

From Pontiff to Pew:

hearts and in acts of kindness toward those in need, the miracles of charity are continually renewed. So, if you feel that Christ is calling you to follow him in a path of special consecration – as priests, religious sisters, religious brothers, or catechists – do not be afraid to follow in his footsteps. As he himself promised, and I also wish to say emphatically to you here today – you will receive “a hundredfold and ... eternal life” (Mt 19:29).

Dear friends, you have come to this gathering with your families. They are the fertile soil in which your human and Christian growth, like a young and delicate tree, sinks its roots. For this reason, I want to invite everyone to thank the Lord together for the gift of your loved ones. As Purificación and Jaime Antonio have suggested, entrust yourselves to the Lord, so that your families may grow in unity and welcome life as a gift to be cherished and nurtured, as we journey toward the Lord, the Lord who is “the way, and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). Many of you are preparing for the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. Being spouses and parents is an exciting mission – a covenant to be lived day by day. Within this covenant, you will continually rediscover one another as you cooperate with God in the miracle of life and in building happiness for yourselves and for your children. Be prepared to embrace this calling as a journey of true love that grows in freedom; as a journey of hope, born from the knowledge that God will never abandon you; and as journey of holiness, in which you always seek the good and happiness of others.

I warmly thank Victor Antonio for sharing his story with such sincerity and courage. His words help us to grasp even more deeply the value of what we have been reflecting on. His testimony may unsettle us, but it does not discourage us. Rather, it invites us to build a better world – one founded on respect for burgeoning life and on a sense of responsibility toward children and the most vulnerable among us. Victor Antonio has reminded us that welcoming life requires love, commitment and care. These words, spoken by a young person, should lead us to reflect seriously on the importance of protecting and safeguarding the family and the values learned within it. Let us cultivate, live and bear witness to these values, even when it requires sacrifice, or when judgments, prejudices and stereotypes seem to diminish their worth, as Jaime Antonio and Purificación said. A family that knows how to welcome and love becomes a source of light and warmth. In this regard, Pope Francis left us some beautiful words to describe the family. He said: “The father and mother, a couple with their personal story of love... the couple that loves and begets life is a true, living icon... capable of revealing God the Creator and Savior” (Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 9, 11).

Dear young people, parents and all who are present, let us be inspired by the beauty of love; let us become witnesses to the love that Jesus has left us and taught us! Let us show every day that it is beautiful to love – that the greatest joys, in every situation, come from knowing how to give and from giving of ourselves, especially when we reach out to those most in need. The light of charity, nurtured in our homes and lived out in faith, can truly transform the world – even its structures and institutions – so that every person is respected and no one is forgotten (cf. Francis, Message for World Food Day, 14 October 2022). Sisters and brothers, let us together make this a firm resolution, a joyful commitment, so that the crucified and risen Christ – the light of Equatorial Guinea, of Africa and of the whole world – may guide us all toward a future filled with hope. Christ, the light of Equatorial Guinea!

Pope Leo XIV then departed from Bata, the largest city in Equatorial Guinea on Wednesday, April 22nd and made his way back to Rome after completing a fulfilling and successful Apostolic Journey to Africa. May we hope and pray that his visit and words of spiritual healing helped those with whom he had spent time with while on his trip.

Mass for Widows and Widowers to be Televised - Remember your loved ones on Sunday, May 24, 2026 with a televised Mass Celebrated by Bishop Mark Barchak at 11:00 am on WATM ABC 23. All spouses will be acknowledged and remembered at the Mass. All persons who have lost a spouse through death throughout the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese are invited to register by contacting the Family Life Office 814-317-2643 or email familylife@dioceseaj.org. When registering, please give your name, address, phone number and the name of your spouse who has passed away. The last day to register is Thursday, May 21, 2026. The event is sponsored by the Diocesan Family Life Office and the Catholic Ministries Drive. Please be advised, a special broadcast of a sporting event on WATM ABC 23 may delay this broadcast. All names of loved ones will be seen during Communion.

So Jesus said again, "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." ~ John 10: 7-10