

# I am not an individual. I am a person!



## The Bishop Speaks

*This is an edited version of the homily Bishop Kennedy gave to Australian pilgrims at the recent World Meeting of Families in Dublin, Ireland.*

We have all heard, witnessed and learnt so much this week during the Dublin World Meeting of Families; so much for us to remember. A few of the things I heard that really struck me were:

First, regarding marriage. “Love is a decision, not a feeling; I decide to love and to be loved.” Another couple said, “we are just 2 imperfect people trying to love each other”. The Priest Chef expressed it differently when he said “Marriage is about fidelity, not perfection. On your wedding day you vow to be faithful, not perfect.”

Second, regarding parenthood. An Irish couple said

“when we were younger we wanted to change the world. Now we just change nappies!” Another man said, “the greatest gift a father can give his children is to love their mother”, and “children who are lovingly corrected, feel loved and cared for.”

And lastly, regarding the whole Church. Many of us heard Bishop Barron say that when one of us fails, the rest of us – the Church – follow the way of Jesus, which is not to exclude and cast-off the one who fails, but to be merciful and reinstate him or her.

This is how good families treat the so called “black sheep of the family”. Families have learnt from Jesus and the Church, but the Church also learns it from families. Families, whatever your degree of imperfection and brokenness the Church wants you; the Church needs you.

*Bishop Kennedy with the Hyland Family*





But if all of this, and everything else we heard these few days is too much to remember, there are two things I know I will never forget. One is the three words Pope Francis gives us for happy family life: “Please, thank you, and sorry”. The second thing I will never forget is you, the couples and families on this pilgrimage. Your humble and sincere witness to love and to marriage and family life is extraordinary and has touched me deeply.

Parents, seeing your patience and kindness for each other and your children. Kids, seeing your respect and obedience toward your parents. Mums and Dads travelling alone without your spouse and kids, hearing the way you speak about them in their absence. And seeing the joy and delight you all take in each other.

Seeing all this has been and is a powerful Gospel. This is the *Gospel of the Family* that Pope Francis wants us all to continue living in our communities back home. This is the Gospel that, amidst so many shadows and clouds, is transforming the world – for now ever so subtly, but like a snow ball it is growing and will continue to grow.

The words of Jesus in today’s Gospel passage seem strange during a gathering of families: “Call no man on earth your Father” (Mt 23:9). You might think I’ve been deliberately avoiding them! I haven’t. I’ve been saving them for last!

We are not meant to take every single word of the Bible literally, not even every word of Jesus. This is one such passage. Otherwise we’d be in the ludicrous situation of calling our Mums mothers but not our Dads fathers! Even the Bible itself often

refers to people as “fathers”, either by blood or by faith.

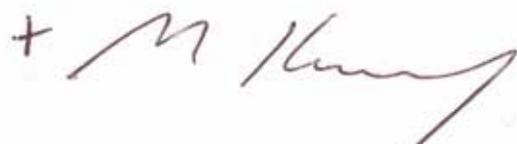
We call our Mums Mothers and our Dads Fathers, not just as titles, but because it’s who they are – it sums up their very identities.

Cardinal Tagle said something beautiful about this during the week. He said that each of us is not an individual but a person. An individual exists in isolation and distances himself from others, whereas a *person* exists in relationship with others and finds his or her identity in those relationships.

So, who am I? I am not an individual! I am a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, a husband, a wife, a mother, a father, a priest, a nun, a bishop. There is nothing better in life than to be one or more of these things. It is who we are. They are the relationships that make us who we are.

And every one of us is a son or daughter of God who is *The Father* possessing both paternal and maternal qualities, the one from who all fatherhood and motherhood comes.

Let us bask in our relationships with each other and in our relationship with God and pray that these bonds may be strengthened today through our sharing in this Eucharist.

  
**Most Reverend Michael Kennedy**  
Bishop of Armidale