaluation. As the month was coming to an end the teams started some evaluation. "How much have you learned from our discussions, sharing and listening to each other?" "With women's lib and the striving for gender equality clearly there needs to be ongoing discussion but then is sexual harassment addressed often enough? Is it still as serious in the workplace? And what about in families and homes?" "Should we continue with further sessions or discussions on Families and Sexuality?" Most of the groups agreed it had been valuable, and opened doors for them.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *Boaz said to Ruth, "Have I not charged the young men not to molest you? All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me. So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife." Book of Ruth Pope Francis. There is a need for training lay leaders who can assist in the pastoral care of families, with teachers, counsellors, physicians, social workers and specialists in psychology, sociology, marital and family therapy. Professionals can help keep pastoral initiatives grounded in the real situations and concrete concerns of families. AL 204*

August 27. Sunday 21A. Fr Joseph smiled to himself as he prepared his homily. God really was amazing in creating men and women the way he did. Using the bible story of Adam having to look for a mate amongst the animals is nice but the real point is the reality of the differences between men and woman. At times this can be a source of awful conflict and yet also a source of endless delight. If only couples could be made to understand that. If only the Church could come to a deeper understanding too about those deeper aspects of sexuality and not get bogged down in narrower issues of fertile times and contraception. I think, sadly, that we often miss the point. But I must be careful how I put that to the people. I really want them to appreciate the wisdom of God in creation. How can that come across in a homily. It will need a whole retreat, or even a lifetime.

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *"O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counsellor?" Romans 11:33-36. Pope Francis. A couple's fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself, for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit of love. The triune God is a community of love and the family is its living reflection. AL 11*

August 28. Praying for. That parents have unique relationships with their children was accepted by everyone in the group. Lucia shared, "I think that mothers never stop worrying about their children, their daughters or their sons. The widows in our parish have formed a support group and named St Monica as their patron. Why? She was a mother who never stopped praying for her son to change his bad ways. Her prayers were answered as her son Augustine eventually became a great teacher and one of the first African saints. We don't all have bad children but without fathers in their lives they are sometimes more inclined to go off the rails. Fr George even said that when he visited the jail he was shocked to find a few of his altar servers now serving time - in a very different way."

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *“She bore me in the arms of her prayer that you might say to the son of the widow: I command you – arise. St Augustine. Confessions 6:2* **Pope Francis.** *I would like to express my particular gratitude to all those others who continue to pray, like Saint Monica, for their children who have strayed from Christ. AL 288.*

August 29. Law. Rayhab had invited a family lawyer to facilitate a session with the group. “I know that the law is important and we need to know the law for justice to happen, but how often is the law manipulated and true justice is not done. Many abuse cases and even rape cases never result in a conviction. Is that justice? It certainly cannot be mercy if an abuser is let off and the victim is left with no reparation or resolution. Should true justice not have to involve some punishment and reparation? What is true justice after all?”

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *Woe to you. You tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith. Matt 23:23.* **Pope Francis.** *It is not helpful simply to consider whether or not an individual’s actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life a human being. General rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected, but in their formulation they cannot provide absolutely for all particular situations. AL 304*

August 30. Pornography. Mrs Buthe shared her perceptions and experience of the last month. “Our sexuality and spirituality are gifts from God, beautiful and to be cherished. Too often this is spoilt and attacked by negative influences and images. I love art and for me the arts are meant to edify and raise our spirits to wonder at God’s greatness. Pornography is a perversion of art, sadly too accessible to anyone, also too early in life and too commonly used.” “Why do people view pornography if not for titillation and sexual arousal and also escapism from real relationships.”

Reflect, share, act. Scripture: *O Lord you search me and know me. If I take the wings of a dove or dwell at the sea’s furthest ends even there your hand would lead me, your right hand would hold me fast. From Psalm139.* **Pope Francis.** *The Synod Fathers expressed concern about the current spread of pornography and the commercialisation of the body, fostered also by a misuse of the internet. AL 41*

August 31. Be Prepared. The PPC chairman thanked all those who had participated in exploring the month’s theme of sexuality as a family gift in many ways. It was dealt with in the wider context of marriage and of family life. He noted that the first place to situate sexuality as gender justice is within marriage and within intimate interpersonal relationships, heterosexual and homosexual too. As we are all sexual beings in all our dealings all our other social interactions demand respect and justice too. Young and old deal with friends, school mates, work colleagues and also people in authority where sexual harassment happens because one has more power than the other. “A final word of warning is probably appropriate,” he concluded. “contextualising the words of Jesus, watch out, be prepared and, recognising one’s vulnerability, do not open yourself to opportunities and occasions for abuse and for sin.”

Reflect, share, act. Scripture *Jesus said, “Watch for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming he would have watched and not have let his house be broken into. Matt24: 42-50.* **Pope Francis.** *The Church wishes with humility and compassion to reach out to families and to help each family to discover the best way to overcome any obstacles it encounters. Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for an effort at evangelisation and catechesis inside the family. AL 200.*