

Marriage and Family Life a way to Holiness



*Hope in the Future
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Opening Prayer

God of my life,
Help me to take my hand off the wheel and allow you to take over. Let my friendship with you be my passion. My ability belongs to you and where I am weak you work all the more. May I be a reflection of you. Give me anew the freedom to do what pleases you. I am certain that you will give me more than I ever expected. Amen.

Mother Mary,
In your life we see that it is worth trusting God completely!
In you we find the strength to unite our lives with Him and one another. Our covenant with you encourages us to give our all:

My Queen, My Mother, I give myself entirely to you: my eyes, my ears, my mouth, my heart, myself without reserve. As I am your own, my good mother, guard and defend me as your property and possession. Amen.

Apostles' Prayer

Introduction

Following the Way

We look at Marriage and family life in the context of the universal call to holiness

‘Good Soil Church’

Albert Wiseman working with Gallup Press wrote about the changes in Churches and Church in a book from 2007 called: Growing an Engaged Church, How to stop ‘doing Church’ and start ‘being Church’ again. He brings the notion of being a ‘Good Soil Church’ in reference to the parable of the sower (Matt 13). His studies show three basic groups of Church members: engaged, not-engaged and actively disengaged.

Gallup research demonstrates that congregations with engaged members are spiritually healthier, are better able to carry out their missions, attract more new people, are better able to fund new ventures, and have a higher percentage of spiritually committed individuals. In short, they are more effective than congregations with not-engaged or actively disengaged members.

He unearths four outcomes that are performance indicators for a Church which is spiritually growing. These are; ***life satisfaction, inviting, serving and giving***

He discovered that causes of spiritual health in a community are spiritual commitment and Congregational engagement. Wiseman points out that people want to feel valued and want to know that they make a meaningful contribution to the community. This is the gateway to becoming engaged, feeling you belong and knowing you are useful in your community. To a certain extent Wiseman wishes to ‘...reclaim the Biblical heritage of the Church found in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:42- 47): a growing community of followers of Christ who were passionate about the message and mission of the new movement, who practiced radical hospitality, and who were so emotionally engaged with the movement that they were willing to risk everything to see it succeed.”

We can propose that good-soil-church resonates well with the ‘spiritual growth of healthy family life.

‘Family the untapped resource...’

Mavis Pirola was the only woman along with her husband Ron who attended the first Synod on the family in 1980 and in her short address to the Synod she remarked that ‘family was the untapped resource of evangelisation in the Church’. That synod highlighted the family has the mission corresponding to its nature to become a community of life and love, as such to be the place of forming a community of



persons based on the fundamental communion between husband and wife. Pope Francis has instigated a revitalisation of the Church's approach to the spirituality and pastoral significance of the family.

Role of Marriage and Family in forming Christian Culture

From Familiaris Consortio we hear:

Christian spouses and parents can and should offer their unique and irreplaceable contribution to the elaboration of an authentic evangelical discernment in the various situations and cultures in which men and women live their marriage and their family life. They are qualified for this role by their charism or specific gift, the gift of the sacrament of matrimony

Familiaris Consortio #5

Thus, with love as its point of departure and making constant reference to it, the recent Synod emphasised four general tasks for the family:

- 1) forming a community of persons;
- 2) serving life;
- 3) participating in the development of society;
- 4) sharing in the life and mission of the Church.

Familiaris Consortio#17

But man, who has been called to live God's wise and loving design in a responsible manner, is an historical being who day by day builds himself up through his many free decisions; and so he knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by stages of growth. Familiaris Consortio # 34

In a conference with Forum for Family Associations Pope Francis said:

"The family, which you promote in various ways, is at the centre of God's plan, as shown in the whole history of salvation. For a mysterious divine plan, the complementarity and love between man and woman make them co-workers of the Creator, Who entrusts them with the task of generating new creatures to life, taking care of their growth and education. The love of Jesus for children, His filial relationship with the heavenly Father, His defence of the conjugal bond,



which He declares sacred and indissoluble, fully reveal the place of the family in God's plan: being the cradle of life and the first place of acceptance and love, it has an essential role in the vocation of man, and it is like a window that opens up on the mystery of God Himself, Who is Love in the unity and trinity of Persons."

(Audience with Delegation of Forum of Family Associations JUNE 16, 2018)

Holiness for everyone for everyday

Holiness means being yourself

Pope Francis offers us many examples of holy lives throughout this document: St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the French Carmelite who found holiness in doing small tasks; St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Jesuit founder who sought to find God in all things; St. Philip Neri, the founder of the Oratorians who was renowned for his sense of humour.

The saints pray for us and give us examples of how to live, but we are not meant to be cookie-cutter versions of them. We are meant to be ourselves, and each believer is meant to "discern his or her own path" and "bring out the very best of themselves." As Thomas Merton said, "For me to be a saint means to be myself."

Everyday life can lead to holiness

You do not need to be a bishop, a priest or a member of a religious order to be holy. Everyone is called to be a saint, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us—a mother or a father, a student or an attorney, a teacher or a janitor. “Saints next door,” Francis calls them. All we need to do is to “live our lives in love” and “bear witness” to God in all we do. That also doesn’t have to mean big, dramatic actions. Francis offers examples of everyday sanctity, like a loving parent raising a child; as well as “small gestures” and sacrifices that one can make, like deciding not to pass on gossip. If you can see your own life as a “mission,” then you soon realise that you can simply be loving and kind to move towards holiness.

You also do not have to be “swooning in mystic rapture” to be a saint or walking around with “lowered eyes.” Nor do you have to withdraw from other people. On the other hand, you do not want to be caught up in the “rat race” of rushing from one thing to another. A balance between action and contemplation is essential.

Tendencies to avoid

Pope Francis may send people racing to either dictionaries or their theology textbooks when asks us to avoid two dangers in the spiritual life.

The first is *Gnosticism*, from the Greek word *gnosis*, to know. Gnosticism is the old heresy that says that what matters most is what you know. No need to be charitable or do good works. All you need is the correct intellectual approach. Today Gnosticism tempts people to think that they can make the faith “entirely comprehensible” and leads them to want to force others to adopt their way of thinking. “When somebody has an answer for every question,” says Francis, “it’s a sign that they are not on the right path.” In other words, being a know-it-all is not going to save you.

The second thing to avoid is *Pelagianism*, named for Pelagius, the fifth-century theologian associated with this idea. Pelagianism says that we can take care of our salvation through our own efforts. Pelagians trust in their own powers,

don't feel like they need God's grace and act superior to others because they observe certain rules.

Today's Pelagians often have, the pope says, "an obsession with the law, an absorption with social and political advantages, punctilious concern for the church's liturgy, doctrine and prestige." It's a real danger to holiness because it robs us of humility, sets us over others, and leaves little room for grace.

Be kind

"Gaudete et Exsultate" is filled with Pope Francis' trademark practical advice for living a life of holiness. For example, don't gossip, stop judging and, most important, stop being cruel.

That goes for online actions, too. Francis' comments on this topic are memorable. Online, he writes, "defamation and slander can become commonplace...since things can be said there that would be unacceptable in public discourse, as people look to compensate for their own discontent by lashing out at others.... In claiming to uphold other commandments, they completely ignore the eighth, which forbids bearing false witness or lying and ruthlessly vilifying others."

The Beatitudes are a roadmap to holiness

As you might guess from the document's title, the Beatitudes, Jesus' list of "blessed ones," are central to this exhortation. The Beatitudes are not only what Jesus means by holiness, they are also a portrait of our Lord himself. So we're called to be poor in spirit, meek, peacemakers, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on.

But let me focus on one beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful." Pope Francis says mercy, one of the central themes of his papacy, has two aspects: helping and serving others but also forgiving and understanding. Jesus does not say, "Blessed are those who plot revenge!" And what is Pope Francis' overall summary of holiness? It's based on the Beatitudes: "Seeing and acting with mercy."

Family is Sacred Introduction

Spirituality of 1000 small gestures

In *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis shows how family is the school of engagement. The place where we experience and learn human networking, personal bonds in the cultural fabric of 'The spirituality of family love (which) is made up of thousands of small but real gestures. In that variety of gifts and encounters which deepen communion, God has his dwelling place. AL #315-316

Holiness the Family way

We have always spoken of how God dwells in the hearts of those living in his grace. Today we can add that the Trinity is present in the temple of marital communion. Just as God dwells in the praises of his people (cf. Ps 22:3), so he dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory. (AL 314)

The Lord's presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. Living in a family makes it hard for us to feign or lie; we cannot hide behind a mask. If that authenticity is inspired by love, then the Lord reigns there, with his joy and his peace. The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures. In that variety of gifts and encounters which deepen communion, God has his dwelling place. This mutual concern "brings together the human and the divine", for it is filled with the love of God. In the end, marital spirituality is a spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells. (AL 315)

Family

School of Life

"I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfil their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way. The Synod's reflections show us that there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems." (AL57)



(Family) is the path along which the history of salvation progresses... The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection. (cf AL11) The aim of Church teaching is “to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden” (AL 37).

If the parents are in some sense the foundations of the home, the children are like the “living stones” of the family (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). (AL12)

Here too, we can see another aspect of the family. We know that the New Testament speaks of “churches that meet in homes”. A family’s living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table. (AL15)

School of Love

All that has been said so far would be insufficient to express the Gospel of marriage and the family, were we not also to speak of love. For we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and

mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love. Indeed, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else “to perfect the couple’s love”. (AL 89)

“Love is shown more by deeds than by words”

Throughout the text (of 1Cor 13), it is clear that Paul wants to stress that love is more than a mere feeling. Rather, it should be understood along the lines of the Hebrew verb “to love”; it is “to do good”. As Saint Ignatius of Loyola said, “Love is shown more by deeds than by words”.

(Spiritual Exercises, Contemplation to Attain Love (230)106 (AL 94)

Spiritually, Father Kenterich said “Two hearts one beat”. He was referring to the relationship of Mary with her Son, Jesus. However all love is about having a right of residence in the heart of the one I love and giving them a reserved place in my heart. In your experience what elements of love between spouses reflect Gospel values and in practice proclaim Gospel truths.

“Those who love are capable of speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation, and encouragement. These were the words that Jesus himself spoke: “Take heart, my son!” (Mt 9:2); “Great is your faith!” (Mt 15:28); “Arise!” (Mk 5:41); “Go in peace” (Lk 7:50); “Be not afraid” (Mt 14:27). These are not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn. In our families, we must learn to imitate Jesus’ own gentleness in our way of speaking to one another.” (AL100)

School of Evangelisation

Family salt of the earth and leaven for the world

All of us should be able to say, thanks to the experience of our life in the family: “We come to believe in the love that God has for us” (1 Jn 4:16). Only on the basis of this experience will the Church’s pastoral care for families enable them to be both domestic churches and a leaven of evangelisation in society.

Values of the Gospel of the Family

...value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of

generosity,
commitment,
fidelity and
patience. (AL5)

for love is

*Free
Total
Faithful
Fruitful*

“The Lord’s presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes”
(AL 315)

Break

Spirituality the Family Way

Accompaniment (Discernment and Integrating Weakness)

All family life is a ‘shepherding’ in mercy (p.252)

Jesus’ description of the two houses, one built on rock and the other on sand (cf. Mt 7:24-27), symbolises any number of family situations shaped by the exercise of their members’ freedom, for, as the poet says, “every home is a lampstand”. (AL 8) Marriage and family is therefore about accompaniment. It’s way is to walk with each other as a couple and to make sure none of those in their care feels left behind “even when they are walking away”.

“I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfil their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way. The Synod’s reflections show us that there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems.” (AL57)

295. Along these lines, Saint John Paul II proposed the so-called “law of gradualness” in the knowledge that the human being “knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth”.(Familiaris Consortio, 34:). This is not a “gradualness of law” but rather a gradualness in the prudential exercise of free acts on the part of subjects who are not in a position to understand, appreciate, or fully carry out the objective demands of the law. (AL295)

308. At the same time, from our awareness of the weight of mitigating circumstances – psycho- logical, historical and even biological – it follows that “without detracting from the evangelical ideal, there is a need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively appear”, making room for “the Lord’s mercy, which spurs us on to do our best”.(Evangelii Gaudium 44)

I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, “always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street”.(Evangelii Gaudium 45) The Church’s pastors, in proposing to the faithful the full ideal of the Gospel and the Church’s teaching, must also help them to treat the weak with compassion, avoiding aggravation or unduly harsh or hasty judgements. (AL 308).

Concluding Prayer

Prayer to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate

the splendour of true love; to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,

grant that our families too

may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel

and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again experience violence, rejection and
division;
may all who have been hurt or scandalised find ready comfort
and healing.
Holy Family of Nazareth,
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family, and its beauty
in God's plan.
Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Graciously hear our prayer.
Amen.

Questions for Discussion

How can families grow in their awareness of being sacred?

How can families use their family way of life as a way to
holiness?





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