



POPE'S PRAYER INTENTION | JUNE 2022

*Pope Francis' Intention for June: Families

By Andrew Hamilton

We pray for Christian families around the world; may they embody and experience unconditional love and advance in holiness in their daily lives

Images of Christian families often represent a Catholic father and mother, together since their marriage, with two or three children happily going to Mass together on Sunday, praying together before dinner, and active in Church groups in their parishes and schools.

That is a very attractive picture, and to be part of such a family may be a great blessing. But it is not representative of many families throughout the world. Many people grow up in single parent families; in families where one or other parent was married previously; in families to which both parents bring children from their first marriage; in families where both parents are of the same sex; and in families in which the parents' marriage is not recognised as such by the Catholic Church. Whatever the history of these families, both parents and children need God's love and support. Pope Francis' prayers and hopes for families would certainly extend to them. He also clearly sees as a great blessing a commitment to Jesus in a shared faith lived out daily family life and within the Catholic Church.

Certainly, the experience of unconditional love for which Pope Francis prays is a great gift both to the person who loves and to the person who is loved. To find ourselves loved for who we are, and not because we are intelligent, good looking, white, wealthy, well behaved, generous, or healthy in mind and body, is the seed bed for our growth as persons. A powerful image of unconditional love can be seen in the mother who loves her son who is in prison for murder, visits him, encourages him and keeps a place in her heart and home for him. She hates what he has done, wants him to take responsibility for it, but loves the person that he is despite his bad deeds. To be loved by such a generous mother can be the beginning of her son's desire to change his way of life.

Unconditional love spreads. It will not be restricted to relationships between family members but will naturally extend into their relationships with others. That is why Pope Francis prays that Catholics will embody this love in their lives. Nothing will commend our faith better than the generous and expansive love that we bring to our friends, work places and the groups of which we are part.

Pope Francis also prays that Catholic families will grow in holiness. Holiness is a word with which we may not always feel comfortable. It can suggest that our main interest in life consists in religious practices and devotions and that we anxiously observe all the rules of God and of the Church. In Pope Francis' understanding, holiness includes these things but cuts much deeper. It expresses the dream that there is something more to aim at in life than money, pleasure, fame or social position, and leads to a generous life built on thanksgiving for the gift of being alive, and to a steady attention to and care for all our relationships to our family, to people in our workplaces, and to our environment. Holiness is a lifetime's work and grows invisibly. When we see it, as we often do in older people, it is an encouraging gift.