

Editorial: The media missed an opportunity to amplify the beauty and generosity of adoption

During his first general audience of 2022, Pope Francis gave a rather lovely catechesis on St. Joseph and adoption – the sixth such address in a series about the foster-father of Jesus. You may not have heard about it, because the pope also made an off-the-cuff comment (in vintage Pope Francis style) about how many couples sadly choose to have “dogs and cats take the place of children” in their homes. Chances are, you heard about that one. The 45-word aside spread like wildfire and became the fodder of opinion piece after opinion piece in every prominent news outlet that comes to mind. No one seemed to miss a chance to comment on how Pope Francis apparently hates pets, how a celibate man doesn’t have the right to talk about children, or how it’s well documented that Pope Benedict loves his cats, so what could you possibly be thinking, Francis?

In [an essay in this issue](#), David Mills does not only provide a thorough takedown of such petty (pun intended) criticisms, but also speaks needed truths about the role of marriage and children in the life of the Church and how it diverges greatly from the concept of marriage and children active in the secular world today.

“Children aren’t an optional extra,” he writes. “They’re one of the two ends marriage is for. Marriage isn’t given primarily for our enjoyment. It’s given to us to get things done in the world. Specifically, two: for the spouses to help each other grow closer to God and for them to have and raise children. That’s a lot of work and a lot of sacrifice – and

it's work we will not always want to do and sacrifices we will not always want to make. But it's the job we accept, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part."

Amen.

At the same time, we recognize and acknowledge the terrible pain and suffering of those couples who are unable to have children of their own. Pope Francis was in no way speaking about these couples as "less than" those who can conceive or as undeserving of being parents because they are unable to conceive naturally, as some critics have claimed. In fact, this was the thrust of the rest of his catechesis, in which the pontiff spoke of the qualities that it takes to be an effective parent – qualities that have nothing to do with biology.

"It is not enough to bring a child into the world to also be the child's father or mother," he said, going on to quote his apostolic letter *Patris Corde*, which he wrote in 2020 for the start of the Year of St. Joseph. "Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person."

The Holy Father encouraged couples to open their hearts to adoption, and to not be afraid of taking the "risk" of welcoming children with no homes into their homes. He encouraged adoption agencies to simplify what can be a long, tedious and drawn-out process, and he prayed that "no one may feel deprived of the bond of paternal love." Finally, he ended with a beautiful prayer invoking St. Joseph's intercession for those children who have no family, for those couples who long for children of their own, and for those couples who actively and intentionally close themselves off from life, that "they

may open their hearts to love.”

Rather than a somewhat absurd series of commentaries on how people in the Western world have every right to view their pets as equal to human children, Pope Francis’ words on adoption should have been picked up by news outlets. It was this message of love and hope and generosity that should have been amplified and underscored. Because he’s right. There are too many children in this world without parents, and too many childless couples who dream of children. And the system that works to bring them together is complicated, time-consuming and expensive. Why not spend our energy trying to do something about that?

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