



The family accompanies the dying with love

COLF Message on the occasion of the

NATIONAL WEEK FOR LIFE AND THE FAMILY

11-17 May 2015

Each year the Church in Canada designates one week as a special time for prayer and reflection on life and the family. In light of the recent judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada relative to the issue of assisted suicide, it is appropriate that we turn our attention to the call of the family to draw near to the dying, and, indeed, to any who suffer, and accompany them with love. Experience has shown that, among those who approach the end of life, the greatest fear is not that of suffering but of being alone. Nothing can alleviate that anxiety better than the loving presence of family members.

For many people today, life is valuable only to the extent that it is useful. This can lead to the abandonment of the weak. Too often forgotten is human life's intrinsic dignity, which nothing – not even illness – can diminish. This truth must be handed on and honoured in the family, above all in the way we share love with one another.

As followers of the Lord Jesus, we are called to imitate Him in His self-giving love. It is God's intention that the family be the privileged place where we encounter this unconditional love, especially in the selfless love of a mother and a father. Through our union with Christ in prayer and the sacraments, our weaknesses are healed by his mercy and we are enabled to become the loving individuals that God calls us to be.

As Pope Francis reminded the people of the Philippines during his visit to that country in January of this year: "In the family we learn how to love, to forgive, to be generous and open, not closed and selfish. We learn to move beyond our own needs, to encounter others and share our lives with them. That is why it is so important to pray as a family! That is why families are so important in God's plan for the Church!"

During this year's National Week for Life and Family, let us all reflect on the wonderful role which has been entrusted to the family. Let us ask ourselves how we can better reflect God's unconditional love, whether in the context of our own day to day family life or as we strive to support the families with whom we are in contact. Let us be guided by the immortal words of Saint John Paul II: "As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live."