

DEAR SISTERS, DEAR BROTHERS,

THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET WE JUST HEARD TAKE US BACK TO A DAY IN EARLY FALL IN THE SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF DARIUS THE GREAT, EMPEROR OF PERSIA—FIVE HUNDRED AND TWENTY YEARS BEFORE CHRIST!

ON THAT DAY THE LORD SPOKE TO HIS PEOPLE WHO HAD RETURNED FROM CAPTIVITY IN BABYLON. HE TOLD THEM TO TAKE HEART AND REBUILD THE TEMPLE THAT HAD BEEN DESTROYED SOME SEVENTY YEARS BEFORE.

BUT THOSE WHO REMEMBERED THE FIRST TEMPLE WERE SADDENED WHEN THEY SAW WHAT THE SECOND TEMPLE WOULD BE LIKE.

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT WAS GONE, SO WERE THE TABLETS OF STONE CONTAINING THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. GONE TOO WERE THE POT OF MANNA, AARON'S ROD, THE URIM AND THUMMIN, THE HOLY OIL AND THE SACRED FIRE. ALL LOST IN THE BABYLONIAN DISASTER!

THE SECOND TEMPLE'S DIFFERENCE WAS SO GREAT THAT LATER WRITERS TRADITIONALLY SAID THAT THE SECOND TEMPLE HAD LOST THE SHEKINAH, THE PRESENCE OF GOD, AND THE RUACH HAKODESH, THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS.

BUT THROUGH THE PROPHET, THE LORD STILL GAVE HIS FORLORN PEOPLE HOPE.

HE SENT HAGGAI TO TELL THE PEOPLE THAT THEY MUST WORK TO BUILD A PLACE OF GREATER GLORY, A HOUSE OF PEACE, THE KINGDOM OF GOD, FROM WHICH ALL

PEOPLES, AS ONE FAMILY, WOULD ASCEND THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD BEARING THEIR GIFTS FOR HIM.

DEAR SISTERS, DEAR BROTHERS, MORE THAN TWO THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED AND TWENTY YEARS LATER, IN THE EARLY FALL OF 2015, HERE IN PHILADELPHIA, THE CITY OF FAMILY LOVE, THIS READING STILL HAS MUCH TO TELL US.

THE WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES IS NOT JUST ANOTHER CELEBRATION THAT REPEATS ITSELF EVERY THREE YEARS. THESE DAYS ARE, IN TRUTH, A TIME OF GRACE, A TIME OF REBUILDING, A GIFT FROM GOD. WE SEE THE JOY OF THESE DAYS, WE LISTEN TO WORDS SO FULL OF PASSION AND TENDERNESS—THESE ARE TRULY GIFTS FROM GOD.

AND WE ARE WAITING FOR POPE FRANCIS. HE WILL BE WITH US LIKE A PROPHET WHO GIVES US HOPE. TO US, A PEOPLE OF FAMILIES HE WILL SAY, “TAKE COURAGE!...TAKE COURAGE!...TAKE COURAGE!”

THIS IS THE PROPHETIC ENCOURAGEMENT HE HAS BEEN GIVING TO FAMILIES FROM THE MOMENT HE BEGAN TO LEAD US ON THE ROAD TO THE SYNOD.

THE HOLY FATHER WANTS THE WHOLE CHURCH TO HELP FAMILIES REDISCOVER—AND REBUILD—THEIR VOCATION AND THEIR MISSION. AND IT WAS FOR JUST THIS REASON THAT HE CHOSE TO DEDICATE HIS AUDIENCE CATECHESSES THIS WHOLE YEAR TO THE FAMILY—A PRECIOUS SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL GIFT! AND I AM SURE THAT AT THE

END OF THIS MEETING HE WILL SAY TO US WITH THE WORDS OF HAGGAI: “BE UP AND DOING! OUR WORK IS CALLING!”

AND AT THE END OF THE SYNOD HE WILL SAY THE SAME THING TO ALL THE CHURCH—AND TO THE WORLD!

YES, DEAR SISTERS AND DEAR BROTHERS, WE MUST GET TO WORK. WE ARE WELL AWARE OF THE DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES THAT FAMILIES FACE ALL OVER THE WORLD TODAY. WE SEE HOW DETERMINED THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS IS TO DESTROY WHEREVER HE CAN THE BONDS THAT HOLD FAMILIES TOGETHER. AND WE SEE THE BITTER RESULTS OF THE FAMILY TRAGEDIES THAT FALL MOST HEAVILY ON THE WEAKEST AND POOREST AMONG US, AND ON CHILDREN AND THE ELDERLY.

“GET TO WORK” MEANS THAT IT IS NO LONGER ENOUGH TO KEEP DOING WHAT WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE, THAT IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SIMPLY CONDEMN THE PRESENT AND RETREAT TO OUR OWN BACK YARD. WE NEED A NEW PASSION FOR THE FAMILY, AND A MORE GENEROUS AND CREATIVE LOVE TO SUPPORT IT.

WE CAN NO LONGER LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE WITH FAMILIES THAT ARE DOING WELL. WE HAVE TO PUSH THEM TO GROW BEYOND THEMSELVES.

NOR CAN WE TURN OUR BACKS ON FAMILIES THAT ARE HURTING. WE MUST HELP THEM HEAL THEIR HURTS AND EMBARK ON A NEW LIFE.

AND IN EVERY PLACE THAT WE FIND EVEN A SPARK OF FAMILY—OR MAYBE A FAMILY THAT IS BARELY A SMOULDERING EMBER, WE MUST RUN TO HELP IT FIND NEW STRENGTH.

YES! LET'S GET TO WORK!

NONE THE LESS, IT IS CLEAR THAT WE CAN'T LET OURSELVES YIELD TO THE TEMPTATION TO TRUST ONLY OUR HUMAN CAPABILITIES, TO ENGAGE IN A SHOW OF FORCE.

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH SAID IT WELL WHEN ON HIS WAY TO ROME AND MARTYRDOM HE WROTE,

“IN TIMES OF TRIAL, IT IS NOT SUBTLE ARGUMENTS THAT PRODUCE CHRISTIANS, IT IS CHRISTIANITY'S CALL TO HEROISM”—THE HEROISM OF WITNESS, THE HEROISM OF LOVE, THE HEROISM OF HOLINESS.

AND HERE IS THE TRUE MEANING OF THE GOSPEL PASSAGE WE HAVE HEARD TODAY, “ONCE WHEN JESUS WAS PRAYING IN SOLITUDE, AND THE DISCIPLES WERE WITH HIM...”

WE SEE JESUS, ALONE, PRAYING, AND THE DISCIPLES OFF TO THE SIDE WATCHING. HOW OFTEN DO WE LET JESUS PRAY ALONE—SHOW MERCY ALONE!

WHEN HE FINISHED PRAYING HE ASKED THEM WHAT PEOPLE WERE SAYING ABOUT HIM.

BUT JESUS WASN'T INTERESTED IN OPINION POLLS. WHAT HE WANTED WAS THE HEARTS OF HIS DISCIPLES. "WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"

DEAR SISTERS, DEAR BROTHERS, WHO IS JESUS FOR US, FOR US BISHOPS AND PRIESTS, FOR YOU FAMILIES?

JESUS IS WHAT SHEPHERDING OUR FLOCK IS ALL ABOUT. JESUS IS PASTORAL CARE FOR FAMILIES.

WE MUST SAY WHAT PETER SAID, "JESUS, YOU ARE THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD."

ONLY JESUS SAVES. FAMILIES ARE SAVED ONLY IF JESUS IS PRESENT WITHIN THEM, ONLY IF THERE IS AT LEAST SOME SPARK OF HIS LOVE. THE HOLY FAMILY WAS SAVED—BUT ONLY BECAUSE MARY AND JOSEPH WELCOMED JESUS. IF THEY HAD NOT DONE SO, THEIR MARRIAGE WOULD HAVE FAILED.

DEAR SISTERS, DEAR BROTHERS, THE POPE, WHENEVER HE SPEAKS, OFFERS US JESUS AS OUR MODEL, OUR SAVIOR. WE MUST BECOME LIKE HIM, SHARE HIS SENTIMENTS, BE "MEEK AND HUMBLE OF HEART."

BUT BECAUSE OF HIM WE WILL ALSO BE STRONG, WHETHER IN COMBAT WITH THE SPIRIT OF EVIL—OR IN WITNESSING THE FAITH THAT CAN CHANGE THE WORLD, THAT CAN LIFT US BEYOND OURSELVES, THAT PUSHES US TO SACRIFICE OURSELVES TO MAKE THE WORLD A WORLD OF BROTHERHOOD, SOLIDARITY AND FAMILY LOVE.

LET US ASK THE LORD TO HELP US REDISCOVER THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF OUR FAMILIES.

WE NEED FAMILIES, AND SO DOES THE WHOLE WORLD. AMEN.