



NEWSLETTER

No 96

June 2022

Family Solidarity

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The Rally for Life will take place in Dublin on the 2nd July and, for this occasion, Family Solidarity has organised a special pre-rally talk with Dr Dermot Kearney. Dr Kearney has saved dozens of babies in England, helping their mothers who had taken an abortion pill and immediately regretted it. We will hear of Dr Kearney's use of the Abortion Pill Reversal protocol and how a complaint against him made by the abortion industry was dismissed by the UK General Medical Council.

You will find more details about Dr Kearney's pro-life work and about his talk in this newsletter.

As places are limited, please register your interest sending a message at **familysolidarityireland@gmail.com**

FAFCE, the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe, was established 25 years ago. Family Solidarity was one of its founding members and, since the beginning, we have actively contributed to its life and development. To celebrate this significant anniversary, delegates have met in Rome and were received by Pope Francis. Our representatives Stephen Browne (secretary) and Liam Ó hAlmhain (former chairman) attended the event. In this newsletter you will find the text of the address given by the Pope for the occasion, and also an account of FAFCE's recent activity.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your donations towards the Ukraine appeal. Thanks to your generosity we have collected 1,480 euro. In March, Family Solidarity already sent 1,000 euro to FAFCE to help their direct contacts in Ukraine and two partner organisations working on the ground. We continue to pray for the end of this tragic war.

Angelo Bottone

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FAMILY SOLIDARITY ACTIVITIES

- In March, Family Solidarity presented a submission to the Department of Health on the ongoing review of the abortion legislation. This document can be found on our website.
- On the 15th of March, we held a rosary and get together for families in UCD, Belfield. More of similar gatherings are planned for the months to come.

- While we continue to take care of our historical archive, in May some of our members have been interviewed by Dr Laura Kelly, a lecturer based in Glasgow who is researching the history of the pro-life movement in Ireland.
- Family Solidarity is present on a number of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Odysee, and now also on Telegram. Please, follow us at <https://t.me/familysolidarity>.

A LANDMARK VICTORY FOR A PRO-LIFE DOCTOR



Dr Dermot Kearney is an Irish physician working in England. Through use of the Abortion Pill Reversal (APR) treatment, he has saved at least 20 babies who would otherwise have been lost to abortion. Abortion provider, Marie Stopes International, made a complaint against him

to the General Medical Council, but the complaint was recently dismissed. In fact, it backfired, because the complaint ended up publicising the fact that the APR can be successful.

The Abortion Reversal Pill operates through the administration of the natural hormone progesterone to women who changed their mind after taking the first of two abortion pills. Progesterone, which is used also to prevent miscarriages, helps to undo the effects of the first pill and increases significantly the chance of survival of the baby.

Marie Stopes International accused Dr Kearney of using the treatment without it being properly backed by evidence. They also accused him of 'imposing' anti-abortion beliefs on a patient. As a result, Dr Dermot Kearney has been prevented from offering the APR treatment for an initial period of 18 months, later reduced to 9 months, but the investigation could not find a single woman speaking against Dr Kearney, despite treating dozens who had changed their mind after taking the first abortion pill.

Instead, a woman claimed that Marie Stopes International had twisted her experience with Dr Kearney to suit their complaint, and she felt pressured to criticise him.

“None of the women I helped complained to the GMC, and none of the families either. The women themselves were all very grateful, even when it didn’t work. I struggle to understand why some people oppose this treatment.”, said the doctor.

The General Medical Council dropped all sanctions against Dr Kearney, who can now provide APR treatment again. This is an important victory because his case refutes three common claims: women don’t regret having abortion, APR doesn’t work, and it is dangerous.

As mentioned, the complaint against him raised awareness of this life saving treatment and now more health professionals may well offer the service, not only in the UK but also in other countries.

In Ireland, in 2020, some doctors were attacked for using the Abortion Reversal Pill here and a HSE spokeswoman claimed that it is not a reliable medical practice. The HSE website says: “Once you take mifepristone, the abortion will begin. It is irreversible. If you decide not to take the second tablet, there is a risk of harm to the foetus if you continue the pregnancy.”

The experience of Dr Kearney, and of other doctors who use APR treatment, shows that the effect of mifepristone is not irreversible, and a percentage of babies can be saved with a prompt intervention. Moreover, the General

Medical Council's examiners' report states that: *"there was no evidence to suggest that APR increases the risk of harm to a foetus."*

Following this case, the HSE should offer a similar service to women who regret taking the first abortion pill. There is no reason why those who claim being pro-choice should deny women this last choice.

MARRIAGE IN IRELAND CONTINUES ITS DECLINE



New figures from the Central Statistics Office throw light on the changing nature of marriage in Ireland. The number of

marriages went up in 2021, however, it hasn't reached the pre-Covid levels. Many Catholic weddings were postponed last year but they are the most popular ceremony again.

In all, there were 16,717 opposite-sex marriages last year; 81.5 percent more than the year before but 15 percent less than in 2019. There were 500 same-sex marriages. The marriage rate per 1,000 population was just 3.4 in 2021. A clear drop when compared to 2019 (4.1), but a definitively higher figure than in 2020 (1.9) when many

couples suspended or delayed their plans because of the pandemic.

Marriage rates have constantly declined in the last few decades, but the Covid pandemic has had a tremendous impact on numbers. Compared the two years before Covid (2018-19), opposite-sex marriage declined 35.2 percent in 2020 and 2021 combined. Same-sex marriages declined even more (37.5%) in the same period. After the 2015 referendum that redefined civil marriage, there was an initial surge of same-sex weddings, but numbers are now going down.

The average age at which couples marry keeps going up. In 2021, it stood at 37.4 for men and 35.4 for women. It was 34.6 and 32.5 in 2011.

Religious ceremonies continue to decline although they are still the most popular ones overall, accounting for 57 percent of all weddings in 2021. Thirty-nine percent were in a Catholic church, the most popular ceremony. The second most common celebration was civil marriage (35%). But ten years ago Catholic ceremonies accounted for 66 percent of the total.

Last year, when churches were closed and the number of people allowed to attend weddings was limited, for the first time in Irish history civil ceremonies became more popular than Catholic weddings. Atheist Ireland said that

those figures showed that Ireland was no longer a Catholic country, but Catholic ceremonies were postponed for very practical reasons. The newly released figures confirm that 2020 was really exceptional, and now we are moving back to the normal trends.

The general decline of Catholic ceremonies is partly due to secularisation and partly due to more options being available to those who want to tie the knot, especially hotel weddings. Those who want to marry in a hotel and have a religious ceremony often opt for a 'Spiritualist' marriage. Last year 7.9 percent of opposite-sex couples and 12 percent of same-sex couples do so. A significant proportion (43%) also chose non-religious celebrations.

The data released by the Central Statistics Office this year are less detailed compared to the past. For example, this time we are not told about the previous marital status of the brides and grooms, and how many were marrying for the first time. It is a pity that some interesting figures regarding the state of marriage in Ireland were missing.

The most recent data about divorces and separation from the Court Service Annual Report refer to 2020 and show us that there was a 29 percent increase in the number of applications for divorce (5,266) that year, compared to 2019 (4,073), while judicial separations decreased by 48 percent (from 1,229 to 636). These are the effects of the

change in family law legislation following the divorce referendum in 2019 that reduced from four to two years the amount of time required to be separated before been allowed to apply for divorce.

Besides the Covid pandemic, 2020 was an exceptional year because of the recent changes in family law and it is of little use to compare divorce and separation figures for 2020 with the previous years.

In any case, the overall figures show that marriage in Ireland is in anything but rude health.

THE POOR STATE OF MARRIAGE ACROSS THE EU



Ireland had one of the lowest marriage rates in Europe in 2020, according to new data from Eurostat. This was the year Covid emerged, so marriage rates dropped everywhere, but Ireland was

particularly bad, and the rate was already low.

Figures from Eurostat show that Ireland had a marriage rate of 1.9 per 1,000 people in 2020. It was 4.1 in the previous year. Only Italy (1.6 per 1,000) and Portugal (1.8

per 1,000) had a lower rate but they have an older population. Again, these particularly dismal rates are because of Covid, but the trends have been down in any case.

About 1.4 million marriages took place in the EU in 2020, which is equivalent to 3.2 marriages per 1,000 population. As we can see, Ireland's 1.9 per thousand was very low even in the context of the pandemic, but then we also had particularly long lockdowns.

The highest marriage rates in the EU in 2020 were reported in Hungary (6.9 per 1,000), Latvia (5.6 per 1,000) and Lithuania (5.5 per 1,000). Hungary was the only country in Europe that celebrated more marriages during the pandemic than before. Except for Latvia, Hungary was also the only country with marriage rates higher than ten years before.

Marriage rates have constantly declined in the last decades in Europe, from 7.8 per 1,000 in 1970 to 5.2 per 1,000 in 2000, and then a further drop to 4.3 per 1,000 in 2019, just before Covid.

In Ireland, the marriage rate is often slightly below the already low EU average. (7.0 in 1970, 5.0 in 2000). In the early 2010s, Irish rates were slightly above the EU average, and after that, more or less in line with it.

According to the Eurostat data, in 2020 about 800,000 divorces took place in EU countries, the equivalent of 1.6 divorces every 1,000 people. The lowest rates were registered in Malta (0.5) and Slovenia (0.8) while the highest figures were in Latvia, Lithuania and Denmark (all at 2.7). The divorce rate for Ireland has always been lower than the EU average. The 2020 figures for Ireland were not available at the time of the Eurostat data publication but we know that there was an increase in the number of applications that year.

We often hear that marriage in Ireland is in good health, compared internationally, but the latest Eurostat figures prove that this is definitively not the case.

OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE TOLD HARSH FACTS OF LIFE ABOUT COMMERCIAL SURROGACY



Officials from three Government Departments have expressed great doubt about the possibility of legislating for the recognition of international commercial surrogacy contracts in Ireland. Besides practical difficulties, it would

create a double standard if commercial surrogacy, which is banned here in Ireland, is tolerated when it happens abroad.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on international commercial surrogacy is addressing two main issues: the retrospective recognition of parentage for children who have already been born abroad from a surrogate mother, and the legal status of future arrangements.

The Committee wondered whether something should be added to the Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) Bill that is currently under scrutiny in the Oireachtas, or if a separate piece of legislation is needed instead. Other than Senator Sharon Keogan, no-one on the Committee appears to be against commercial surrogacy in principle despite that the fact in Europe only Ukraine, Belarus and Russia permit it. Other countries regard it as womb-renting.

Representatives from the three Departments (Justice, Health and Children) which appeared before the Committee reminded members of these facts.

A representative from the Department of Children also told the politicians that he was “not aware of any EU Member State which has legislated specifically for their own citizens engaging in surrogacy in another jurisdiction.

Rather, the norm appears to be that existing family law is utilised and adapted to deal with specific cases.”

This is also what currently happens in Ireland, but the Committee wants to create an easy pathway for surrogacy abroad.

The same representative warned that “international commercial surrogacy does raise concerns about the commodification of children, exploitation of women in poorer countries, the risk of child trafficking and the child’s right to know their identity.”

The Department of Health representatives said that they are “primarily concerned to ensure that any proposals that may emerge do not undermine the principles of the policy in respect of domestic surrogacy as reflected in the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill, or create a conflicting policy landscape”, whereby we ban commercial surrogacy here, but recognise it overseas.

Some members of the Committee suggested a solution along the lines of international adoptions, where Irish couples can adopt children only from countries that guarantee good practice. But, unlike with adoption, there is no international convention on surrogacy, there is no international framework to rely on. Speaking about surrogacy, Andrew Munro from the Department of Justice told the Committee: “We have seen some very difficult

examples in the past where ... a lot of people got exploited by bad actors, where the egg that was purportedly supplied by a purported donor was not the egg. The child given to the intending parents had no genetic link”.

He said there had been cases where the surrogate mother was “spirited away over a border immediately after birth,” or a birth certificate provided by local authorities falsely “named the intending father as father despite the child having none of his genetic material”.

Professor Conor O’Mahony, Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, also spoke to the Committee, but he came down more on the side of facilitating commercial surrogacy. He criticised the Government for ignoring his report on children’s rights in the context of surrogacy. If enacted without considerable amendments, he claimed, the Bill will be against the “best interest” of children produced through surrogacy. Unlike the officials from the various Government Departments, Professor O’Mahony believes that international surrogacy can be regulated in the AHR Bill. He proposes that intending parents should “apply to the High Court for parentage and parental responsibility, as well as a grant of nationality and citizenship to the child, subject to satisfying a range of prescribed criteria.”

This is probably what the Committee will recommend but it will create tension with the Government as it will delay the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill and its implementation. This is aside from the many inherent and unavoidable ethical problems created by commercial surrogacy.



FAFCE BOARD MEETING

The FAFCE Board gathered in the city of Vác (Hungary), from the 4th to the 6th of May. Stephen Browne, our secretary, attended on behalf of Family Solidarity.

These three-day meeting represents an important moment of dialogue for Catholic Family Associations in Europe, during which the main guidelines of their action at the European level are decided.

The event was hosted by the Diocese of Vác and co-organised by the Family Office of the Hungarian Bishops' Conference, the Human Dignity Centre, the FAFCE Member, and the Seventy-Two Disciples Movement, FAFCE Observer Organisation.

On the 4th of May an inaugural conference took place, providing an opportunity for a meeting between church, civil society and government decision-makers, who reflected together starting from the sentence of St. John Paul II: "The family is the centre and the heart of the civilisation of love". The President-elect of Hungary, Katalin Novak, also intervened with a video-message, expressing her support for the work of FAFCE and encouraging family associations to work together and intensify their cooperation in witnessing the beauty of the family in Europe.

The Board of the Federation, during the meeting, adopted a resolution focused on the terrible war in Ukraine, entitled "Families and family associations are builders of peace". FAFCE recalled "that the family has always been the place where freedom, democracy and solidarity were preserved in times of war and totalitarianism. Mothers and fathers, beyond their nationalities, do not want war. The family is the school of peace."

The Board also accepted new Members within the Federation: The Human Dignity Centre (Hungary) became a full Member. The Union of Centres and Counselling for Family (Slovakia) and the *OpGROEI Symposium* (Netherlands) were admitted as new Observers, and candidates for full membership. Gezinplatform (Netherlands) was accepted as an Associated Member Organisation of the Federation. This is the first time that FAFCE welcomed to its board Dutch family organisations.

Exchanges took place also on the recent Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences, at which FAFCE President intervened, speaking about the role of Family Associations and the preparation of the World Meeting of Families (Rome, 22-26 June 2022). The next ordinary Board Meeting will take place in Paris, between the 18th and the 20th of October 2022.

CELEBRATION OF FAFCE 25TH ANNIVERSARY IN ROME WITH POPE FRANCIS AND DELEGATES

The Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE) celebrates this year its 25th anniversary. Delegates of Family Associations from all over Europe gathered in Rome on June 15th and met with Pope

Francis. The Family Solidarity's secretary and the former chairman were present.



The President of FAFCE, Vincenzo Bassi, commented: *“We look forward to meeting Pope Francis again, tomorrow. We are going to meet with him to receive inspiration and encouragement, but also to have the possibility to thank him in person, for putting the family at the centre of his Petrine ministry. Putting the family at the centre means focusing on the human person, far from ideology and extremisms, but close to the reality and the concrete needs of our peoples”.*

Previously in 2017, the Holy Father met the Federation for its 20th Anniversary, and praised the work of family associations that *“should help remind everyone that there is no better ally for the integral progress of society than to favour the presence of families in the social fabric”*.

FAFCE also organised a conference on “Celebrating the beauty of the family”, as a European foretaste of and in contribution to the X World Meeting of Families, that will take place on 23-27 June 2022.

This conference embodied what FAFCE’s mission is about: a bridge among communities, between families and the Church, and between families and Europe. It will bring together high-level representatives of different institutions and organisations, with the participation of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, the Council of the European Bishops’ Conferences (CCEE), the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), the Delegation of the European Union to the Holy See, representatives of the European Union institutions, Ambassadors, academics, and delegates of the European and national civil society.

The event saw the contribution of Marian Jurečka, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and Vice-Prime

Minister of the Czech Republic, just before the start of the Czech Presidency of the European Union, next month.

Bishop Mariano Crociata, First Vice-president of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), the Brussels-based structure representing Catholic Bishops in the EU, delivered a reflection on *The voice of the Church in Europe, the voice of its families*. Archbishop Gintaras Grušas, President of the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE), with which FAFCE concluded a memorandum of understanding last year, described the contribution of local churches in Europe to celebrate the X World Meeting of Families.

Gianluigi De Palo, President of the Forum of Family Associations, Italian Member organisation of FAFCE, intervened on the role of family associations, with a special focus on the demographic challenges that Europe faces today.

Bénédicte Colin, FAFCE Policy Manager, and Moderator of the roundtable discussion during the conference, underlined that *"the message that we would like to send with this conference is very clear: the family is not something from the past, but the future. Even in today's Europe: the family is the future of Europe"*.

The round table looked at the contribution of the family to the common good from different perspectives, with Joseph Thouvenel, Confederal Secretary of the French Confederation of Christian Workers, Oksana Furman, Medical Doctor, delegate of the Ukrainian Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference, Philip Booth, Director of Catholic Mission, St. Mary's University, and Director of Policy and Research of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and with Toma Sutic, Member of the Cabinet of the Vice-President of the European Commission, Dubravka Šuica, in charge of Democracy and Demography. Gabriella Gambino, Undersecretary of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, gave the final remarks, with a final look on the upcoming World Meeting of Families.

Thank you all who have paid their subscriptions and made donations to further our aims. We have put a return envelope with a subscription slip with all copies of the Newsletter as it is simpler than selecting those from whom we have not heard.

MEETING OF HIS HOLINESS THE POPE WITH THE BOARD OF FAFCE ON ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY



Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the President for his words of greeting and introduction. This is a jubilee meeting: you are commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of your foundation, and it is good to celebrate and give thanks. Sadly, at this moment Europe, and especially families in Europe, are undergoing tragic and dramatic experiences as a result of the war in Ukraine. I can only endorse your statement that “mothers and fathers, regardless of their nationality, do not want war. The family is the school of peace” (*FAFCE Presidency Council, 6 May 2022*). Indeed, families and family networks have been and continue to be at the forefront of welcoming refugees, particularly in Lithuania, Poland and Hungary.

In your daily efforts to assist families, you provide a twofold service: you make their voice heard in the European institutions and you work to form networks of families across the continent. This mission is in full harmony with the synodal path on which we have embarked, in order to make the Church ever more a family of families.

I thank you for the seminar that you organized in cooperation with the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life, centered on bearing witness to the beauty of the family. In advance of the World Meeting of Families, which will take place in a few days' time, it calls our attention to the low birth rates in Europe and especially in Italy. This demographic winter is very serious. Please, be attentive to it! There is a very close link between this regenerative poverty and the loss of a sense of the beauty of the family: "Witness to the social dignity of marriage will become persuasive precisely by being a witness that is attractive" (*Catechesis*, 29 April 2015).

I also renew the encouragement I gave to you five years ago (1 June 2017) and I encourage you to continue your work of encouraging the creation and consolidation of *family networks*. This is a valuable service, because there is a need for places, gatherings and communities where couples and families feel welcomed, accompanied, and never alone. There is an urgent need for the local

Churches, both in Europe and beyond, to encourage the work of the laity and families who accompany families.

It is clear that we are living in an era of change, but even more, a change of era. Your work is being carried out amid this change, and that can sometimes lead to a sense of discouragement. Yet by God's grace, we have been called to keep working with confident hope and in effective communion with the Church. I think in this regard of the Memorandum of Understanding signed last year by your Federation with the Council of European Bishops' Conferences and your cooperation with the Commission of the Episcopates of the European Union, in whose Brussels offices your General Secretariat is located.

The challenges are great and they are all interconnected. Today, for example, "we can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity" (*Laudato Si'*, 159). This solidarity presupposes a balance; but it is precisely this balance that is lacking in our Europe today. An aging Europe that is not reproducing is a Europe that cannot afford to talk about sustainability and finds it more and more difficult to be solidary. For this reason, you have often pointed out that family policies should not be considered expressions of state power, but be based *in primis* on concern for families themselves. States have the task of eliminating obstacles to larger

families and recognizing that family is a common good to be rewarded, with natural positive consequences for all.

Furthermore, as a recent Resolution of yours observed, “having children should never be considered as a lack of responsibility towards creation or its natural resources. The concept of ‘environmental footprint’ cannot be applied to children, since they are an indispensable resource for the future. Instead, consumerism and individualism should be addressed, looking at families as the best example of the optimization of resources involving large economies of scale” (FAFCE, *Families for Sustainable and Integral Development*, 26 October 2021).

We should also speak about the scourge of pornography, which has everywhere burgeoned due to the internet, can only be condemned as a continuing attack on the dignity of men and women. It is a matter not only of protecting children – an urgent task of the authorities and of all of us – but also of declaring pornography as a threat to public health. “We would be seriously deluding ourselves were we to think that a society where an abnormal consumption of internet sex is rampant among adults could be capable of effectively protecting minors” (*Address to the Participants in the Congress on “Child Dignity in the Digital World”*, 6 October 2017). Networks of families, in cooperation with schools and local communities, have an essential role to play in preventing

and combatting this plague, and in bringing healing to those trapped in the maelstrom of addiction.

The dignity of men and women is also threatened by the inhuman and increasingly widespread practice of the “rented uterus”, in which women, almost always poor women, are exploited and children treated as commodities.

Your Federation is rightly responsible also for bearing witness to unity and working for peace – may it be peace in abundance - at this time in history when, sadly, it is under grave threat, and where there is great need to focus on what unites rather than on what divides. In this regard, I am grateful that in the last five years your Federation has expanded to welcome ten new family organizations and four new European countries, including Ukraine.

Finally – and this is perhaps the challenge underlying all others – the pandemic has highlighted another, more hidden pandemic, about which little is being said: the pandemic of *solitude*. While many families have rediscovered their identity as domestic churches, it is also true that all too many families have felt isolated and their relationship with the sacraments has become in many cases purely virtual. Family networks are an antidote to solitude and isolation. Indeed, by their very nature, they

are called, in communion with the pastors and local Churches, to leave no one behind.

“The mutual love between man and woman is a reflection of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves the human being, destined to be fruitful and to find fulfilment in the common work of the social order and the care of creation” (*Address to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 29 April 2022*). The family founded on marriage is therefore crucial. It is the primary cell of our communities and must be recognized as such, in its unique and indispensable *regenerative function*. Not because it is an ideal and perfect entity, and not because it is an

ideological model, but because it represents the natural place of our first relationships and of regeneration. “When a family is welcoming and reaches out to others, especially the poor and the neglected, it is a



Former Chairman of Family Solidarity greeting His Holiness

symbol, witness and participant in the Church's motherhood" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 324).

Dear brothers and sisters, keep moving forward in your service! Please, ensure that the organization is all about service, streamlined and ever ready to respond to the demands of the Gospel. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady keep you. I bless you all from my heart, and I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you!

Rome, 10 June 2022

Catechesis of the Holy Father. General Audience, 15 June 2022. (Addressed to the elderly mainly)

"The joyful service of faith that is learned in gratitude"
(Gospel reading: *Mk 1: 29-31*).

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

We have listened to the simple and touching account of the healing of the mother-in-law of Simon – who is not yet called Peter – in Mark's version of the Gospel. The brief episode is related, with slight yet evocative variations,



also in the other two synoptic Gospels. “Simon’s mother-in-law lay sick with a fever”, writes Mark. We do not know if it is a mild ailment, but in old age even a simple fever can be dangerous. When you are old, you are no longer in control of your body. One has to learn to choose what to do and what not to do. The vigour of the body fails and abandons us, even though our heart does not stop yearning. One must then learn to purify desire: be patient, choose what to ask of the body and of life. When we are old, we cannot do the same things we did when we were young: the body has another pace, and we must listen to the body and accept its limits. We all have them. I too have to use a walking stick now.

Illness weighs on the elderly in a new and different way compared to when one is young or an adult. It is like a hard blow that falls in an already difficult time. In the elderly, illness seems to hasten death and, in any case, diminish that time we have to live, which we already consider short. The doubt lurks that we will not recover, that “this time it will be the last time I get sick...”, and so on: these ideas come. One cannot dream of hope in a future that now appears non-existent. A renowned Italian writer, Italo Calvino, noted the bitterness of the old who suffer the loss of the things of the past, more than they enjoy the coming of the new. But the Gospel scene we have heard helps us to hope and already offers us a first

lesson: Jesus does not visit that sick old woman by himself: he goes there together with the disciples. And this makes us think a bit.

It is precisely the *Christian community* that must take care of the elderly: relatives and friends, but the community. Visiting the elderly must be done by many, together and often. We should never forget these three lines of the Gospel, especially now that the number of elderly people has grown considerably, also in relation to the young, since we are in this demographic winter, we have fewer children, and there are many old people and few young ones. We must feel a responsibility to visit the elderly who are often alone, and present them to the Lord with our prayers. Jesus himself will teach us how to love them. “A society truly welcomes life when it recognizes that it is also precious in old age, in disability, in serious illness and even when it is fading” (*Message to the Pontifical Academy for Life*, 19 February 2014). Life is always precious. Jesus, when he sees the sick elderly woman, takes her by the hand and heals her. The same gesture that he uses to revive that young girl who was dead: he takes her by the hand and heals her, putting her back on her feet. Jesus, with this tender gesture of love, gives the first lesson to the disciples: namely, salvation is announced or, better, communicated through attention to that sick person; and the woman’s faith shines in

gratitude for the tenderness of God who stooped to her. I return to a theme I have repeated in these catecheses: this throwaway culture seems to cancel out the elderly. Yes, it does not kill them, but socially it eliminates them, as if they were a burden to carry: it is better to conceal them. This is a betrayal of our own humanity, this is the worst thing, this is choosing life according to utility, according to young and not with life as it is, with the wisdom of the elderly, with the limits of the elderly. The elderly have much to give us: there is the wisdom of life. There is much to teach us: this is why we must teach children that their grandparents are to be cared for and visited. The dialogue between young people and grandparents, children and grandparents, is fundamental for society, it is fundamental for the Church, it is fundamental for the health of life. Where there is no dialogue between the young and the old, something is lacking and a generation grows up without past, that is, without roots.

If the first lesson was given by Jesus, the second is given to us by the elderly woman, who arose and “served them”. Even in old age one can, or rather one must serve the community. It is good for the elderly to cultivate the responsibility to serve, overcoming the temptation to stand aside. The Lord does not reject them; on the contrary, he restores to them the strength to serve. And I

like to note that there is no special emphasis in the account on the part of the evangelists: it is the normality of following, that the disciples will learn, in its fullness, along the path of formation they will experience in the school of Jesus. The elderly who retain the disposition for healing, consolation, intercession for their brothers and sisters – be they disciples, centurions, people disturbed by evil spirits, those who are rejected – are perhaps the highest testimony to the purity of this gratitude that accompanies faith. If the elderly, instead of being rejected and dismissed from the scene of the events that mark the life of the community, were placed at the centre of collective attention, they would be encouraged to exercise the valuable ministry of gratitude towards God, who forgets no-one. The gratitude of elderly people for the gifts received from God during their life, as Peter's mother-in-law teaches us, restores to the community the joy of living together, and confers to the faith of the disciples the essential feature of its destination.

But we must learn well that the spirit of intercession and service, which Jesus prescribes to all his disciples, is not simply a matter for women: there is no trace of this limitation in Jesus' words and gestures. The evangelical service of gratitude for God's tenderness is not in any way written according to the grammar of the man who is master and the woman who serves. However, this does

not detract from the fact that women, in the gratitude and tenderness of faith, can teach men things they find more difficult to understand. Peter's mother-in-law, before the Apostles arrived, along the path of following Jesus, showed the way to them too. And the special gentleness of Jesus, who "took her by the hand" and "lifted her up", clearly shows, from the very beginning, his special sensibility towards the weak and the sick, which the Son of God had certainly learned from his Mother. Please, let us make sure that the elderly, grandparents, are close to children, to the young, to hand down this memory of life, to pass on this experience of life, this wisdom of life. To the extent to which we ensure that the young and the old are connected, to this extent there will be more hope for the future of our society.



Be there! Rally for Life returns on July 2nd in Dublin to urge TDs - and the public - to 'Rethink Abortion'

You are invited to join a crowd of thousands at the Annual All-Ireland Rally for Life which will take place this year on Saturday, July 2nd, gathering at Parnell Square from 1.30 pm.

Everyone is looking forward to meeting up together again to stand to life - and to hold the abortion law to account. The theme of the Rally, as you probably know, is to urge people to Rethink Abortion - and to urge our TDs to ensure that the Abortion Review isn't used to push for more abortion, but is instead used to shine a light on the horrific outcomes of the abortion law to date. It's so heartbreaking to see that at least 21,000 abortions have already taken place, and that late-term abortions are happening in Ireland. Now we are seeing that abortion campaigners want to broaden the law even further by pushing the government to get rid of the three-day waiting period and attacking the conscience rights of pro-life doctors.

We need to stand up for life, and we can look at the great news from the United States - that the Supreme Court there is going to overturn Roe v Wade after 50 years - for inspiration! It really shows the power of pro-life perseverance. And in countries like Croatia and Poland, the culture is also turning and more and more doctors say they won't perform abortions, while political support is

growing for a ban on abortion.

Change can and will happen, we just need to fight on, to keep the path lit, to rebuild our broken culture. Speakers at the Rally for Life include the wonderful Dr Dermot Kearney who a significant victory this year for his life-saving work in providing Abortion Pill Reversal when he beat an orchestrated campaign to stop him helping women and babies. An Irish cardiologist living in Britain, he has helped to save 32 babies from abortion by giving their mothers a REAL choice through reversing the effects of the abortion pill. Women said he “became a saviour to them and their babies” and described him as a "lifesaver".

Be part of the Rally for Life 2022! We will stand together to raise a voice for the voiceless and to bring this nation to Rethink Abortion - and to demand a better answer than abortion for both mother and child.

DR DERMOT KEARNEY, THE MAIN SPEAKER OF THE RALLY FOR LIFE, WILL GIVE A SPECIAL TALK TO THE MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS OF FAMILY SOLIDARITY. THIS EVENT WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE CASSIDYS HOTEL IN O’CONNELL STREET UPPER (IN FRONT OF THE GATE THEATRE), AT 12.30 PM JUST BEFORE THE START OF THE RALLY FOR LIFE. AS PLACES ARE LIMITED, REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED. PLEASE CONTACT US AT **familysolidarityireland@gmail.com**