Good evening. I am very happy to be here at DeSales University during your celebration of Heritage Week and I am honored to deliver this year’s Kraft Memorial Lecture during the Year of Faith that has been proclaimed by our Holy Father, Benedict XVI. I am particularly grateful to Bishop Barres and Father Dailey for the invitation to speak at this dinner at which so many members of the clergy from the Diocese of Allentown are present. It is also very fitting for me to be back in the diocese where I was born and baptized in order to present some reflections on the role of the family in the new evangelization of culture.

St. Francis de Sales, after whom this university is named, and whose feast we celebrate today, was a master of the spiritual life. He is especially remembered for his conviction that every person is called to holiness—not just religious or members of the clergy—and for his devoted service in giving spiritual direction to lay people. His foresight would be confirmed centuries later during the Second Vatican Council when the universal call to holiness was proclaimed repeatedly and emphatically. In fact, the council fathers went to great lengths to emphasize in its documents that the laity has been especially entrusted with the task of transforming the temporal order, which, of course, includes the culture of our time. With regard to our reflection this evening, the Church proclaims that every Christian family is called to holiness. Holy families will play an indispensable role in the renewal of Christian culture today.

As you may know, Blessed John Paul II was fond of saying that “the future of humanity passes by way of the family.” This phrase first appeared in his 1981 apostolic exhortation Familiaris consortio, on the role of the Christian family in the modern world. This beautiful document was based not only on his own rich reflections over many years of pastoral ministry, but also on the recommendations of the Synod of Bishops
that had been convened in Rome on this topic in 1980. Throughout his papacy, Blessed John Paul II would refer to Familiaris consortio as the magna carta of the Church’s ministry to families. In fact, Pope Benedict XVI himself has continued to use the phrase “magna carta” in reference to this landmark document.

What we find emphasized in this beautiful exhortation is the Church’s conviction that not only does the future of humanity pass by way of the family, but that the future of evangelization also depends largely on the Christian family. “The future of evangelization depends in great part on the church of the home,” the Holy Father stated. “This apostolic mission of the family is rooted in baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God’s plan” (# 52).

The Church’s conviction about the essential connection between the Christian family and evangelization has become even more critical in the three decades since Familiaris consortio was issued, and has become even more decisive for the new evangelization. As you may know, the phrase “new evangelization” was coined by Blessed John Paul during an address to the bishops of Latin America in 1983, just two years after Familiaris consortio was written. “The changed social, cultural, economic, civil and religious scenarios call us to something new,” he said, to live our communitarian experience of faith in a renewed way and to proclaim it through an evangelization that is “new in its ardor, in its methods, in its expressions.” Pope Benedict reaffirmed this summons and emphasized that the new evangelization is directed “principally at those who, though baptized, have drifted away from the Church and live without reference to the Christian life.” Its purpose is “to help these people encounter the Lord, who alone fills our existence with deep meaning and peace; and to favor the rediscovery of the faith, that source of grace which brings joy and hope to personal, family and social life.”

In his December 2011 address to the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family, Pope Benedict emphasized the role of the family in re-proposing the Gospel to a culture that has largely lost its Christian heritage:

The new evangelization depends largely on the domestic church. In our time, as in times past, the eclipse of God, the spread of ideologies contrary to the family and the degradation of sexual ethics are intertwined. And just as the eclipse of God and the crisis of the family are linked, so the new evangelization is inseparable from the Christian family…. Spouses not only receive the love of Christ and become a saved community, but they are also called upon to communicate Christ’s love to their brethren, thus becoming a saving community…. Just like the Church, it is called to welcome, radiate and show the world the love and the presence of Christ. The reception and transmission of divine love are realized in the mutual commitment of spouses, generous and responsible procreation, in the care and education of children, work and social relationships, with attention to the needy, in participation in church activities, in
commitment to civil society. The Christian family, to the extent it succeeds in living love as communion and service as a reciprocal gift open to all, through a process of ongoing conversion supported by the grace of God, reflects the splendor of Christ in the world and the beauty of the divine Trinity.

The deepest truth about the human person is that we are created for communion, with God and with one another, and the family is the first school of communion. The fact that we are created in the image and likeness of God not only means that man and woman each have a rational mind and a free will capable of knowing what is good and choosing it; it also means that man and woman become, in a sense, the image of God by living in loving communion with one another. This is one of the central insights of Blessed John Paul’s theology of the body. The first and most fundamental form of this communion of persons is the vocation of marriage, in which a man and woman are called to make a complete gift of themselves to each other, living with, and even more deeply, for one another out of love. In a marriage between a baptized man and woman, the couple images the communion of love between Christ and His Church.

To begin to understand the critical role that the family is called to play in the new evangelization, we first need to focus on the vocation of marriage, which is the foundation not only of the family, but of the wider culture itself. In his homily for the opening Mass for the synod of bishops on The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith this past October, Pope Benedict made special mention of marriage as a Gospel in itself, and therefore a focal point for the new evangelization. Here is an excerpt from what he said:

The theme of marriage … deserves special attention. The message of the Word of God may be summed up in the expression found in the Book of Genesis and taken up by Jesus Himself: ‘Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.’ What does this word say to us today? It seems to me that it invites us to be more aware of a reality, already well known but not fully appreciated: that matrimony is a Gospel in itself, a Good News for the world of today, especially the de-christianized world. The union of a man and a woman, their becoming ‘one flesh’ in charity, in fruitful and indissoluble love, is a sign that speaks of God with a force and an eloquence which in our days has become greater because unfortunately, for various reasons, marriage, in precisely the oldest regions evangelized, is going through a profound crisis. And it is not by chance. Marriage is linked to faith, but not in a general way. Marriage, as a union of faithful and indissoluble love, is based upon the grace that comes from the triune God, who in Christ loved us with a faithful love, even to the Cross. Today we ought to grasp the full truth of this statement, in contrast to the painful reality of many marriages which, unhappily, end badly. There is a clear link between the crisis in faith and the crisis in marriage. And, as the Church has said and witnessed for a long time now, marriage is called to be not only an object but a subject of the new evangelization.
What the Holy Father is suggesting here is that Christian spouses are called to play a significant role in the new evangelization of culture first and foremost by the witness of their lives. More than ever today, Christian married couples are called to become, as it were, a living Gospel, radiating the love and communion for which we are created, a communion which so many men and women in our culture seek but do not find because they have not found Christ. It is only His grace and His Gospel which make possible the love and communion for which modern men and women thirst—a thirst no less intense than that of the Samaritan woman whom Jesus encountered at the well of Sychar, a woman who had had five husbands already and who was then living with a man who was not her husband. The Church remains deeply convinced that the hopes that men and women rightly place in marriage are only capable of being fulfilled through a whole-hearted acceptance of the Gospel. Married couples who live their vocation with joy and fidelity and generosity, completely committed to the plan of God and fully conscious of their dependence on His grace, evangelize by their example not only their own children, but their extended family, their friends, their children’s friends, their fellow parishioners, their neighbors, members of the wider community, and eventually their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This is the way God planned it to be, because we are all connected to one another, in time and in space, and why marriage has always been understood and upheld as an indispensable institution which, for better or for worse, is intimately linked to the well-being of society as a whole.

Like Holy Orders, matrimony is a sacrament at the service of communion, and the mutual gift of self between a husband and wife is meant to overflows to others, especially to children. The communion of love between a husband and wife is intended to mirror the love that exists between the Father and the Son, a love that is literally “personified” in the Holy Spirit. In a similar way, through the privilege of procreation, God enables the love between a husband and wife to become “personified” in the gift of their child, who is literally the two of them in one flesh, a living reflection of their love and a permanent sign of their unity. This new human being bears not only the image and likeness of his or her parents, but above all, the image and likeness of God.

Procreation is but the first step in the vocation of parenthood, in which the couple is called, in the complementarity of their masculinity and femininity, to give of themselves for the good of the children who have been entrusted to them by God. As the third promise of the rite of Christian marriage reminds us, the couple not only promises to accept children from God, but to raise them “according to law of Christ and His Church.”

The Church has always considered parents to be the primary educators of their children, and Christian parents are also their first and most important evangelizers. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:
Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the first heralds for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church. A wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one’s life…. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God (CCC # 2225-2226).

Parents who conscientiously fulfill their duty to evangelize their own children make an enormous contribution to the new evangelization of culture. This is true not only in the sense of what they formally teach their children but above all through the witness of their lives. As Blessed John Paul emphasized: “Faith is principally assimilated through contact with people whose daily life bears witness to it.” This conviction has been confirmed by the National Study on Youth and Religion headed by sociologist Christian Smith and his team at the University of Notre Dame. This study, which is the largest and longest of its kind ever conducted in this country, found a strong and striking correlation between parental religiosity and the beliefs and practices of teenagers. As Christian Smith, himself a convert from Protestantism, sums it up: “Parents for whom religious faith is quite important are thus likely to be raising teenagers for whom faith is quite important, while parents whose faith is not important are likely to be raising teenagers for whom faith is also not important. The fit is not perfect. None of this is guaranteed or determined, and sometimes, in specific instances, things turn out otherwise. But the overall positive association is clean.”

A Christian family that faithfully lives its identity as the domestic Church—the church of the home—ensures that all the family members receive a broad and deep formation in the Gospel and in those virtues which are the linchpins of life in Christ. This, in itself, is a significant investment in the new evangelization. “Catholic parents must learn to form their family as a ‘domestic Church,’ a church in the home, as it were,” Blessed John Paul II said during his pastoral visit to the United States in 1995, “where God is honored, his law is respected, prayer is a normal event, virtue is transmitted by word and example, and everyone shares the hopes, the problems and sufferings of everyone else. All this is not to advocate a return to some outdated style of living: it is to return to the roots of human development and human happiness” (Homily at Aqueduct Racetrack, New York). The recent synod of bishops also reaffirmed the crucial role of the Christian family as the primary agent of evangelization: “Established by the sacrament of matrimony, the Christian family as the domestic church is the locus and first agent in the giving of life and love, the transmission of faith and the formation of the human person according to the values of the Gospel.”
The work of Christian Smith and his colleague has demonstrated the importance not only of the religiosity of the parents, but in its transmission to the children through shared acts of faith and devotion on a regular basis. In fact, the more acts of shared religious activities as a family that children report, the more likely those children are to report that they are happy and that they feel loved. Shared family activity has a much stronger impact than just the example of the parent’s religiosity. It is not only what the parents believe that is important, but what they do together in leading the family in daily or weekly acts of prayer, service and devotion.

There are two dimensions of living this identity as the church of the home that I think are particularly important today for Christian parents as a critical agents of the new evangelization. The first is prayer, and the second is catechesis. In Familiaris consortio, Blessed John Paul makes a striking claim about how praying together as a family makes an indelible imprint on the souls of children. “The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray,” he emphasized. “Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother—exercising their royal priesthood—penetrate the innermost depths of their children’s hearts and leave an impression that the future events of their lives will not be able to efface” (#60). There are many ways that families can pray together, whether the family Rosary, or part of the Liturgy of the Hours, or by each person simply sharing aloud special intentions for which to pray. Whatever form it takes, what is important is that the members of the family come together to lift their minds and hearts to God, and through him, to come closer to one another. Regular family prayer is a powerful antidote, as it were, to the all-too-common phenomenon today when children grow up, leave home and lose their faith—a phenomenon that in no small way has contributed to the collapse of Christian culture.

Second only to family prayer in importance is the necessity of family catechesis, which can take many forms at different phases in the lives of children and adolescents. Here again we can take our cue from Blessed John Paul, who wrote at length about this task in Catechesi tradendae, the first apostolic exhortation he issued after becoming pope: “The family's catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable,” he wrote.

This special character has been rightly stressed by the Church, particularly by the Second Vatican Council. Education in the faith by parents, which should begin from the children’s tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. This catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events (such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, a bereavement) care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events. But that is not enough: Christian parents must strive to
follow and repeat, within the setting of family life, the more methodical teaching received elsewhere. The fact that these truths about the main questions of faith and Christian living are thus repeated within a family setting impregnated with love and respect will often make it possible to influence the children in a decisive way for life. The parents themselves profit from the effort that this demands of them, for in a catechetical dialogue of this sort each individual both receives and gives. Family catechesis therefore precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis (# 68).

Blessed John Paul presents the parents’ mission of catechizing their children as a true ecclesial ministry. As such, parents should collaborate responsibly and remain in intimate communion with other evangelizing agents at the parish and diocesan levels. Christian parents should pay particular attention in helping their children to embrace whatever vocation to which God has called them. The Holy Father points out that a Christian family that lives its faith and fulfills its duties with generous fidelity is a seedbed in which the vocation to a consecrated life in service to the kingdom of God can take root. Always the pastor, Blessed John Paul also notes that just as suffering often accompanies the announcing of the Word of God in the universal Church, so too, do parents sometimes experience profound difficulties and heartache when their adolescent or adult children challenge or even reject the Christian faith they received in their earlier years. He urges parents to "face with courage and great interior serenity" these difficulties, to take an active role in evangelizing their adolescent children and to persevere in giving a living witness of their own faith. Of particular importance in catechizing adolescents and young adults is the need to give reasons for why we believe what we do as Catholics, especially with regard to morality. As St. Augustine once said: “I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe.”

A Christian family that lives with fidelity and joy its vocation as the church of the home cannot help but evangelize the broader community of which it is a part. Pope Paul VI made this point beautifully in Evangelii nuntiandi:

The family, like the church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families and of the neighborhood of which it forms part.

I think that one of the primary ways in which Christian families are called to evangelize the wider community is through their witness of living an authentic communion of persons. The family that strives to live not just as a collection of individuals inhabiting the same space, but as a loving community in which each person cares about and contributes to the well-being of the others, is in a very real sense
“sacramental”: it is a visible sign that manifests and makes present an invisible reality—the interior life of God who is Love. “Family, become what you are!” were the stirring words with which Blessed John Paul summoned the Christian family to become more and more an intimate community of life and love modeled on the Holy Trinity. This happens where there is loving-care for the young, the elderly and those who are sick and suffering in any way. In such families there is daily experienced mutual service and a sharing of goods, of joys and of sorrows. In a culture that craves the experience of authentic communion and seeks so many false substitutes, we cannot underestimate the influence that this kind of family witness can have on others, and the power it has to attract people to the good news of the Gospel. As Pope Paul emphasized in his encyclical on evangelization in the modern world,

Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, #21).

Beyond their witness of authentic communion, Christian families are called to evangelize the culture more explicitly by becoming involved in various pastoral initiatives within the broader community of the parish and the diocese. In this task, Christian spouses in particular become real collaborators with priests, whose own sacrament of Holy Orders is also a sacrament at the service of communion. “Both these states of life share the same root in the love of Christ who gives himself for humanity’s salvation,” Pope Benedict said in an address to the Pontifical Council for the Family in December of 2011.

They are called to a common mission: to witness to and make present this love at the service of the community in order to build up the People of God…. There are some areas where the prominence of Christian families in collaboration with priests, and under the guidance of Bishops is particularly urgent: the education of children, adolescents and young people to love, understood as self-giving and communion, and the preparation of engaged couples to married life with a journey of faith, and the formation of married couples, especially young couples, the experiences associated with charitable purposes, education and civic engagement, and the pastoral care of families for families.

While the Church honors in a special way those Christian couples and families who devote part of their lives to proclaiming the Gospel in mission territories, every Christian family is called to be a missionary of love and life to the broader community of which it is a part, always by its witness and when appropriate, by its words. Families are often in a position to be close to each other in ways that the clergy cannot. When a relative does not practice the faith or live it consistently, or when a family in the
neighborhood does not yet believe or no longer lives its Christian faith, married couples and families can exercise an authentic apostolate of like-to-like, reaching out in hospitality, solidarity, sincere concern, and disinterested service.

Families who are striving to live in accord with the faith of the Church are also called to support each other in this task, forming a social network of like-minded families who can enjoy each other’s company, share one another’s burdens and encourage each another in the ways of Christ. This kind of small Christian community that is not cliquish or closed in on itself but remains open and eager to welcome others is another manifestation of the missionary heart that modern families are called to exhibit as a way of attracting others to the truth and goodness of the Gospel.

Another critical way in which Christian families are called to help re-evangelize the culture is to become involved in public policy initiatives to protect and promote their rights and responsibilities. *Familiaris consortio* exhorted families to be on the front lines in the battle to defend marriage and family life in the public arena:

Families should be the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family. Along these lines, families should grow in awareness of being ‘protagonists’ of what is known as ‘family politics’ and assume responsibility for transforming society; otherwise families will be the first victims of the evils that they have done no more than note with indifference (#44).

One such evil that has almost come to define modern culture is the crisis in marriage, not only for individual marriages, many of which end in divorce, but also for the institution of marriage itself. For much of human history, despite significant differences in culture and mores, marriage has been held in esteem and upheld in law as the privileged relationship between one man and one woman who pledge lifelong fidelity to one another and who are open to the possibility of children. It is only in this century that we have seen the significant erosion of social, legal and political support for this institution that is so integral to the well-being of individuals and of society as a whole. In 1969, California passed the first no-fault divorce law in the country, and in 2010, New York became the final state to do so, causing one commentator to quip that now we are a “no-fault divorce nation.” In the forty years since that first no-fault divorce law dealt its blow to the permanence of marriage, we have reached the point where we now have little agreement in our society as to what marriage even means. This is most evident in the growing trend among a number of states in granting the legal status of marriage to same-sex relationships. What does not bode well for reversing this trend are the results of a Gallup survey from May 2011 that found that for the first time, a majority of Americans polled—53%—supported legalizing same-sex marriages. This statistic is alarming on many levels, not the least of which is the fact that only one year prior, the same percentage of Americans, 53%, said that they opposed
same-sex marriage. In addition, unlike the issue of abortion on which younger age groups are found to be as pro-life or even more so than older generations, on the issue of same-sex marriage, the younger age groups showed much greater support, with 70% of the 18 to 34 year-olds indicating they favored the legalization of same-sex marriage, compared with 39% of those aged 55 and older.

How much our culture needs to recover an understanding and appreciation of marriage as an intimate and complementary community of life and love that has God Himself as its author! Contrary to popular opinion, marriage is not simply a human institution, something which we invented and which we can therefore re-invent as we see fit. Rather, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church emphasizes, “the vocation of marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator” (#1603). In his apostolic letter at the close of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, Novo Millennio Ineunte, Blessed John Paul referred to the “radical and widespread crisis” which marriage and family life are undergoing in contemporary culture and urged the universal Church to ensure that Christian families are more deeply formed themselves by the Gospel message so that they can, in turn, evangelize others:

On this point the Church cannot yield to cultural pressures, no matter how widespread and even militant they may be. Instead, it is necessary to ensure that through an ever more complete Gospel formation, Christian families show convincingly that it is possible to live marriage fully in keeping with God’s plan and with the true good of the human person—of the spouses, and of the children who are more fragile (#47).

In fact, there is a striking convergence between the moral principles we know to be true from our faith and those attitudes and behaviors which contemporary social science has shown either to benefit children or to put them at risk for serious harm. Much of what we know about what makes for strong and healthy marriages and family life is not strictly a matter of faith, but simply a matter of fact, and Christian families need to make a more concerted effort to share this information with those responsible for public policy as well as their fellow citizens.

Married couples and families must be in the forefront of the movement to promote and protect lifelong marriage as the setting in which children best thrive. The facts are on our side in this debate because God’s plan for marriage and family life is ordered to the flourishing of the human person. The latest sociological research on this question, the New Family Structures Study, was published this past summer in the July 2012 issue of the journal Social Science Research. According to the author, this study clearly reveals that children appear most apt to succeed well as adults—on multiple counts and across a variety of domains—when they spend their entire childhood with their married mother and father, and especially when the parents remain married to the present day” (Volume 41, Issue 4).
In addition to protecting and promoting the institution of marriage through the political process, the Christian family is called to safeguard the sanctity of human life in the public square as an essential contribution to the new evangelization of culture. In his 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium vitae*, the Gospel of Life, Blessed John Paul referred to the family as the “sanctuary of life” and said that the role of the family in building the culture of life is “decisive and irreplaceable” (#92). Among the many ways that the family is called to proclaim, to celebrate and to serve the Gospel of life, he highlighted the necessity to work to “ensure that the laws and institutions of the State in no way violate the right to life, from conception to natural death, but rather protect and promote it” (#93).

Beyond working in the public arena to make sure that the laws and policies of our country promote a culture of marriage and a culture of life, Christian families are called to help create a civilization of love by reaching out to others in solidarity and service. In fact the Christian family’s role in creating a civilization of love is perhaps the most eloquent evangelization of all, the one able to open the heart. In his Letter to Families which he wrote in 1994 for the United Nations Year of the Family, Blessed John Paul wrote that the list given in Matthew's description of the Last Judgment could be lengthened to include the many ways in which charity is expressed by families today: “I was an abandoned child, and you became my family; I was an orphan, and you adopted me and raised me as one of your own children; You helped large families and families in difficulty to look after and educate the children God gave them.” The scope of Christian charity which the contemporary family is called to exhibit can be as local as inviting a neighboring family to dinner or as global as sponsoring a needy child on another continent. Either way, the warmth and hospitality which are hallmarks of the Christian family can do so much in inviting others to the living wellspring of the Gospel. Imagine how beautiful it would be if what was said centuries ago of the first Christians by those outsiders who observed their behavior might be said in our own day about the members of Christian families: “See how they love one another.”

Like the ripples that extend outward in growing orbits from a stone thrown into a pond, the love of Christ radiates to husband and wife in the sacrament of matrimony, then to their children as the whole family becomes a church of the home, and then beyond their own family to the larger community of the Church and society. This is an incredible vision and mission, for it will be families striving for holiness in all these ways who will, with the grace of God, play a pivotal role in the new evangelization of culture.

More than any program or strategy, it is holiness of life that ultimately attracts men and women to faith in God and fidelity to His Church. One can see the holiness of St. Francis de Sales in the charity which led him, barely a year after he was ordained a priest, to volunteer to re-evangelize a province of his native Savoy which had largely converted to Calvinism. It was a difficult and dangerous mission that often required
heroic virtue. St. Francis tried by every means possible to touch the minds and hearts of the people. When the villagers would not come and hear him preach, he went to them, walking throughout the countryside, slipping hand-written pamphlets in defense of the Catholic faith under the doors of their homes by night, and playing with their children by day in order to win their parents’ trust. He visited soldiers in their camps and offered them spiritual direction in the hope of persuading them to turn away from vice and turn their hearts back to the faith of their childhood. He showed his concern not only for people’s spiritual welfare, but also for their physical well-being, even offering money out of his own pocket to supply their needs.

In four short years after St. Francis de Sales travelled to his native land, his zeal, his learning, his kindness, and his patient endurance led thousands of people back to the Catholic faith. Truly, we should look to St. Francis de Sales as a patron of the new evangelization. May the prophetic words which Pope Clement VIII addressed to him be applied to the Christian families of our own time and place, who face a mission to re-evangelize our culture no less daunting than St. Francis faced: “Drink, my son, from your cistern, and from your living wellspring,” the Holy Father told him. “May your waters issue forth, and may they become public fountains where the world may quench its thirst.”

May St. Francis de Sales intercede for the Christian families of our time and sustain them in their role of re-evangelizing our culture. May St. Joseph, head of the Holy Family, and Our Lady, morning star of the new evangelization, pray for us.