

Dr. The Most Rev. Charles Jason Gordon



# MISSIONING THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

Transforming the Caribbean Family



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Dr. The Most Reverend Charles Jason Gordon



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Archbishop of Port of Spain

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	9
Preface.....	11
Introduction.....	13

## **Section 1: Missioning the Domestic Church**

Chapter 1: Family on Mission, Become What You Are.....	21
Chapter 2: Key Practices of the Domestic Church.....	27
Chapter 3: Reigniting the Catholic DNA.....	33
Chapter 4: A Dose of Intentionality and Grace.....	39
Chapter 5: Stages on Our Spiritual Journey.....	45
Chapter 6: Family and the Big Church.....	51
Chapter 7: Make Your Family a Domestic Sanctuary.....	57
Chapter 8: Parents Must Be the First and Best Catechists.....	63
Chapter 9: Service – Let the Good Works Flow.....	69
Chapter 10: Know Your Rites.....	75
Chapter 11: Learning Forgiveness in the Family.....	81
Chapter 12: Meet the Migrant In Our Midst.....	87
Chapter 13: At the Point of No Return.....	93
Chapter 14: Our Families – On Pilgrimage Towards the Domestic Church.....	99
Chapter 15: Share the Faith, Support the Mission.....	105
Chapter 16: From Shame to Redemption.....	111
Chapter 17: Standards to Follow.....	117
Chapter 18: Breaking the Cycle of Shame.....	123

## **Section 2: Liturgical Rhythm & Family Rhythm**

Chapter 19: Creating Holy Moments at Advent.....	131
Chapter 20: A Special Year to Renew Family Life.....	137
Chapter 21: Living the Paschal Mystery in the Family.....	141
Chapter 22: Living the Resurrection in the Family.....	147

Chapter 23: True Faith: Let Go and Let God.....	153
Chapter 24: Jesus’ Peace for Right Relationships.....	159
Chapter 25: Living the Resurrection: Betrayal to Forgiveness.....	165
Chapter 26: Called by Name.....	171
Chapter 27: God’s Invitation to Grow Up.....	177
Chapter 28: Clothed From On High.....	183
Chapter 29: Being Transformed.....	189
Chapter 30: The Eucharistic Sacrifice and Family Life.....	195
Chapter 31: Contemplating the Many Mysteries of Mary Our Mother.....	201

### **Section 3: Essential Extras**

Chapter 32: Caribbean Masculinity – Work in Progress.....	209
Chapter 33: Pride Month: The Paradox of Love and Truth.....	215
Chapter 34: Gay and Catholic.....	221
Chapter 35: Marriage and Family: Rediscover God’s Intention.....	227
Chapter 36: Grandparents: Essential to the Next Generation.....	233
Chapter 37: Destined for the Divine.....	239
Conclusion.....	243
Works Cited and Consulted.....	249



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Most of all, glory be to God, whose grace working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine (cf. Ephesians 3:20).

## FOREWORD

In this inspirational and thought-provoking book, Archbishop Dr. Charles Jason Gordon shares his views on the family in building our Church and society. He appropriately uses the term “domestic Church” for the family, since the family is the first unit for healing, restoration, and revival. It is, therefore, the first (domestic) level of the Church and society.

The key role of family members is that of first teachers of their offspring – the children under their care and control. When this role is not fulfilled, schools, governments, and the Church are expected to fill in. None of these institutions is a well-placed surrogate to effectively address this unique role. Families are, in fact, sleeping giants. They need to see themselves as critical to the changes necessary at all levels of society. The positive influence of the family can favourably impact the economy and development, and minimise corruption.

Sr. Deborah de Rosia  
Director, Pontifical Missions Societies  
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## PREFACE

As Archbishop of the Catholic Church, I have noted the deterioration of our Trinidad and Tobago society with concern. Over time, it has become evident that the Church has a clear role to play in creating the required and desired change. We accept the need for us to play our part and have engaged at multiple levels within the Church and society to make our contribution. However, there is a unique role for the family to be engaged in the change process. The role of the family can best be understood when viewed as an arm of the Church: the “domestic Church”.

This book seeks to encourage you to understand and recognise the role of the family as the domestic Church. Using references from the Bible, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and additional sources, I present thirty-seven topics for your exploration. At the end of each brief presentation, a summary sentence or two will remind you of the chapter’s key message. Brief reflection questions are then provided to aid your introspection, with suggestions regarding practical action you can take to influence the necessary changes for a better society. The Scripture reading at the end of each section provides a biblical context and an additional opportunity for prayer.



## INTRODUCTION

At the Synod of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, 2009, synod participants resolved, through a strong movement, that the Evangelisation of the Family would be the New Evangelization's main component (Resolution 9 New Evangelization).

Shortly after, in 2012, Pope Benedict XVI called a synod in Rome titled, "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith". Here, the Synod Fathers also pivoted the synod to the evangelisation of the family.

Pope Francis then called for an extraordinary synod in 2014 and an ordinary synod in 2015; both focused on the family. It was out of these that the Holy Father gave us his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (Joy of Love). And long before all of this, Pope John Paul II laid the foundation in his 1981 apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (The Fellowship of the Family), subtitled, "On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World".

At Pentecost 2020, I asked that we all work together to mission the domestic Church. This does not mean going on a mission to the family. Rather, we are calling the family to reclaim its identity as a domestic Church. It is in this reclamation of identity that the family will naturally embark on mission.

For a long time, the primary pastoral locus of our archdiocese was the parish. But the parish is dependent upon a smaller pastoral locus – the family. Also, the parish is but one Church institution alongside others, such as schools,

religious congregations, St. Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary, and the charismatic renewal with the myriad of communities that have grown out of them. Each of these has worked separately for maintenance and/or mission with a shrinking group of Catholics in our parishes.

Now, consider that 86% of Catholics have little interaction with the parish. I am proposing that we see the Church as an integral ecology for forming missionary disciples: Catholic families, ecclesial movements, religious, schools – all connected, all working together to mission the domestic Church. Everyone benefits from this activity; it will strengthen our Church and create the conditions in which Catholic Life can flourish.

I am proposing an Integral model of Church on mission – the parish, ecclesial communities, schools, and the movements all joining hands for the missioning of the domestic Church. In this model, the families also join hands for the same end. And as families discover their identity as domestic Church, they, in turn, work hand in hand with the parish, ecclesial communities, schools, and movements to transform these very agencies. The model here is the body of Christ, with all its parts working interdependently for the good of the mission.

Moving the whole Church to mission, each part working harmoniously with the others, enables each member of the Body of Christ to more clearly recognise its identity and mission. This cooperation of the parts is intended to accomplish the most important end: proclaiming the Good News to all creation.



## **Changing the pastoral locus**

CLR James, in his phenomenal work, *Beyond a Boundary*, analysed West Indian Cricket. He realised that most people measured the health of the game by looking at test cricket – the locus of analysis. He also perceived that test cricket was dependent upon having people striving for excellence at the county, village, and school levels. In fact, by the time you see the problem at the test cricket level, it is already too late. He changed the locus of analysis and began to examine the root problem: that school, village, and county cricket were no longer healthy. They no longer had daily organised practices at which to cultivate excellence. But school, village, and county cricket were the places to begin restoring the vitality of the game in the region.

So where is the place to begin if we want to restore the vitality of the Church in the archdiocese? It is my considered view that the family is the place to begin. St. John Paul II agreed. Describing the family as an “intimate community of life and love” (*Familiaris Consortio* #50), he recognised the centrality of the family in the evangelisation work of the Church. Now, in alignment with the Dicastery of the New Evangelization, our pastoral locus is the domestic Church. The agents of mission are all Catholic institutions: family, schools, religious and ecclesial communities, and the parish.

## **Rationale for refocusing the pastoral locus**

The archdiocese has wrestled with the question of meeting society’s evolving needs in the rapidly-changing world of the new millennium.

Our synod of 2009 identified eight core areas in which the Church needed to perform to meet these evolving needs. In 2005, six commissions were formed, based partially on this logic, to respond to changes in the environment. Archbishop Harris called the archdiocese to mission in 2014.

Five years later, after intense self-scrutiny, our archdiocese committed to a six-pillar pastoral plan: Parish, Family, Youth and Young Adults, Catholic Education, Leadership in Church and Society, and Clergy and Vocation. We began with the implementation of the 3Hs (Parish Liturgy): Homilies, Hymns, and Hospitality. Our thinking was that if we got the Sunday experience right, we would keep our people and lead them to deeper formation.

Then, the microbe closed the parish churches and public worship. We scrambled to find ways of continuing our parish activity using technology. What emerged was the domestic Church in all its simplicity. When all else was stripped away, when we had to cease doing what we had done for two thousand years, it was the domestic Church that emerged as the foundation of all Church life. It was in the domestic Church that faith was nurtured during the time of COVID-19.

The family is the load-bearing wall of civilisation; its strength determines whether civilisation and the Church stand or fall. It is clear that the world we are re-entering is different to the one we left behind in critical ways, and this offers an opportunity for meaningful redefinition.

We need to change the pastoral locus from the parish to the family. All Catholic institutions and groups must work together on this task. This will require ecclesial communities, commissions, groups, parishes, et cetera, to develop

integral relationships. This is a recalibration, a refocus. All our priority areas remain vital, but now, we need all hands on deck to mission the domestic Church. Through this missioning, we will strengthen ecclesial and religious communities, as well as the parish.

I am proposing this strategic agenda be adopted as our framework for the next ten years (2020-2030). Furthermore, we will need an evaluation every 2.5 years to decide on the next step in the process.

This book is a compilation of my writings on missioning the domestic Church, given to assist you in the vital pivot we all must make. It is divided into three sections: “Missioning the Domestic Church”, “Liturgical Rhythm & Family Rhythm”, and “Essential Extras”; the third section focuses on some hot topics concerning the family.

I pray that this invitation to prayer and action will lead your family, and that of the wider Church, to deep renewal and obedience to the Holy Spirit who continually missions the Church.



## **SECTION 1**

# **Missioning the Domestic Church**



## CHAPTER 1

### **Family on Mission, Become What You Are**

On Pentecost Day, amazing things happen. A mighty rushing wind fills the Upper Room where Mary, the apostles, and disciples are gathered. Tongues of fire come to rest on their heads and all begin to speak in foreign tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance (Acts 2:2-4).

The wind is the same as that which swept over the waters at the beginning of Creation (Genesis 1:2) and blew the breath of life into the nostrils of the man formed of clay (Genesis 2:7).

This is the same wind that was summoned from the four corners of the world to breathe on the dry bones that would come together, take on flesh, stand upright, and become a mighty army (Ezekiel 37:1-14).

At Pentecost, people from all over the known world realise they could hear the apostles speaking in each of their native languages (Acts 2:5-12). This is significant. It is the overcoming of Babel, where the human language was confused and people no longer understood one other (Genesis 11:1-9). But now, at Pentecost, the apostles speak in their dialect and all the peoples of the world understand.

Pentecost is the unification of the human family. It brings together that which was scattered.

In the New Testament text about Pentecost, the first part of the story illustrates what was happening to the apostles and disciples, what God did, and the mighty marvels God worked in their lives by sending the Holy Spirit.

The rest of the Pentecost text covers what the apostles did in response to God and the further outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, the apostles and disciples are transformed from spectators and passive recipients into active participants in the mission of God. Peter stands up and delivers a sermon, his first, in which he calls his hearers to repentance (Acts 2:14-36). Those hearers respond, and some 3,000 persons are baptised that day (Acts 2:37-41).

Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. It is the occasion on which the apostles and disciples are transformed into the body of Christ, and the first Christians are called into conversion. It is the realisation of the gifts given to the Church so she could be understood when she proclaims the mighty word of God to all peoples.

## **Missioning**

The Holy Spirit missioned the apostles and disciples who were gathered in the Upper Room. It is not just that the Holy Spirit ministered to them, it is that the Holy Spirit transformed them into missionaries. They immediately left the Upper Room, went out, and began to proclaim the mighty works of God.

If the Holy Spirit had come to minister only to those disciples and apostles, the Spirit would have had to repeat this with every group of human beings. But after this first



encounter, the Holy Spirit now had co-missioners who worked alongside God in the mission that the Father entrusted to Jesus. The apostles participated in this mission and became fellow workers with Christ and the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians:3-9). This is made clear by the immediacy of their call to action and the first sermon preached directly after they received the Holy Spirit.

As people encounter the Holy Spirit, they are propelled into action. They become fellow workers with God. The recipient becomes the giver. This dynamic transformation is vital to understanding this new phase of being Church. We are not launching a mission to the domestic Church, we are *missioning* the domestic Church. There is a world of difference.

The former would have us consistently doing things for the domestic Church. It creates an “us-and-them” relationship: ministers of ministry, on the one hand, recipients of ministry on the other. Missioning the domestic Church recognises what St. John Paul II understood – that the domestic Church is integrally part of the mission, and as such, needs to be *on* mission. We are calling the family to participate in the mission which Christ entrusted to the apostles.

## **Domestic Church**

“Family, become what you are!” St. John Paul II uses this phrase in his encyclical letter, *Familiaris Consortio*, 1981, saying that a family’s understanding of what they are propels them to mission:

The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission: what it can and should do. The role

that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is. Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored and specifies its dignity and responsibility: family, become what you are (*Familiaris Consortio* #17).

Missioning the family first requires that we help families understand and live their identity, for this enables them to discover their mission and find the path to living it. This is the process of missioning.

We are not sending the family to some far-off place. We are asking the family to re-discover their core and principle for existence, a discovery through which the family will also discover their mission.

This is subtle but very important. If we had a mission to Catholic families, we may help them discover their identity, but we would still need to mission them to live this identity and become fellow workers in the mission that is Christ.

What is the family? First of all, it is a domestic Church. Everything we do in the Church, parish or universal, we also do in the family. In both spaces, we find mission, sacrifice, blessing, calling forth the gifts of others, prayer, daily offering, and encouraging each other to sacrifice.

The family, when missioned, will strengthen the parish, the ecclesial communities, the schools, and the movements. Likewise, these parts of the body of Christ strengthen the family in its core identity and missions the family to become what it is: the domestic Church.

## **Key Message**

By finding its identity, the family lives its mission. This is the process of missioning.

## **Action Step**

Reflect on the experience of the family in which you grew up. Was it a domestic Church? How can you help your family to become what it should be?

## **Scripture Reading**

Ephesians 3:14-21



## CHAPTER 2

### **Key Practices of the Domestic Church**

If the family is the domestic Church – Church miniature – we then need to understand the key practices in which both greater Church and little Church (domestic) participate.

Acts 2:42 sums up the practice of the early Church: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

If Acts 2:42 is the expectation of the diocesan and parish Church, then these four practices must be inculcated in the domestic Church.

I want to propose that the Church domestic participates in the life of the parish, just as the Church parish participates in the life of the Church diocesan. But the parish and diocesan Church also draw life and vitality from the health and strength of the domestic Church.

These are not distinct spheres; they interpenetrate one another. The diocesan Church is a family of families; ultimately, it is part of the family of God.

The first point to note in this text from Acts is, “they devoted themselves”. The word “devoted” conveys diligence, consistency of action with love and affection. Their devotion was not a duty; it was a commitment born of love.

It was a response to a God of incredible love who loved them first. This devotion is the key to understanding the

logic of the Church, miniature and parish; a Church with love as its only currency.

## **The Apostles' teaching**

The text further tells us that the members of the Church committed themselves to study and growth in the faith that was handed down from the apostles. Here, “faith” refers not only to content, but to encountering the risen Jesus Christ in communion with the Holy Spirit, as well.

To be devoted to the teaching of the apostles is to desire to be formed and informed by the Church and her teaching. It is to seek ways of learning, and being shaped by, the Church. Ultimately, it means thinking with the Church on the burning issues of the day. This requires docility of heart and curiosity of spirit.

## **Fellowship**

The Greek word *koinonia*, meaning “fellowship”, is sometimes translated as “communion” or “participation”. It is a very extreme form of hospitality. St. Paul uses the term in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, which tells us the blessing cup that we bless is a communion (*koinonia*) with the Blood of Christ – a communion or participation in the cross. The bread we break is a communion (*koinonia*) in the Body of Christ. We participate in the Mystical Body of Christ. We, though many, form one body.

This is about the radical unity to which we are called as part of the body of Christ. The Church is a sacrament of unity; the domestic Church must also be a sacrament of

unity. This requires formation for love, which requires human, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual formation.

This fellowship goes beyond the family to those who are most vulnerable; this is the foundation for peace and love. The fellowship extends, also, to those yet unborn, and thus, to the protection and care of the planet, which we are obligated to pass on to the next generation in a better condition than that in which we received it; see Acts 4:32. This Christian participation, or communion, is essential to both domestic and parish Church.

## **The breaking of the bread**

The breaking of the bread refers to the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and *koinonia*, the gathering of the faithful to worship God and pray with one heart and mind. Masses are being offered again in our churches, but closing down is still possible if there is a spike in Covid-19 cases. As we move forward in this time of uncertainty, we need to offer our people the very best experience of liturgy possible each time we celebrate the Eucharist.

This is an opportunity to raise the bar. We need to work at both the domestic and parish levels to allow the Mass to become the premier space for encountering Jesus Christ.

Hospitality needs to be part of the Church's DNA. When we get hospitality, or *koinonia*, right at all levels of the Church, the physical congregation and those who participate via media will experience the deep bond of fellowship. Here, we need to encourage families to participate in the Sunday Eucharist as families and to prepare for it with great devotion.

How do we help families prepare for the Eucharist? What are the practices we might encourage families to employ before and after Mass that would significantly strengthen the family experience of the Eucharist? What does the parish need to do to make the Sunday liturgy a consistently great experience? The Church parish needs to be excellent in hymns, homilies, and hospitality.

## **Prayer**

Prayer is the lifeblood of the disciple. It is our vital connection to Christ, how we abide in the vine as branches (John 15:1-17). In the early Church, prayer was both communal and private. It was in the temple and in the house. It made the disciples one in heart and spirit with their Lord.

Prayer needs to be a staple of the family's daily life as it was for Jesus (see Luke 6:12, 22:45) and the early Church (Acts 1:14). Its members need to pray individually, together as a family, and collectively with all families in the parish. What are the practices of prayer that would assist families in finding their identity as a domestic Church? How do we help families deepen their prayer as individuals and as a family?

Matthew Kelly says not only does there need to be a rhythm of prayer, but there needs to be a routine within the rhythm. Then, anchored in prayer and the life of grace, the Catholic family will become the domestic Church living its mission in the world.

These key practices are not only those of the family, they are also the practices of the big Church. Here again, the Integral model would illustrate the interrelationship between



the family, the parish, the ecclesial community, the school, and the movements. How would the family develop a rhythm of these practices? All the other parts of the big Church, together with families who have been missioned, will need to join hands in this missioning process. This, as we will see, is part of the Catholic DNA. When all the parts of the Body function well together, they will ignite the Catholic imagination and life of the whole Church.

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### **Key Message**

The Church parish nurtures and forms the Church domestic to become what it is: a community of life and love. The Church domestic participates in, and gives vitality and depth to, the life of the Church parish and Church diocesan.

### **Action Step**

Reflect on the family in which you grew up. Was it a domestic Church? How can you inculcate these four practices into your present family?

### **Scripture Reading**

Acts 2:42



## CHAPTER 3

### **Reigniting the Catholic DNA**

We are facing a fundamental challenge which calls for new ways of responding. What is this challenge? And what is our new response to be?

In 2007, when I was Vicar for Administration, we learnt that only 17 per cent of Catholics were going to church. This was a shock to many. It was a call to enter into a deeper mode of reflection to grasp the challenge we were facing and find new solutions. By the time I arrived as archbishop in 2017, the percentage of practising Catholics had shrunk to 14 per cent. In ten years, we lost three per cent of our committed Catholics.

There are many ways to interpret this. From my perspective, none of them offers a comforting narrative that allows us to continue with business as usual. Particularly when one considers that a high number of our Catholics are in the older age group and will not be active in the next ten, twenty, or thirty years. Some of the loss is natural attrition because we have not been filling the Church from below. But the question is, why not? To ask the question differently: Why has transmission of the faith to the new generation been so difficult?

The simple answer is that, for many decades, we have been a Church whose main focus was maintenance. Consequently, many parts of the Catholic world lost the

Catholic DNA, secular DNA being more vital and present to our people.

By “Catholic world”, I mean the family, the school, the ecclesial and religious communities, the parish and its ministries. When the family is devoted to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer, we will see life flourish in all these areas of the Catholic world (Acts 2:42).

## **The Catholic DNA**

DNA gives us specificity – the colour of our hair, our body type, the colour of our eyes, height, health risks, et cetera. It comes to us from our parents at the moment of conception. It shapes so much of who we are. We could ignore it, but that does not change the fact of its existence, doing what it is doing in the secret places, out of sight.

I want us to imagine a Catholic DNA that is the basic building block of Catholic life. Our Catholic DNA is given to us at baptism when we are joined into the body of Christ and become a member of that body. From that moment, the Catholic DNA is at work in us, whether we are aware of it or not. This life of grace permeates all our being, but it could lie dormant in us, inactive, not affecting us in any fundamental way. Or it could be ignited and produce a very different reaction.

The DNA we received from our parents is given and active, whether we like it or not. The Catholic DNA, on the other hand, is a gift from God and only acts if we give it our consent. This is the value and curse of free will; God will

not force us to do anything. God will invite, cajole, seduce, but never force.

So Catholic DNA is given as a free gift from the moment of baptism. It stays in us either dormant or active; our choice makes all the difference. St. Ignatius of Loyola called this “Christ Life”: the unstoppable life of grace given to every disciple of Christ. This life of grace is more powerful than the life of sin, of sickness, death, and destruction. But it requires our cooperation, our yes. It is present in all baptised Catholics, but dormant if we have not yet consciously chosen Christ.

## **Christ Life**

If nurtured, the life of grace given to us at baptism grows into an ecosystem that brings about a fundamental transformation in the individual Christian and in the whole Church. It can be described as an ecosystem because it is self-sustaining, that is, complete, and requires its many parts to work together in harmony. It is actively graced by God’s Holy Spirit in real-time for the good of the whole body of Christ.

David L. Fleming, SJ, describes Ignatius’ vision in three dimensions: life, work, and love. It requires that we share Christ’s life; we come to think like Him and do what He does. These are three levels of inner transformation or conversion.

St. Paul speaks about this understanding of grace being at the heart of all life. In 1 Corinthians 2:14-16, the apostle distinguishes between the person without the Spirit and the person with the Spirit, who, therefore, also has the mind of

Christ. Remember, the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, will teach us and remind us of Jesus' words (John 14:26).

The Spirit also comes with gifts for mission. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world (CCC 799).

## **Missioning**

Missioning involves inviting families to think with a Catholic imagination, to believe that Christ Life is at work in them, individually and as a family, and to accept the grace of the Holy Spirit for transformation and mission. Then, families, schools, ecclesial and religious communities, parishes, and all Catholic groups will begin to share in this Christ Life – to think like Christ and do what He does.

There is Catholic DNA to be activated by inviting Catholics to understand their Christian identity and all that has been given us in Christ.

## **Key Message**

When the family reignites its Catholic DNA, a missionary ecosystem will emerge, spreading to all parts of the Catholic world and activating Catholic DNA in these locations, as well. This ecosystem will eventually become self-sustaining, igniting a phenomenal process of transformation and renewal.

## **Action Step**

Reflect deeply on your life and that of your family. Is the Catholic DNA at work? Is it strong, weak, or failing? Earnestly ask God to reignite the Catholic DNA in your family and in each member.

## **Scripture Reading**

Ephesians 3:14-20





## CHAPTER 4

### **A Dose of Intentionality and Grace**

Awakening the Catholic DNA is every adult Catholic's responsibility. It is the most precious gift you can give to your family, friends, workplace, and the nation.

When the Catholic DNA is ignited, you will live with a sense of mission, actively pursue God's will, and live your vocation. You will be on the path to becoming the best version of yourself, and ultimately, grow in sanctity. That is an amazing gift.

Ensuring the Catholic DNA is active requires both grace and intentionality. St. Paul will say: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Jesus warns, however, in St. Matthew's Gospel: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

The whole Christian life must be understood as grace – a free gift from God – and our response, which is our gift to God. God gives us gifts freely, but we need to intentionally accept these gifts and cultivate them so that they flourish.

### **Cultivating the life of grace**

On Pentecost day, when Peter preached, his hearers asked: "So what shall we do?" Peter replied: "Repent and

be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

There is intentionality: “Repent and be baptised”. There is grace: “You will receive the Holy Spirit” – the gift freely given.

The Christian life flourishes with intentionality and grace. Our seeking the will of God and bending our hearts to God’s will opens up a space for God to fill us with incredible grace.

What we give and what God gives are completely disproportional. St. John teaches us: “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

## **Making the first step**

A great place to begin is by reading the book *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic* by Matthew Kelly. This book contains some of the essentials you need to understand how to activate the Christ Life. Kelly calls the Catholic who responds fully to God a “dynamic Catholic”, one whose life is marked by four signs: prayer, study, generosity, and evangelisation. While these are not the four practices mentioned in Acts 2:42, they are integral to the teaching in the Acts of the Apostles. Kelly gives us a vital approach.

Find your copy of *The Four Signs*. Go to the end of each chapter and read the summaries. Reflect on what you read. Make a plan (intentionality) for the area under review.

Spend time praying about what is being asked and the challenges it presents.

Read the book slowly, digesting and implementing what you read. Each chapter opens up a new enquiry and a new path for grace, inviting a new response to God's call.

Here is what is critical: take small incremental steps towards your goal in each area every day. In this way, we build habits of excellence and find our way to inner transformation and responding to God's grace.

What if you set aside five minutes a day for reading? What if, over time, you increase this to ten minutes, then fifteen minutes, then twenty minutes a day? The incremental increase allows you to grow your habit, step by step, every day.

## **Deepening the journey**

As you begin the book, put a routine of prayer in place, and a rhythm inside your routine. Each day, use the *Examen* prayer process. Ask God to awaken your Catholic DNA and give you a missionary heart. At the end of the day, speak to Him about your progress and the ways you have come to understand the grace necessary for you to grow.

Once you begin your journey, invite your family to join you in making a journey as a family. Begin with a decade of the rosary every day or with the Grace Before/After Meals. Introducing prayer into the family is a great second step. To do this, begin a conversation about prayer, and particularly, family prayer. Remember: daily practice, small steps, and incremental growth. Do not begin with too much at first; it will fail. Small steps!

## **Another small step**

As you pick up momentum on the journey, you are now ready for another step – the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This sacrament is the most undervalued in our Church, yet its grace is amazing!

As you grow in your consciousness of God, you grow in your sense of failure and need for mercy. This sacrament gives us a constant reminder that it is “all God’s grace”. It is the antidote for pride and arrogance, which is the single greatest obstacle to doing God’s will. Frequent access to the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the greatest medicine for the spiritual life.

Make a habit of this sacrament personally, and invite your family to go with you. In a parish in the US where I have helped out, families go to the sacrament on a Saturday evening. It is beautiful to see. As the family becomes a domestic Church, they become a community of life and love. They also join hands with the parish and other parts of the Body of Christ to reignite the Church.

## **Key Message**

The Christian life flourishes with intentionality and grace. It is important that we begin with healthy habits, small steps, and incremental, continuous growth.

## **Action Step**

Reflect deeply on your life and that of your family. Is the Catholic DNA at work? Is it strong, weak, or failing? Earnestly ask God to reignite the Catholic DNA in your family and in each member.

## **Scripture Reading**

Ephesians 3:14-20



## CHAPTER 5

### **Stages on Our Spiritual Journey**

Our Catholic DNA was given in baptism when we were grafted into the body of Christ, becoming a member of that body. This first act of grace invited us into an adventure that is phenomenal, an adventure we need to reflect upon often.

How do we give ourselves fully to Christ? How do we allow Christ to transform our minds, understanding, and heart? How do we grow in Christ?

I want you to imagine that life in Christ is like our natural life. We are born babies and grow from stage to stage: infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood. In our natural life, we have no choice; we grow.

In our life of grace, we have a choice. We could choose to grow or be stagnant, wither, and die. The responsibility to grow in Christ is primarily your responsibility. The Church, her members, and ministries are here to help, but once you are an adult, the responsibility remains yours.

#### **Stages of spiritual growth**

The stages of spiritual growth may be conceived in various ways. I like to think of four stages or movements:

- (1) The seeker: This individual is discerning God's call (vocation) and strives to find the courage to live it.

- (2) The disciple: He or she is striving to follow Christ and become the best version of himself or herself (through the process of integral development), a saint.
- (3) The missionary disciple: When, by living with integrity and generosity (stewardship and evangelisation), the disciple calls others to Christ.
- (4) The mystic: The disciple has a deep interior life and is conscious of his or her union with Christ (mystical union).

These stages of development should be the goal and commitment of every Catholic from infancy to the moment of death.

The fundamental understanding that God calls each of us to a specific purpose draws us into the first stage of discipleship: seeking this purpose and discerning God's call. Here, the disciple needs to listen, be docile, pray, and allow God to lead.

The second step is recognising that faith and its response happen incrementally, and so, taking small daily steps to develop every dimension of the human person is required.

Here, the disciple is beginning to understand the life of grace and to explore its inner dynamic and meaning. Christianity is no longer an external life, but has serious implications for inner transformation, for the disciple to become the best version of himself or herself. This commitment to incremental, continuous growth unleashes vital energy for further development.

The movement to missionary discipleship is the third level of growth. Now, the disciple knows Christ and is seeking to live his or her vocation as the disciple has discerned it. He or she is now growing continuously in faith and



human qualities and wants to share what has been experienced. Missionary disciples use every occasion to witness to Christ; they want others to desire what they have.

Ultimately, the journey leads to a desire for union with Christ; the disciple wants to make his or her home in Christ, as Christ makes His home in the disciple.

Here, participating in Christ becomes real as the person begins to understand that he or she is grafted onto Christ and is Christ's presence in the world. This realisation is profound.

Jesus said: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Where are you on this journey? A seeker, a disciple, a missionary disciple, or a mystic?

## **The responsibility to grow**

In the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23), we gain insight into this growth process. Those who grow in Christ produce a harvest now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty. Those who don't grow, produce no harvest. "Understanding" is critical to growth (Matthew 13:19).

If we hear the word and do not understand it, the evil one snatches the word from us. Therefore, the first task of growing in Christ is coming to an understanding that is credible, age-appropriate, and true. To become a seeker, the person needs to desire Christ in mind, heart, will, and understanding.

The second figure in the parable is the shallow rocky

soil. The one with no root falls away quickly when troubles or persecutions come (Matthew 13:21). This is why Stage One of spiritual development is vital: to desire Christ and make Him the focus of our lives; to put ourselves under His authority and become obedient to His call as we seek to align our lives to Christ's desire for us.

The parable explains that the seed choked by thorns illustrates how, for some people, the worries of this world and the difficulties of wealth prevent the word from bearing fruit in their lives (Matthew 13:22).

This is what happens to the person who does not move to the second stage. We need to bring people to commit to the human work of authentic integral human development which is this imperative second stage. Moving from stage to stage of the human and spiritual development journey, stretches our hearts wide to receive Christ.

Without the interior work, done intentionally and through God's grace, the seeker will simply become distracted by the pressing needs of the day and the desire for wealth, power, pleasure, and fame.

Many a Christian has been set back in their spiritual journey at this stage. Thoroughly distracted, they fail to go to the depth necessary for them to live the Good News of Jesus.

The one who bears a rich harvest is the one who both hears the word and understands it (Matthew 13:23). This disciple has digested the word and become one with it.

This brings the disciple to Stages Three and Four of the spiritual journey. The missionary disciple is fruitful in bringing others to Christ; saints tend to be bountiful in their fruitfulness.

Think of how many people have given their lives to Christ because of St. Benedict, St. Dominic, or Blessed Anne-Marie Javouhey.

Each drop in the ocean contributes to the health or disease of the whole. So too, each family, each parish, each school, ecclesial community and movement contributes to the reigniting of the Catholic DNA. When they work together in this sacred task, the whole Church will be missioned and Catholic life will flourish.

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### **Key Message**

We have the responsibility to grow in Christ to full maturity.

### **Action Step**

Assess which stage of the journey you are at and pray, asking God for grace and guidance to see what the next step of your journey should be. Then, take it.

### **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 13:1-23



## CHAPTER 6

### **Family and the Big Church**

The term “domestic Church” first appears in the documents of the Second Vatican Council that took place in Rome between 1962 and 1965. Here, bishops, theologians, and observers from all over the world met four times to discuss matters critical to the life of the Church universal.

This Council is the guiding light for the Church in our age. It sets the agenda for our theology and pastoral action. Its teaching is vital to understanding the mind of the Church in our modern world.

The first reference in the documents appears in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, where the term is mentioned almost tentatively, “the family is, so to speak the domestic church” (#11). The text gives the theology of marriage and expresses the hope for the Christian family.

I will quote the passage in full:

Finally, Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony, whereby they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church, help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children. By reason of their state and rank in life they have their own special gift among the people of God.

From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state (*Lumen Gentium* #11).

In Christian marriage, the spouses “partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church”. Here, the Council is making direct reference to Ephesians 5:32 where St. Paul calls marriage a “great mystery”. This outward sign of the union of the couple points to the inner grace of the union of Christ to His Bride, the Church.

Thus, Christian marriage is not just about the two people; it involves so much more than that. It is a miniature of the whole economy of salvation and the relationship between God and His people. This requires deep reflection.

## **The great mystery of marriage**

Marriage, for the Catholic, is not just a civil contract. It is a participation in a covenant, a revelation of a profound mystery. It is a portal through which we glimpse the deepest truth of the relationship between Christ and His Church; cast as a marriage covenant, we see this relationship is indissoluble and fruitful.

Because marriage is a covenant and a “great mystery”, because it speaks to Christ and His Church, it is a sacrament that is indissoluble. This is why the marriage promise says: “Till death do us part.” Christ will never leave His Church; so too, one spouse should never leave the other.

The next line speaks to the heart of marriage. There is a purpose: to obtain holiness. Each spouse offers the other the road to holiness, to be configured to Christ. In simple language, to become the best version of himself or herself.

By learning to put the other first in all things, Christian spouses learn, day by day, to die to themselves so others may have life. The road to holiness, though, is not outside the day-to-day experience of living; it is not something esoteric or purely spiritual. It is precisely there, in the domestic Church, in the daily sacrifice of dying to self, that the spouses are being configured to Christ.

Marriage is fruitful. The ultimate end is the procreation and education of children; I need you to hear this line through the whole understanding of the Catholic DNA. The Church is not speaking about accreditation or degrees. It is speaking about the process of transformation into Christ, forming the children to live as children of God and great citizens of their nation and the world community.

If every family gave the children what they needed to live as children of God, the family and the nation would be very different. This is why family life is essential to good order in the nation and the world.

## **Family as a community of love**

When parents recognise and live marriage as a vocation, a call from God with very special grace, the children experience an infusion of grace in all aspects of their lives. This is what it means to ignite the Catholic DNA in the family.

It calls all members of the family to live as a community of life and love. This is how we transform the Church, the nation, and the world.

The last part of the statement is vital. By naming the family as a domestic Church, there is now an analogy between the family and the big Church.

The big Church preaches; the parents preach by word and example. At the Sacrament of Baptism, parents are told they are the first teachers of the faith to their children. The exhortation continues: “May you be the best of teachers.”

When the family is conscious of living the Catholic DNA, the marriage becomes fruitful, not just by producing children, but also, and more importantly, by producing saints.

The last part of the statement puts the burden of vocation on the parents. The parents should discern and encourage their children towards a vocation that is suitable to them.

They are also mandated to keep the prospect of a vocation to the sacred state to the fore of their family life and in the imagination of their children.

As we reflect on the Church’s rich teaching on marriage and the family, we – big Church – need to assist all families in discovering and living their vocation as the domestic Church. At the same time, each family becoming a domestic



Church helps us, the big Church, to discover our mission and live more faithfully as a missionary disciple.

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## **Key Message**

When Catholics live their vocation of marriage consciously, they make a great contribution to the Church, the nation, and the world.

## **Action Step**

Reflect on your family and families that you know. Are they living as domestic Church? What one step can you take to assist your family, or another family, to live their vocation more fully?

## **Scripture Reading**

Ephesians 5:25-33



## CHAPTER 7

### **Make Your Family a Domestic Sanctuary**

The mission of the Church is always threefold: sanctification, teaching, and service.

Sanctification has to do with the life of prayer and liturgy. Teaching focuses on growing in the faith. Service centres on care and love of the poor. The big Church does these things consistently, and from within it, the Church miniature is called to fulfil its mission. This is an important movement in understanding the Catholic family as a domestic Church.

The mission of the family, as outlined by the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) #11, falls into these basic categories. In this chapter, we will look at the first part, which addresses sanctification:

The mission – to be the first and vital cell of society – the family has received from God. It will fulfil this mission if it appears as the domestic sanctuary of the Church by reason of the mutual affection of its members and the prayer that they offer to God in common, if the whole family makes itself a part of the liturgical worship of the Church (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #11).

## The first vital cell

Therefore, the family's mission, in essence, is "to be the first and vital cell of society". It is important to see how the big Church positions the family for this, giving a sense of the importance of the family to society as a whole.

In the first social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Pope Leo XIII, arguing for the rights of the worker, claimed that:

[T]he family, the "society" of a man's house – a society very small ... but none the less a true society, and one older than any State ... has rights and duties peculiar to itself which are quite independent of the State (*Rerum Novarum* #12).

Following this logic, we also need to say that the family is older than the parish; its rights and duties do not depend upon the parish.

We need to begin to see the family as a unit in its own right, with a mission uniquely its own. We cannot speak about the restoration of the nation, the Church, or the parish, without first addressing the need for the family to live its mission. It is in this sense that we must understand the family as the first and vital cell of the State, the Church, and the parish. Without the renewal of the family, we cannot hope to renew the larger units.

## Sanctification

The mission proceeds by way of sanctification: "[The family] will fulfil this mission if it appears as the domestic sanctuary of the Church by reason of the mutual affection

of its members and the prayer that they offer to God in common..." (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #11). This is a loaded statement.

From the concept of the domestic Church, we now move to the domestic sanctuary. Wow! The sanctuary is a place of safety and a refuge from danger. To see the family as a domestic sanctuary is to believe that the role of the family is to ensure that every one of its members feels safe and knows what it is to be loved and protected from harm.

This is the first human need: safety, protection, and love. Our families need to be places of welcome and love where spouses, by their offering of themselves to each other, create a culture of love and care for the children and each other.

Owing to our collective historical wounds, the Caribbean family can be vicious. We tend to point out each other's weaknesses and magnify them as a way of having fun. We unconsciously believe that pointing out weaknesses helps a child grow and improve. It actually undermines the confidence of the child.

The family as sanctuary means that love and protection must come first. It is only through love that people grow and develop. It is through unconditional love that they come to deep transformation. The culture of each family needs to be evaluated from this perspective. Do all members of our family feel safe, protected, and loved?

The sanctuary also refers to a holy space that is set aside for God. To see family as a domestic sanctuary, therefore, is to recognise the family as the holiest part of the big Church. In the Church's sanctuary, we have the Blessed Sacrament; the lectern, sometimes an ambo, from which the word is proclaimed; and the altar of sacrifice.

In the family, Jesus is present in each of its members, with the word being proclaimed through actions of love and sacrifice every day. Here, too, we need to see the family as the holy of holies, the place where God dwells among His people. By God coming into the world as a member of a family, He made all families holy. According to the teaching of the Church, the purpose of the family is the sanctification of spouses (Canon 1134).

The Church also expects that the family would have “prayer that they offer to God in common” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #11). This is where the image of the domestic sanctuary comes alive.

This coming together of the members of the family to offer their prayer to God is vital if a family is to be a domestic sanctuary.

Through our prayer, we lift up and offer to God what was done in the day. The family also enters more deeply into union, strengthening its bonds with God as the glue. Each member of the family learns to lift his or her mind and heart up to God in big and little things. The family is the first school of prayer.

My sister and brother-in-law had a beautiful family ritual. Just before the youngest child went off to bed, the family would gather, hold hands, and pray. Everyone prayed! They prayed for each other, for people they knew, and for whatever was happening. That is a domestic sanctuary.

This prayer in the domestic sanctuary is complete when it is united with the prayer of the big Church in the liturgy. The parish is a family of families. The gathering of the vital cells in the liturgy gives the pastor the opportunity to invite each family to join in communion with each other

and with God. It also gives the family what is necessary to live its mission.

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### **Key Message**

The family is the first and vital cell – a domestic sanctuary.

### **Action Step**

Assess your family. What steps could you take for it to be a more vital cell, a domestic sanctuary?

### **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 2:19-23





## CHAPTER 8

### **Parents Must Be the First and Best Catechists**

The mission of the Church, as we saw in the previous chapter, is always threefold: sanctification, teaching, and service. Sanctification has to do with the life of prayer and liturgy. Teaching focuses on growing in the faith, and service, on the care and love of the poor.

Continuing our reflection on the mission of the family as outlined by the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*), we now look at how the document addresses teaching.

Christian husbands and wives are cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children, and all others in their household. They are the first to communicate the faith to their children and to educate them by word and example for the Christian and apostolic life. They prudently help them in the choice of their vocation and carefully promote any sacred vocation which they may discern in them (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #11).

The family becomes a domestic Church when the family is consciously the first teacher of the faith by word and example. Parents who are consciously living their faith raise

children who imbibe the faith, its propositions, ethos, and values. In this sense, faith is first caught, not taught.

## **First teachers**

Parents are their children's first catechists, first evangelists, and first teachers. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2221-2231) spells out, in great detail, what is expected of parents in the education of their children.

The whole section is worth a careful reading. It says, in part, "The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable" (CCC 2221).

This role exists from the beginning (primordial) and it cannot be substituted (inalienable). This double character is vital to understanding the parent's role and what makes a family a domestic sanctuary or Church.

When parents abdicate their role as primary educators, or when parents themselves are not properly educated, civilisation collapses. The family is the load-bearing wall of civilisation.

The first thing parents need to teach their children is to live as children of God (CCC 2222). This means being obedient to the Father in Heaven and putting God's will first in everything. This can only be done by example.

Through witnessing to the primacy of God in the life of the family, parents teach their children in the best way.

The second topic is virtuous living and true freedom. The Catechism says that:

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery – the preconditions of all true freedom (CCC 2223).

This is the ideal for the Catholic family. It gives us some stretch goals to aim towards.

Virtue formation is not accidental. It requires parents who are committed to practising excellence in virtues every day. This daily practice is the most important gift that children can receive. Seeing their parents dying to themselves every day, forgiving each other, acting tenderly, respecting each other and all people, and living their marriage vow is a great gift.

To see them at prayer and wrestling with God’s will in the little and big things of life is the foundation for active discipleship. We want freedom, but true freedom is not doing what we want to do, it is doing what God wants us to do. Bending one’s heart to His will every day is the path to growth in holiness.

The third topic is initiation into the sacred mystery: “Parents should teach their children to subordinate the ‘material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones’” (CCC 2223).

This is vital for today. We live in a world where “the material and instinctual dimensions” take precedence. Hedonism,

wealth, and power are seen as the highest values, and too many parents live by this creed.

The children learn that the material and the instinctual are dominant. This is creating a generation that cannot be satisfied and live in the idolisation of pleasure, money, and power.

The turn to the outer world as the “really real” is the deepest challenge to the Catholic family today. How do we help the family to sacrifice for the sake of interior spiritual values, and make them a priority?

This turn to the interior life is at the core of the family’s becoming a domestic sanctuary. This is the great gift the big Church has to offer the little Church.

To give this gift, we first need to practise it. We need to live with the interior as primary above pleasure, wealth, and power. This requires great sacrifice and clear commitment.

This is the evangelisation mission of the family; it begins at home. CCC 2225 says: “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.”

In the early Church, the language was of sacred mysteries. St. Paul speaks of marriage as a “great mystery” (Ephesians 5:32). A mystery is something into which we plunge; we enter and live it. It is a sacred portal to the encounter with Christ, a way of seeing and being in the world. The whole world is filled with the mystery of God (Colossians 1:26).

The Latin word for mystery is “sacrament”, which has come to be understood as an act to be performed – the outward sign. How do we invite our families to enter into the

sacred mystery and encounter the living God – the inner grace?

This is the fundamental challenge facing the Church and parents' ultimate responsibility. This is the core of evangelisation. The parents are the first catechists; they need to be the best catechists.

But parents cannot mission the domestic Church alone. They need to hold hands with the parish, the school, the ecclesial communities and movements to draw the strength, depth and resilience needed to accomplish their task well. Remember, we are working towards an Integral model of church.

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## **Key Message**

Parents are the first teachers of the faith to their children. This is done by word and example, in little and big things.

## **Action Step**

Google *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2221-2231. Read, meditate, and discuss this teaching in your family.

## **Reflection Reading**

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2221-2231



## CHAPTER 9

### **Service – Let the Good Works Flow**

The mission of the Church, as we saw over the last two teachings, is always threefold: sanctification, teaching, and service.

Sanctification has to do with the life of prayer and liturgy. Teaching focuses on growing in the faith, and service on the care and love of the poor.

Continuing our reflection on the mission of the family, as outlined by the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*), we now look at how the document addresses service.

The family fulfils its mission, the document says, if it:

[P]rovides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all the brethren in need. Among the various activities of the family apostolate may be enumerated the following: the adoption of abandoned infants, hospitality to strangers, assistance in the operation of schools, helpful advice and material assistance for adolescents, help to engaged couples in preparing themselves better for marriage, catechetical work, support of married couples and families involved in material and moral crises, help for the aged not only by providing them with the necessities of life but also by obtaining for them a fair share of the

benefits of an expanding economy (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* #11).

## Faith and Good Works

If the second dimension of mission expresses the inner grace that is at the core of Christianity, this third dimension expresses the outer works that flow from it.

The Catholic and Lutheran Churches have debated the relationship between faith and works for nearly 500 years. In 1999, they arrived at an official agreement which states:

By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works (Joint Declaration #15).

There is no authentic faith without a manifestation of good works flowing from it. Thus, this third dimension of mission: service. As St. James says, "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17).

This is paradoxical thinking. To live by faith is to manifest good works. The two together constitute justification. Here, we see the family that lives by faith manifests that faith in tangible ways.

As the Decree says: "[The family] provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all the brethren in need." Hospitality, justice, good works for those in need – what a godly combination!



## **The witness of faith**

Rose Williams took in, cared for, and brought up over fifty children in her life. When she died, her children came from many different parts of the world to the funeral. They all had the same story: Rose took them in because their families failed, and she raised them as her own. Many of them have done extremely well. That is a witness of faith.

Rose often had no money to care for the children. Many times, it was through a test of faith that food would come, and books and uniforms arrive for school. This is the value of family, stretching to include others.

Both my grandmothers included people in their families along the way. Two of them, I knew as my aunts. They were part of the family, their children were part of the family. One of my grandmothers gave lodging to orphans. She often did not have sufficient money for her family and would wonder about the next meal. Neither of my grandmothers was short on hospitality. Their gaze was turned outwards to those in need around them.

With our focus on material progress, we have robbed our children of the gift of a family turned outwards to service. This is what nurtures the faith of the young. This turn to service planted seeds in our young imagination that flourished later in life.

When families turn outwards to service, they give the children the best gift ever – humanity, an orientation of service grounded in faith, and ultimately, Catholic DNA.

## Catholic DNA

In Catholic DNA, this is the second dimension: fellowship. In Acts 2:42, the Greek word translated as fellowship is *koinonia*, which means “fellowship”, “communion”, “participation”. It is a very extreme form of hospitality. We are all interrelated as members of the body of Christ. Everyone is our brother or sister, and those in need have a privileged place.

A family that is attentive to the needs of others and routinely responds to those needs reignites the Catholic DNA. The children develop a Catholic imagination when God is placed first, and love of neighbour – especially those most in need – is integral to love of God.

In the Catholic tradition, we refer to the physical services we can provide to others as the Corporal Works of Mercy. These are: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the prisoner, bury the dead, and give alms to the poor.

A Catholic family that consistently practises these seven spiritual habits in a way that includes the children will ignite a love for Christ in the heart of the family. This is witness to the faith. This is connecting love of God with love of neighbour. This is witnessing that God, and God’s law of love, is first. This is how parents become the best of teachers of the faith.

To achieve this high and noble task, parents need to be in Integral relationship with their parish, school, ecclesial community, and/or movement. Then, they will have the necessary support to sustain their journey and mission the family.

## **Key Message**

Faith without good works is dead. Families that live by faith will find tangible ways to show hospitality, justice, and good works, and make a habit of practicing the Corporal Works of Mercy.

## **Action Step**

Reflect on your family's traditions of hospitality to those in need. Are you doing enough with the children and the grandchildren? What else can you do to help your family grow in this dimension of faith?

## **Scripture Reading**

James 2:14-26; Catechism of the Catholic Church 2447.



## CHAPTER 10

### Know Your Rites

The modern child knows about his or her rights, but very few know there are rites. We live in a culture in which we constantly seek to reinvent ourselves. We want new experiences; we want the unique! So the modern family seeks to reinvent itself too, throwing off rites and rituals. But when we cast off rites and rituals, we don't do without them – we just adopt bad rites and inculcate bad values.

Both rights *and* rites are essential for the domestic Church. Good rites and rituals lead to good values and harmonious living; bad rites and rituals create the opposite. We used to have the rite of the mealtime. Remember when everyone got dressed up every day, sat at table, and ate a meal together? A simple act that nourished both body and soul. We connected with one other; it was about relationships. Today, everyone goes to the pot, serves himself, and eats by himself. What do these mealtime rites convey?

Terence Lovat proposes that a ritual has five stages: entry, preparation, climax, celebration, and return. Dressing suitably for the meal is about entry and preparation. The climax is in the eating and conversation. The prayer at the end marks the celebration and preparation to return to order and normal time.

The old rite of the common meal indicated that the family's identity *as a family* was important. It said every

member's story was important, since everyone was listened to at the table. Each member had a place within the larger whole. There was an order to the seating and the serving and who got to speak first. In these subtle ways, the children learnt their place in the family and the limits and boundaries of that place.

Family rites structure relationships. This is vital for healthy living. The rise in depression and suicidal thoughts in children today may well be connected to the lack of healthy and life-giving rites. Without consistent rites and rituals, we do not have appropriate containers for the big and dark emotions.

Many families have thrown out the baby with the bathwater. This does not strengthen the family, it weakens it. The Archdiocesan Family Life Commission is proposing that families focus on three rites: relationships, rituals, and reaching out.

## **Rite of relationships**

We are people of habit and ritual. Reflect on your morning ritual. You probably do the same things in the same order every day. That is the power of ritual. We do not plan it. It flows and gives meaning and structure to living.

Our families have many rituals, conscious and unconscious. Some of them are good, others are destructive. We need to look critically at all our rituals and evaluate them. In our families, for example, we celebrate birthdays, which tells individuals they are valued and special. Families develop rituals around these celebrations; what you eat, how you dress, the presents you give all add significance to the day.

What are the other occasions that you celebrate as a family? Christmas, Easter, anniversaries? Consider these celebrations and plan them as a family. It is important that there is participation. It is also important that, over the years, people come to know what to expect. This gives the container for the emotions and the relationships.

It is also important that significant moments be celebrated differently. Thus, each of the celebrations for reaching puberty and the ages of sixteen or twenty-one require a special marker. In addition to letting the child know he or she is loved in a special way, they allow each one to learn the place of ritual. This gives the individual a sense of being cared for, so there is no need for anxiety as the significant date approaches.

Rituals have meaning. Ceremonies connect members of the family to one another and to the wider world. I believe we need to rediscover the importance of various rituals, ceremonies, and rites of passage in our lives. We need to live them more fully and be open to re-examining our present rituals to deepen them and adopt new ones, as needed. Remember, the purpose of these rites and rituals is relationship.

## **Rite of Rituals: work & play, talk & pray**

Building consistent and dependable rituals gives a container for the psychic energy around these human activities. Does everyone in the family have a chore that contributes to the whole? As soon as children are old enough, they need to participate in the preparation. Otherwise, we get entitled children who believe the world owes them everything.

What about homework? Is there a ritual? Come home, eat, play, then homework? If not, it will be a constant fight to contain the energy and the desire to simply play.

Does your family have rituals of leisure and relaxation? We went to the sea many weekends; it was a magical time for us as a family. The night before, we prepared by deciding when we would go to Mass. Then Mum would cook, and we decided on our departure time and what we needed for the trip.

The journey home was a re-entry into the real world, as we mentally prepared for school the next day. In the car and at table, we would talk with each other about things serious and light. There was much play and laughter, learning and caring. The ritual of talk moulded us as a family.

What are the prayer rituals in your family? Do you bless the children before they leave home? Do you pray together on mornings or evenings? Do you go to Mass together? Do you prepare for Mass by reading the gospel of the Sunday? Is there a night ritual of prayer? These rituals tell children who is ultimately important – not them, not you, but God.

## **Rite of reaching out**

In the previous chapter, we explored service to others. It is vital that the children participate in this form of outreach as a family. To see others less fortunate than themselves is a powerful reminder of their true state and the gratitude they owe to God for all His many blessings. The family's outreach will also help the parish, the school, the ecclesial community and the movements to re-capture their missionary mandate,



reignite the Catholic DNA, and proclaim the Good News to the whole creation.

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### **Key Message**

Rituals are important for containing the big moments in life; they inform us about what is truly important.

### **Action Step**

Review the rituals in your family. Strengthen those that are not working well, adopt new ones that are needed, and abandon those that are not life-giving.

### **Scripture Reading**

Luke 2:41-42



## CHAPTER 11

### **Learning Forgiveness in the Family**

Mercy is what love does when the beloved messes up. Mercy is not an attribute of God, it is God's response to broken humanity when we mess up badly. Forgiveness and mercy are at the core of Christianity.

Judgement, hell, retribution, and punishment are not at the core of the Christian message. They are part of it, important maybe, but not the essence. It is vital to understand this.

Christianity, at its core, is communication from a loving God who paid a very high price to demonstrate the depth of His love, forgiveness, and mercy.

Think of the many parables of mercy we find in the gospel: The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin (Luke 15), The Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37), the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35) to name a few.

Each one spells out what mercy requires, not as an objective demand, but because of the extreme mercy we have received from God through Christ Jesus our Lord.

The centrepiece of mercy in the gospels is found in Jesus' direct and bold injunction: "Be merciful as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). If you want to belong to this family and be like God, then mercy must flow.

To connect mercy and the family, we need only look at the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). It shows clearly what a father does when a child messes up badly.

## **In the domestic Church**

At the core of the domestic Church is the Pauline understanding of marriage as a profound mystery (Ephesians 5:32), which is another word for sacrament. In the married couple, we see the visible reality of the invisible grace of the love between Christ and His Church.

As we contemplate the mystery of the married couple, we come to understand the mystery of the relationship between Christ and His Church. As we contemplate the mystery of the love of Christ for His Church, we comprehend more clearly the demand of marriage and the love of the spouses.

The Church miniature and the Church grand are directly interconnected. This is the sacramental nature of marriage. And so, as the Church grand goes, so also, goes the Church miniature. Forgiveness and mercy are essential for the Church grand; so must it be for the domestic Church.

Twice in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gives the power to forgive. First, to Peter (Matthew 16:19), then to all the disciples (Matthew 18:18). After His resurrection, Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the apostles, and also, the power to forgive sins (John 20:23). For the big Church, mercy and forgiveness are at the core and centre of its identity; so it must be for the domestic Church, as well.

## A school of love

What is the family if not a school of love? It is there that the spouses learn the true meaning of love, a love that moves from *eros* to laying down one's life, regardless of feelings or desires.

In the family, the spouses learn to forgive and show mercy to each other regularly. This opportunity for grace is not always recognised, taken, or lived. But when spouses demonstrate forgiveness and mercy in the family, it allows that family to more perfectly reflect the big Church and the love that God demonstrated in giving His Son for our salvation. We were forgiven when we did not deserve it; so too, in the family, forgiveness is given when it is not deserved.

Where did you first learn forgiveness and mercy? If not in your family, the lesson would have been difficult to learn. When children see their parents forgive each other and witness the radical and costly nature of love, they experience forgiveness and learn to forgive. It is in this sense that the family is the primary school of love. This is how children learn from their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings the radical nature of love and how costly it can be.

In a practical bit of wisdom, St. Paul, speaking to the community at Ephesus says: “[D]on’t let the sun go down on your anger” (Ephesians 4:26). This is a great bit of advice for families: do not take today’s bitterness and lack of forgiveness into tomorrow. How do we teach our children to forgive? By witnessing to mercy on every possible occasion. Then, the family will be a school of love, a domestic Church, and ultimately, that formative cell of society.

When forgiveness is difficult for you, consider the price that God paid for our reconciliation; meditate on the cross

of Christ. Remember the debt we owed to God was so big, we could not pay it if we lived a thousand lives. The debt to our neighbour is very small by comparison.

There is a four-fold process of forgiveness: (1) tell the story to someone you trust; (2) name the hurt you received; (3) choose to forgive; (4) renew or rework the relationship.

Forgiveness does not mean you do not feel the pain of the hurt. Forgiveness means that you wish the person well and not ill. You want blessing for them, not curse.

Sometimes, because of the nature of the hurt, as in the case of abuse, for example, you cannot renew the relationship. It needs to change; it may need disengagement to be reworked for your safety and good. This, too, is a process of forgiveness where every step is vital.

As the family learns to forgive and deepen its capacity for love, the parish, ecclesial community, the school, and the movements participate in this inner transformation. They stimulate and support the family in this journey, the family opens channels of grace for the Big Church to be renewed. Each part needs the other if we are to accomplish the mission that God has entrusted into our hands.

## **Key Message**

Mercy and forgiveness are essential for the domestic Church, for spouses and children.

## **Action Step**

Do an audit of your relationships. Identify where hurt or lack of forgiveness is still lurking. Mentally choose one person and pick up a small stone. Walk with the stone until you can let go the person in forgiveness. Then, release the stone with a prayer.

## **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 18:21-35





## CHAPTER 12

### **Meet the Migrant In Our Midst**

(Previously published: *A Caribbean Perspective on Catholic Social Justice*, Volume I. 2021.)

“Forced like Jesus Christ to flee.” This was the theme of the 106th World Day for Migrants and Refugees in 2020.

By positioning the migrant and refugee in the light of Jesus the refugee, the Holy Father was making a compelling connection between Jesus and the migrant we see every day.

The theme itself is a catechesis. This migrant, this refugee has been forced, like Jesus, to flee his or her home and head to our shores.

No one leaves his home without good reason. Think about the many Caribbean people who left for Australia, England, the US, and Canada. They left in the hope of a better life for themselves and their family. For them, it was not a matter of life or death; they were not fleeing persecution or threats to their lives.

We all have family abroad, and we are troubled when they have a challenge with their visa or their arrangement to stay in a foreign land. We rejoice when they succeed and do well and make us proud by their accomplishments.

We felt anger and indignation in 2018 when the British parliament wrongfully detained and denied the legal rights of many of our Caribbean people in England. In eighty-three

cases, the Home Office actually unlawfully deported them. We felt their pain; we suffered with them.

What about the pain and suffering of those who leave their homes today because there is insufficient medication, food, health care, jobs, economic or political stability?

For over thirty years, Trinidad and Tobago has welcomed refugees and migrants onto our shores. They came from all over the world and each had a very interesting story.

There were two Russians stranded here in the late 1980s. There was also Mustafa, a conscientious Muslim from the Middle East who lived in our community for many years. He is now settled in New Zealand. There are countless others whom I have met and interacted with over these long years.

The fact that the Church will celebrate the 108th World Day for Migrants and Refugees later this year (2022), should jolt us. This means that, for over a century, the Church has seen it important to highlight the cause of the refugee and migrant in our midst.

That refugee or migrant could have been me or you; that man or woman was “forced like Jesus Christ to flee”. Pope Francis reminds us that every migrant or refugee is an image of Jesus Himself.

## **A call to the domestic Church**

Welcome, protect, promote, and integrate are the four verbs that Pope Francis gave us in his Message for World Day for Migrants and Refugees in 2018. These four very powerful verbs are at the heart of all ministry to migrants and refugees. They stir us to action, to discipleship, to becoming

our brother and sister's keeper. This is the call of the Holy Father to us, his faithful flock.

In his 2020 message, the Holy Father introduced six additional pairs of verbs to challenge us to go even deeper in our response to Christ.

With the worsening effects of climate change and the forced migration of many people, our generation will be forced to face this crisis, showing compassion in ever-greater ways to the migrant and refugee. It is in and through these six pairs of verbs that the domestic Church finds its response to this human crisis that the universal Church has highlighted for over a hundred years:

“You have to know in order to understand” (*Message*, 2020. par. 7). There is a Native American saying: “Never judge another until you walk a mile in his moccasins.” It is easy to point fingers. Getting to know a migrant or refugee family is the first step of educating ourselves on their plight, the first step to recognising the face of Jesus in them.

Is there a migrant or refugee family with children or grandchildren the same ages as yours? That's even better. Find a way through your parish to meet a family, just one, and begin to know and understand their plight.

“It is necessary to be close in order to serve” (*Message*, 2020. par. 8). As you get to know the family up close, you will see how best to serve. You will also see the way that Jesus, recognised in them, serves you and your family. When children see true poverty and need, their sense of entitlement and greed are challenged; they develop sobriety. As you come up close to the family, see how you can serve. See how Jesus serves you through them.

“In order to be reconciled, we need to listen” (*Message*, 2020. par. 9). We often imagine we know another’s plight. Listen to the family. Listen deeply to their story and their pain. Begin to understand why they left to come to our country. As you listen, see the prejudice drop. They are like us in so many ways.

“In order to grow, it is necessary to share” (*Message*, 2020. par. 10). Extra toys, clothes, food, or necessary items? Begin to share what you have with them. Share your time, talent, and treasure. This is how the domestic Church grows in faith, hope, and love.

“We need to be involved in order to promote” (*Message*, 2020. par. 11). As Christians, we are called not only to protect, but also, to promote. Become an advocate for their cause; challenge prejudice and xenophobia. As your family becomes more deeply involved, there will be opportunities to promote the cause of Jesus: the migrant and refugee.

“It is necessary to cooperate in order to build” (*Message*, 2020. par. 12). By working together, we will build a better future for our family, our Church, and the nation. I really urge you to take this step in faith. Begin by getting to know one family.

I want to applaud all the many priests, religious, families, and individuals who have already taken these steps to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate the migrant and refugee into our communities. Many of our parishes and parishioners continue to do outstanding and heroic work amongst our migrants.

## **Key Message**

Jesus is the migrant and refugee that you gaze upon; treat Him with the utmost respect.

## **Action Step**

As a family, get to know one migrant or refugee family. Follow Pope Francis' six pairs of verbs. Join your parish ministry for migrants and refugees.

## **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 2:13-14



## CHAPTER 13

### **At the Point of No Return**

Once upon a time there was a family, the Maanavatas. They lived in the most peculiar way. They were reckless and wasteful beyond imagination. They threw things wherever they wanted: in rivers, seas, mountains, and beaches. They littered and never looked back. Many commented about their reckless and cavalier nature, but the family took no heed.

The family had inherited much of its wealth from generations past and worked hard at building on what they received. But they also squandered the wealth on a lifestyle of pleasure, comfort and elegance, prestige and notoriety.

Now, while they squandered the resources, the fate of other family members grew dire. But the plight of the poor was of no concern to those who were having a good time; their lifestyle was far more important.

So indifferent were the rich, that they tried to act as if the other members were not real family at all, as though there was no obligation to help, share, or care for these unfortunate relatives.

Those who were doing well became so avaricious, they even threatened the goose that laid the golden egg: the family business. They sold off assets to support their lifestyle and began to use even the children's education fund to accommodate their greed.

They damaged the land by overplanting and using bad chemicals. They began cutting and selling the wood of the forest they had inherited from successive generations as a family reserve without replanting. They reaped what they did not sow and were unbothered about depleting the resources intended for the next generation.

Everywhere they went, those who lived wantonly left the place in an absolute mess for others to clean up. They were wasteful in every possible way, using electricity, water, the forest, streams, and seas in the most extravagant manner.

They went to church often and gave generous offerings. Yet, they were blind to the fact that they were squandering the inheritance of future generations, and cared not for their poor relations who were starving before their eyes. They did not care! They cared only about their lifestyle, their pleasure, and their appearance.

Those who were impoverished appealed to the Church for help. Their rich relations labelled them as lazy. The children of the poor relations also appealed to the Church, arguing that the business and property were left to all of the family, not just the wealthy.

They said if the rich relations made even a moderate change in their lifestyle, everyone would have enough to live well. The Church tried, but the rich ones would not listen.

Some of the children of the rich relations realised that, at the current rate of expenditure, things would go very wrong during their lifetime. They appealed to the elders for a family conversation, but were ignored.

In fact, the elders began to label them as socialist and described the whole thing as a hoax dreamt up by the poor to indoctrinate the youth and take control. There was bitter



tension in the family, much name-calling, labelling, and dismissing of each other. Each part of the family had their version of truth and could see no value in the other side's position.

A few of the young, both rich and poor, could see there was little time left to avert disaster. But those who made the decisions refused to listen or believe there was an actual problem, and thus, did nothing differently. The clearer the signs that things were drastically wrong, the more apathetic the elders became.

The young, who believed they could see clearly, held that they were all heading to the proverbial precipice, the point of no return. The old humoured them, but took no real notice. Things were changing for the worse all round and those who had the power to enact change refused to see, act, or believe. If this were your family, what would you do?

## **Some facts**

“Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history – and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world...” This claim was made by a UN report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). The summary of the report was approved at the 7th session of the IPBES plenary meeting, Paris, April 29-May 4, 2019.

The report is frightening in its claims, and not just about what has gone wrong. Even more daunting is the acceleration of the decline. We are currently damaging the Earth at

an unprecedented rate, and we do not have long before the damage is irreversible.

The report claims that 75 per cent of land and 66 per cent of the world's ocean area has been “significantly altered by human actions”. Also:

[A]round 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades, more than ever before in human history. The average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20%, mostly since 1900. More than 40% of amphibian species, almost 33% of reef forming corals and more than a third of all marine mammals are threatened (IPBES, 2019).

The report further states:

Land degradation has reduced the productivity of 23% of the global land surface, up to US\$577 billion in annual global crops are at risk from pollinator loss and 100 - 300 million people are at increased risk of floods and hurricanes because of loss of coastal habitats and protection (IPBES, 2019).

We ran out of letters in the alphabet to name storms in 2020 and 2021; extreme weather events intensified during these years, as well. Add to this COVID-19, with more than 500 million cases worldwide and at least six million deaths to date. Human action has significantly contributed to all of this, but we can have an impact for the better if we act now!

Oh! And the name of the family, Maanavata – it's the Hindi name for humanity.

## **Key Message**

The human family has contributed significantly to climate change. If we choose to act now, we can have a great impact for the common good.

## **Action Step**

Reuse, recycle, reduce, and restore to decrease your carbon footprint.

## **Scripture Reading**

Genesis 1:1-31



## CHAPTER 14

# **Our Families – On Pilgrimage Towards the Domestic Church**

I wish to make a distinction between a Christian family and a domestic Church. The domestic Church may always be a Christian family, but not all Christian families are domestic Churches. Let me explain.

The term “domestic Church” rests on the understanding of marriage as a great mystery and a sacrament; see Ephesians 5:32. The relationship between husband and wife is an outward sign of the inner grace of the love between Christ and His Church. This is an analogical relationship: we look at one thing that we can observe, and through this observation, we get to understand something else.

The term “domestic Church” describes an analogical relationship while also naming a reality. Thus, the relationship is also ontological. The analogy allows us to infer something about the Church miniature by observing the essence and character of the big Church. But it also brings something into reality.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church” (CCC 2204).

If the term “domestic church” is dependent upon the sacramental nature of marriage, then not all families are,

strictly speaking, a domestic Church. The term is referring to families with sacramental marriage as their foundation.

So what of other families? Well, the Church always provides.

Did you know that not all marriages in the Catholic Church are sacramental? The marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptised person is not considered a sacrament.

This is important because, in the eyes of the Church, it is still a valid marriage. The Church has great pastoral practice to reach the needs of all her people, so bear with me for a while longer.

From a sociological perspective, families come in a variety of shapes and forms. Even in our description of families, we speak about married, single-parent, divorced, separated, et cetera.

The nuclear family (father, mother, and children) is not the norm in the Caribbean setting. In the Caribbean, we commonly have intergenerational families and single-parent households. Our theology teaches, however, that a Catholic family, regardless of its configuration, is constituted through sacramental marriage.

Allow me to stretch you a bit for the sake of understanding. We believe the marriage of a Catholic and a non-Catholic is a valid marriage although it is not a sacrament.

All Catholic families take their “norm” from, and participate analogously in, sacramental marriage, which is the foundation of the domestic Church. They do so to the extent that they can.

As a norm or measuring rule, all will not fit. But you participate in as much as fits your family; each family is stretched to become a better version of itself.

I am proposing that every family of Catholics, regardless of its configuration, see the domestic Church as its ideal and aim to come as close to this ideal as is humanly possible.

## **Integral development**

Pope Paul VI and Pope Benedict XVI taught that authentic human integral development is the vocation of the Church. This concept, which is at the heart of modern Catholic life, speaks to two important realities.

First, we are all capable of authentic growth and development, no matter the configuration of our life at this moment. Secondly, our vocation, as Church, is to facilitate every person, and every dimension of the human person, to move from less-human to more-human conditions in incremental steps.

If we accept this vocation, then we need to apply it to every sphere of human existence. Applied to marriage, then, we need to be able to see that there are different configurations of human unions that are at different stages of achieving the goal of marriage and the domestic Church.

To spell this out more clearly, we need to say a common-law relationship is not the same as a couple in a civil union, which is not the same as a non-baptised person validly married to a Catholic, which is not the same as two Catholics married in the Church, which is not the same as two Catholics married in the Church who are capable of giving

themselves freely and completely to each other in faithful love, regardless of the challenges they face.

There is a hierarchy, and it is not whimsical. All these forms of union take their norm from the couple capable of living as a domestic Church. But even the couple capable of living as a domestic Church has growth steps and development goals for which they, too, must strive. We are all pilgrims on the journey to authentic human integral development.

Pope Paul VI describes the highest form of development as being able to:

[A]cknowledge the highest values and God Himself, their author and end. [And grow in] faith – God’s gift to men of good will – and our loving unity in Christ, who calls all men to share God’s life as sons of the living God, the Father of all men (*Populorum Progressio*, #21).

The ultimate end of development is holiness. We are all on pilgrimage. The word “sin” means “to miss the mark” – think of the arrow missing the target. Not all human unions hit the target; in fact, some are way far from it. But again, not all unions that hit the target, hit bullseye.

Every form of human union can be located on the continuum of human development from least-developed – random unions for the sake of pleasure only – to sacramental marriage between spouses who give themselves to God, each other, and their children in the most selfless way.

Every union has a sacred obligation to move towards answering the call of development that God has placed in the human heart. We need to do so as much as possible. When



each union is on the path of development, the parish, the school, the ecclesial communities and movements will experience the impact.

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### **Key Message**

All Catholic families take their “norm” from, and participate analogously in, sacramental marriage which is the foundation of the domestic Church.

### **Action Step**

Reflect on the steps your family can take to become a better version of itself.

### **Scripture Reading**

Ephesians 5:21-32



## CHAPTER 15

### **Share the Faith, Support the Mission**

In 1926, Pope Pius XI instituted World Mission Sunday for two reasons: first, to raise people's consciousness of missionary activity around the world, and secondly, to provide opportunities for Catholics everywhere to support the missions throughout the world. The 2020 theme, "Baptized and Sent: the Church of Christ on Mission in the World" was based on Isaiah 6:8: "Here I am, Lord. Send me."

The Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago has grown and developed through the work of men and women who were "sent". Indeed, it owes its foundation, and its leadership until 1968, to the missionary endeavour. We have sent missionaries too, among them Fr. Glyn Jemmott and Bishop Gerard County to Mexico for many years. The Spiritans have sent their men to Africa and Latin America. "Auntie" Babsie Bleasdel and Sister Debbie de Rosia, Frs. Ian Taylor and Trevor Nathasingh have journeyed to several parts of the world on short missionary assignments. The Eternal Light Community has had a mission in Grenada. Living Water Community has had a mission in Russia for three years, one in Saba for twenty-five years, and another in St. Lucia for thirteen years. They currently operate a permanent mission in Barbados.

Catholic theologian George Weigel once wrote: "The Church does not have a mission... The Church is a mission, and everything the Church does is ordered to that mission."

The Church's purpose (mission) is to communicate, in word and action, the mission that the Father entrusted to His Son. We are part of that mission; we all need to do our part to further it. Here I am, Lord. Send me!

## **What is a missionary?**

“Mission” is derived from a Latin word that means “to send”. A missionary is someone who is sent out to take the Good News of Jesus to others. Missionaries often go to far-off places, especially places where people struggle every day to survive. They help run hospitals, schools, orphanages, and clinics. They provide food programmes and help people learn how to care for themselves and build better lives for their families and community. Most importantly, as people motivated by God's great love for each one of us, they share their Catholic faith by their actions!

## **How are we missionaries?**

By our baptism, we become members of a family – the family of the Church. Family members have responsibilities, and our responsibility is to share our faith. Some people fulfil this responsibility by actually going to mission countries to take the Good News of Jesus to our brothers and sisters who are most in need. Most of us are missionaries by prayer and sacrifice.

The first act of mission is to be conscious of, and pray for, the mission. Every person is able to offer prayers. Prayers lead to sacrifices. Every person can offer up suffering, temporary or chronic, for those who suffer daily in mission lands. Every person can give up something with the

intention of sacrificing for the missions. Here I am, Lord. Send me!

## **Pontifical Mission Societies**

The Pontifical Mission Societies animate the Church for mission. These societies form an international network within the Catholic Church. Their charism and aim are to assist the Holy Father in supporting young churches with prayer and funding, and to strengthen the missionary commitment to: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20), under the leadership of, and in close collaboration with, the Holy Father and the bishops.

The Pontifical Mission Societies consist of four societies:

- The Society for the Propagation of the Faith
- The Holy Childhood Association
- The Society of St. Peter Apostle
- The Missionary Union

Each of these societies has a unique role to play in the mission of the Church. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith was founded in France in 1822 through a young woman, the Venerable Pauline Marie Jaricot.

At age seventeen, she privately took a vow of chastity and decided to do all she could to support missionary activity through prayer, works, and charity. She organised the first collection for the missions in 1817.

I urge you to pray for the conversion of those who have never been touched by the saving grace of Jesus. Pray for those who have not heard of His love and for the churches that are still young.

I invite our seniors, those suffering from loneliness or discomforts, and all persons who are ailing, to offer up your sufferings with Christ for the mission. We are all missionaries.

French Bishop Charles de Forbin-Jansen began the Holy Childhood Association (HCA) in 1843 as an organisation of “Children Helping Children”. Bishop de Forbin-Jansen shared his hope of establishing an organisation to aid the children of China with Pauline Marie Jaricot, founder of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. She suggested appealing to the children of Europe to help their sisters and brothers in other countries – young people in service to other youth around the world.

Today, the Missionary Childhood Association is established in more than sixty mission countries of the world. Children are encouraged to pray one Hail Mary daily for other children and to save a small sum each month to assist their young brothers and sisters. Hence the motto, “Children Helping Children”.

The Society of St. Peter Apostle was founded in 1887 in Caen, France, by mother and daughter, Stephanie and Jeanne Bigard. This society supports the education of candidates for the Catholic priesthood and the formation of men and women candidates for religious life in the missions. To date, some 300,000 major seminaries, mostly in Africa and Asia, have been supported.

The Missionary Union of the Clergy is an association of clerics whose sole purpose is to animate and instil missionary eagerness in pastors and communities of formation. The Union was planned as a “school of education for apostolic service”.

When considered together, the parts of the Pontifical Mission Societies work to reignite missionary consciousness throughout the Catholic Church, each part contributing to the whole.

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### **Key Message**

We are all called to participate in the mission of Christ. We can do so by prayer, missionary activity, and financial support for the missions.

### **Action Step**

Commit to prayer, sacrifice, and financial support for the mission of the Church. Here I am, Lord. Send me!

### **Scripture Reading**

2 Corinthians 8:1-7





## CHAPTER 16

### **From Shame to Redemption**

One of the greatest challenges to the Catholic family is shame.

Behind the drama, behind the quarrels and tensions experienced in any given family, we will likely find shame.

In many ways, this emotion is the driver of dysfunction within the family. Because of shame, we are unable to be vulnerable before each other. We hide and pretend, cover up and get secretive, and when our backs are against the wall, we explode.

Shame is what we feel when we have done wrong; it is the result of sin. But the sentiment is directed at the self and informs us about how we feel about ourselves. There is a difference between guilt and shame. Guilt comes because we have done something wrong. Shame comes through the realisation that I am the kind of person who could do such a thing. It is a focus on the self and leads the person to believe: “I am, and will never be, good enough.”

#### **Original blessing and shame**

We were created in harmony with God, others, creation, and self, as the Book of Genesis makes clear. The first experience of the human was of being naked without shame. The emotion is not part of our original experience; it comes

from what we do. We lived in original blessing before we lived in original sin. This is important to contemplate.

Once, the human family lived in complete harmony. The time will come when we will live that way again.

After Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:6), they heard God coming and hid (Genesis 3:8). The exchange continued thus:

But the Lord God called to the man: “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” And God said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” (Genesis 3:9-11)

It is interesting to see how the story unfolds. First, the disobedience; next, the hiding. The hiding comes from the broken harmony between the human and God. This is shame. It signals a break in the relationship with self. We cannot dare to be vulnerable or to be seen entirely.

Before the Fall, they were naked without shame; afterwards, they are ashamed, so they hide. But that’s not all. The story continues.

The sequence of events is not unpredictable. The man blames the woman; the harmony between them is broken. The woman blames the serpent, and the harmony with nature is broken. Then comes pain in childbearing and the toil of planting.

Shame comes as the result of doing what is wrong. It is different from guilt, which is what we feel when we do wrong. We feel shame because we let ourselves down and became the kind of person who did what we did. Shame is

a break in harmony with self, which paralyses us internally and causes us to hide from God and others.

## **The Caribbean family and shame**

For some reason, we believe it is necessary to shame people to get them to improve. When a child has done something wrong, everyone needs to know, and the child is shamed over and over again, leading him or her to feel worthless.

Our culture of teasing is about shame. It gets to the one thing the person is most ashamed of, then ridicules the individual because of it.

Our parenting style is shame-based, for the most part. It exposes and exploits weakness, leaving the child feeling that there is something inherently wrong with him or her. I believe this is the consequence of our unredeemed past of slavery and indentureship. It is our deepest psychic wound.

This shame creates havoc in the family. It leaves spouses and children with many negative emotions. But worst of all, it leads to hiding and creates a place for dark emotions to fester where harmony is broken often and most deeply. Hiding, defensiveness, posturing, et cetera, take the place of honest conversation.

## **Redemption**

If shame causes us to hide, redemption requires that we step out of our hiding places and stand naked before the other. This is the essence of spousal love: being naked before each other, being one flesh. We have experienced

shame in physical nakedness as we have in psychological nakedness.

To rise from shame, we first need to be aware of just how much this emotion is part of our lives and family culture. It is there in our relating, in our fighting, in our down-time and our leisure.

Notice it, acknowledge it. This is the start.

Listen for the times when we make one another feel there is something wrong with “all of us”. Begin a conversation with your spouse, and then your children, about shame in your family.

Shame is so infectious. Listen to your conversations as a family. Look at the reactions of your spouse or children. Ask God to show you both the extent to which shame is killing your joy and the depth to which it is a challenge in your family.

Confession is about healing the divided self. It is in this Sacrament of Reconciliation that we find the balm of healing. Here, the divided self is reunited, and by being spiritually naked before the priest, as God’s representative, it becomes possible to become naked before your significant other too.

## **Key Message**

Shame is the great destructive force at work in our Church and family. We need to face it, acknowledge it, and begin the process of healing.

## **Action Step**

Become aware of your language and ways of shaming others. Also, become aware of the ways in which you have been shamed. Begin a conversation with your spouse and/or children on the ways that shame is killing your family. Make some healthy steps.

## **Scripture Reading**

Genesis 3:1-20



## CHAPTER 17

### **Standards to Follow**

Parents, what is your dream for your children? What do you agonise over? These are important questions.

The first dream parents should have for their children is that they become saints. Parents should foster the love of God and the things of God in the hearts and imaginations of their children. The home should be the place where a child gets the first taste of the things of God. Through this taste, the longing and the hunger for God should grow.

Many of the dreams and desires of parents for their children are for worldly success and honours. There is much agony about the right school and about which secondary school they will attend after sitting the S.E.A. exam. Which subjects are taken and what the child does after secondary school can also cause much anguish.

As I listen to the dreams and desires of parents, what I hear, most often, is about progress in this world. It is clearly not about becoming a saint or doing something extraordinary for God. This presents a major challenge for the spiritual, emotional, and character formation of the child.

### **The two standards**

In his writing, St. Ignatius of Loyola meditates on two standards. Imagine a battlefield with Christ's army on one

side and Satan's army on the other. Each army has its standards or flags.

On Satan's standards are wealth, pleasure, and honour. This army conquers by enticement, leading the family and its members to believe that they will arrive at true happiness by finding wealth, pleasure, and honour in the eyes of others. It proposes these three standards as the highest good, capturing the imagination of the family so it focuses only on these three.

The second army belongs to Christ. On this army's standards are signs of humility, service, obedience to God's will, poverty of heart, love of God, and true devotion. This army works by calling people to true freedom, helping them to value this freedom as they choose the good. This true freedom is always in the service of love: love of God and of each other.

Which standards are you and your family under right now? Those of the devil? Or the standards of Christ? Which standard do you value most and give most time and energy to in your family? This is the value system that will be communicated most clearly to the children.

## **A Catholic imagination**

In previous times, vocations to the priesthood, religious, and lay ecclesial life sprang out of the religious imagination of the family. Families that placed God first and sought to live the will of God under the standard of God, produced vocations, including vocations to married life, and great citizens.



When a family lives with a Catholic imagination, it follows a rhythm of prayer in the family and in the parish community. Such a family has great traditions of service to the poor and involves the children in these works of mercy as part of their growing up, thus, giving the family its identity. The family is the first teacher of the faith. And the faith is communicated by word and example.

In a family with Catholic imagination, the parents pray agonisingly for the children, asking God to preserve them for their vocations. This prayer is not an imposition of the will of the parents; it is, rather, discernment of the will of God for each child. In this prayer of discernment, there is agony and fasting and specific sacrifices offered on behalf of each child from the moment of conception through the spiritual experience of childbearing. In this way, a child grows to be keenly aware of God's vocation and to put that vocation before everything else.

Answering God's call becomes a focus when parents put God's will first in their individual lives and in the family. Here, the children are schooled in finding God at the centre of everything. They come to believe God has called them for a special purpose and that they will be happiest living this purpose with generosity and grace.

## **Discerning Vocation**

Very often, your family knows you better than you know yourself. Very early in a child's life, a parent has a sense of the suitability of a child for different things. Families that are under the standard of Satan, push the children to bring honour to the family, to be wealthy and live the good life.

Families who are under God's standard, listen deeply to the children and help them gently to begin the process of listening, to discern God's purpose (vocation) for their lives. The vocation is not pushed or sold as the option, it is left open to the child to explore.

I suggest beginning the discernment process with a simple prayer: "Bend my heart to Your will, O God." With this simple prayer, the whole family moves towards obedience to God as its core and centre. From this centre, each person is disposed to listen and be surprised by God, who leads each child along a unique path of intimacy with Him.

When St. Ignatius was in his discernment phase, he realised he had two different daydreams. One was of his becoming a knight with much honour, many valiant actions, and prosperity. The second was of him submitting his life humbly to Christ, becoming a priest, and doing many noble works of great sacrifice and surrender for the glory of God.

The first dream led to agitation, disquiet, and depletion of his energy. The second led to joy and peace and the growing realisation of God's love as the real foundation of his life.

## **Key Message**

The family is the first school of vocations. It is in the family that the children make choices about the standards they will follow and what captures their imagination.

## **Action Step**

If you, your family member, or a good friend is contemplating vocation to the priesthood or religious life, pray that God's will be made manifest. Actively discern yourself by contacting Fr. Matthew d'Hereaux or a member of his team. Encourage that family member or friend to do the same. Pray the simple prayer: "Bend my heart to your will, O God."

## **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 9:35-38



## CHAPTER 18

### **Breaking the Cycle of Shame**

Shame is a break in harmony with God, neighbour, creation, and self. It leads the individual to believe something is wrong with himself or herself. It is very different from guilt that focuses on the wrong the person has done. Shame labels us as deficient and defective, and causes us to hide.

Shame came to the first family – Adam and Eve – and is present in all families. Because shame causes a person to hide, it creates barriers between people. It creates conflict and can destroy the family. It makes the afflicted hypersensitive and causes them to hide from the truth. This is the covering up of which the Book of Genesis speaks.

Remember, in the beginning, Adam and Eve were naked without shame. One day, through God's grace, we will again learn to be naked before our beloved without shame. Brené Brown, in her book, *The Power of Vulnerability*, gives us steps to this path to redemption.

In her research into what leads to the happy life, Brown learnt the unexpected: shame is the greatest cause of unhappiness, and vulnerability is the royal road to recovery and happiness. She outlines five steps to recovery.

#### **Don't bottle up your emotions; become self-aware**

I don't know if you are like me, but bottling up emotions is just what I do. Stuff happens constantly, and if I do not

stop, name my emotions, and reflect on them, they get bottled up. This *stuff* is everywhere: in the family, at work, while driving, among friends, et cetera. It gets pushed into a bottle till the bottle cannot hold any more, then I push some more in, and some more in again. Until, finally, there is too much stuff, and it comes tumbling out at some unsuspecting person.

Why do we bottle up stuff? Well, I tell myself: “It’s small stuff; don’t sweat it, leave it alone.” But small stuff becomes big stuff, and ultimately, explodes. I have learnt that when I am not at my best, when I am unable to process my feelings, I am at the greatest risk to myself and others. It is much better to talk through the small stuff in an ongoing way.

Here, the daily *Examen* is invaluable. Many years ago, I read a book about the value of the mother telling bedtime stories. In that liminal (transitional) time between wake and sleep, the mother takes the children’s feelings of the day, sorts them out, launders them, folds them up, and places them neatly in the right places so they will be ready for use the next day. That is a beautiful image.

This, too, is what the *Examen* does at the end of each day. It invites the Holy Spirit to sort out the feelings, emotions, and impulses of the day, launders them, and gets them ready for the new day.

So the first discipline: sort out your emotions with God and speak through the stuff with a brother or sister so there is no bottling up.

## **Vulnerability takes courage**

Yes, this takes courage! Why do we not speak through the small stuff? Well, it is easier to sidestep. It also calls for vulnerability. I remember an occasion when I knew my remarks wounded someone. I carried the problem for a few days until I could not any more. When I eventually made my apology, the person denied knowing what I was speaking about. I had gone vulnerable, and the individual was unready to receive it. I am happy I did it, though; I did not need to hide anymore. It changed the relationship, although the person was not ready to acknowledge the hurt at the time.

## **Show up, face the fear, and move forward**

Why do we resist vulnerability? Fear! We are afraid of rejection. Or afraid to be told we are the problem. We think: what if those we approach say they do not know what we are talking about?

If there is a relationship which causes you to hide, show up, face the fear, and be vulnerable. This will breathe new energy into the relationship and bring you a new freedom.

Fear is the paralysers; it pushes us to not name or own the stuff, to hide, protect ourselves, cover up. These actions lead us down the path to destruction. The path to redemption is to show up, face the fears, and move forward.

## **Seek excellence, not perfection**

This is the big one. It is the underlying mental structure that causes much of the challenge. When you think of the

verse of St. Matthew's Gospel, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), what comes to mind?

Our understanding of perfection is the real problem. There is a Jewish and a Greek notion of perfection, and they are very different. The Greek sees perfection as the absence of all imperfections. So when you see imperfection in yourself, you are to root it out in a radical way. If you cannot, then hide it. This causes much psychological stress.

In the Bible, the perfection of God is described as having a love that includes all. When speaking about God and perfection, it says: "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45).

The Greek notion of perfection causes us to hide in shame. The biblical notion invites us to incorporate the good, the bad, and the ugly in us. This is the invitation to vulnerability and to redemption, to become the best version of ourselves.

## **Dare to be yourself**

When we can incorporate all aspects of ourselves, we can dare to be ourselves. Then, each of us can say: "I have done bad things, but I am not a bad thing. I am wonderfully blessed, a mixture of grace and weakness, loved and redeemed by Christ." This is true freedom where we can stand naked without shame. Then the family has an opportunity to become a community of life and love, and the big Church has an opportunity to grow in healthy relationships.



## **Key Message**

Vulnerability is the antidote to shame and covering up.

## **Action Step**

Choose to be vulnerable and not leave stuff to bottle up. Use Brown's five steps to move to true freedom.

## **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 5:43-48



## **SECTION 2**

# **Liturgical Rhythm & Family Rhythm**



## CHAPTER 19

### **Creating Holy Moments at Advent**

My hope for this Advent season is that each family will find ways to deepen its relationship with Christ and connections among its members. This is the time when we contemplate the most beautiful and profound mysteries of our faith.

To choose, as a family, to intentionally enter into this time together will open the portal to the mystery that is Christ. In and through this mystery, the family will find its identity, and thus, its mission.

The purpose of Advent is to prepare for Christ's coming. Many times, people skip Advent and go straight to Christmas – in October. This year, let us, as families, use the Advent season to prepare for Christ's birth in our hearts at Christmas time.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks about prayer this way: "The drama of prayer is fully revealed to us in the Word who became flesh and dwells among us" (CCC 2598).

The Church gives Advent as a gift so we can contemplate the drama and events surrounding the birth of the Word who became flesh. Let us set aside the four weeks of Advent to make this most special journey towards Christ.

Several family activities during the Advent season can significantly enrich the journey to Christmas and the

encounter with the Christ Child. I will explore a few with you to get you going.

## **Advent Wreath**

The Advent wreath, a seasonal fixture in our churches, has found its place in many Catholic homes today. Its green circle symbolises the everlasting life that the Christ Child brings into the world.

The five candles: three purple, one rose-coloured, and one white, have been given various interpretations. We will use one convention here; there are others.

It will be wonderful to gather the family on each of the four Sundays of Advent to light that week's candle in a short prayer ritual. This will focus the family on Christ and assist its members to live the journey to Christmas.

The first candle symbolises "Hope". It is often called the Prophet's Candle because it reminds us of the hope the prophets had as they foretold the coming Messiah. They spoke to what they had not yet seen and waited for that not yet revealed. So too, at Advent, we wait in hope for the coming of the Messiah to our families and our hearts.

The second candle symbolises "Faith" and is called the Bethlehem Candle. The prophet Micah foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). This prophecy led the Magi to the child; may it lead your family to the Christ Child.

The third candle stands for "Joy" and is called the Shepherd's Candle. This is the rose-coloured one. It is important, when you light the first candle on the wreath, that

you arrange it so the rose-coloured candle is lit at the start of the third week.

The start of this third week is the joyful Sunday of Advent. It is intended as a break from the penitential nature of the season, as we look forward, more fully, to the coming of Christ. The shepherds experienced great joy at His coming; your family will be abundantly blessed too.

The fourth candle represents “Peace” and is called the Angel’s Candle because they brought great peace when they greeted the shepherds. Their ministry brings us peace as we welcome God into our family and home.

The fifth candle, the white one, is placed in the middle of the wreath. It represents the coming of the Christ Child. This is lit on Christmas Day.

Each week, as you light a candle, reflect on the way your family experiences the particular theme or virtue in your family. What is there to hope for? How do we express our faith? How do we experience and express joy as a family? What brings us peace?

Purchase *Advent Prayer and Reflection* from the Archdiocesan Family Life Commission. It will help you have a great Advent season. You can purchase the wreath at most Catholic bookstores.

## **Jesse Tree**

The Jesse Tree is a wonderful family tradition. Again, its depiction varies greatly. One way is to place on the tree, each day of December, an ornament representing one of the historical figures or events that points or leads up to the coming of the Christ Child. The activity requires choosing

a Scripture passage for each day which gives the main idea for the ornament. The ornaments are put on the tree during a time of prayer and reflection on the verse of Scripture.

## **The Crèche**

Making your crèche provides a very good catechetical moment. If the children are old enough, have them research the concept of the crèche. Where did it come from? Why the animals, and what's their significance?

To involve the children in creating the Nativity scene is an important way to cultivate family traditions that transmit faith to the next generation.

When you build your crèche, do not put the Child in just yet. Put the empty crib somewhere in the house as a reminder that we are waiting for the Messiah. Have the family pause before the empty crèche every day and pray for Christ's coming.

## **Advent Angel**

Some families have the tradition of Advent angels. On the first Sunday of Advent, have the family exchange names written on folded slips of paper. No one should know the identity of his or her Advent angel. Each week, do something nice for the person you have chosen; become an Advent angel! At Christmas, give the person a gift (from the "Advent angel"), and speak about the experience of being an Advent angel and receiving love from your angel.



## **Holy Moments**

All of these suggestions are ways of creating holy moments during Advent. A holy moment is when we try, as best as we can, to make God's will real in the moment.

Let us try always, but especially during Advent, to create one holy moment each day.

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## **Key Message**

Advent is a great time for families. Let us use this season to bring our families together in prayer and reflection.

## **Action Step**

Besides the activities recommended above, give something – food, toys, clothes – to a poor family this year.

## **Scripture Reading**

Micah 5:1-3



## CHAPTER 20

### **A Special Year to Renew Family Life**

*Amoris Laetitia* is Latin for “The Joy of Love”, the title of a March 2016 apostolic exhortation Pope Francis wrote after listening to views expressed at two synods on the family. This very beautiful text is enriching the Church’s understanding of family and love in our modern world still.

In December 2020, Pope Francis announced he was dedicating a year to the family. He called it the Year of *Amoris Laetitia* Family and it ran from March 19, 2021 to June 26, 2022.

Over that period, many activities focussed on missioning the domestic Church. Today, I invite you, again, on to a path of repentance and renewal as we work together to mission the domestic Church.

### **Missioning the domestic Church**

During the Vigil Mass for Pentecost 2020, I announced that the Church was being sent on mission. We’d left the desert at Easter, and after an intense, really beautiful time of formation in the Upper Room, during those days when we were locked in our houses, the Church now pivoted to its new focus, that of missioning the domestic Church.

The domestic Church is not exempt from missionary activity. In a 2013 article, George Weigel reminds us that:

The Church does not have a mission, as if “mission” were one among a dozen things the Church does. The Church is a mission, and everything the Church does is ordered to that mission, which is the proclamation of the gospel for the conversion of the world to Christ. Thus mission and mission-effectiveness measure everything and everyone in the Church (Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism*).

Since Pentecost 2020, much of my writing has focused on understanding the family in all of its joys, hopes, fears, and anxieties. We had a running start and were in a good position to move in union with the Holy Father during the year of “The Joy of Love Family”.

I am asking every family in the archdiocese to join with me in asking the intercession of St. Joseph and his beloved spouse, Mary, for the renewal of family life in our archdiocese. Let us recommit to family life and ask God to renew our families.

## **Repentance**

Every renewal begins with a reassessment of our practices, values, and beliefs (repentance). What are the practices of our family that build love for God and each other? What are the values we currently hold? Are they Catholic values? What are our beliefs? Are they consistent with Christ and His Church?

If every family journeys with us, we will see a boon for mission, for family life, for healing and renewal of our Church and society.

Pope Paul VI, in a speech at Nazareth on January 5, 1964, said:

May Nazareth teach us what the family is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, its sacred and inviolable character; we learn from Nazareth how the formation we receive there is sweet and irreplaceable; let us learn what is its primary role on the social level. (Pope Paul VI, *Visit*)

The greatest challenge we face as a society and a civilisation is the destruction of the family – its practices, its values, and its beliefs. I have often said: “The family is the load-bearing wall of civilisation.”

As the family goes, so goes the civilisation. Everyone wants the renewal of sweet T&T. It begins with you and your family.

## **Renewal**

Our Family Life Commission prepared a series of videos called *Domestic Church: Know your Rites*. This is a great place to begin. It looks at relationships, rituals, and reaching out – three essential elements of a renewed family.

As we reflect on our families, if we are honest, we will see the path most families are taking is not working. Let us take a different way, then, a way less travelled, a way of commitment to God first, relationships and values, and reaching out to others.

Pope Francis says “[T]he family of Nazareth is the model family” (*Angelus*, Dec. 2020). Let us look to them – Joseph, Mary, and Jesus – to guide us.

## **Key Message**

Reassess the practices, values, and beliefs your family currently holds. Then ask the Holy Family of Nazareth to help you renew your family's relationships and values.

## **Action Step**

Get the Archdiocesan Family Life Commission videos, *Domestic Church, Know your Rites*; find them at [aflcrc.org](http://aflcrc.org) or on the Commission's social media platforms using [@familylifecommission](https://twitter.com/familylifecommission). Watch and discuss each video as a family. Reflect on how you can improve in the three essential areas: relationships, rituals, and reaching out.

## **Scripture Reading**

John 12:34-35

## CHAPTER 21

### **Living the Paschal Mystery in the Family**

On Holy Thursday, beginning with the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, we solemnly celebrate the most profound mystery in the Catholic tradition – the Paschal mystery.

Wrapped up in this mystery are four interrelated mysteries of Jesus' salvation of humanity: His life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven. This is the core of the Christian faith.

As St. Paul says: "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:16-17).

As Catholics, we need to understand and live the Paschal mystery every day of our lives. It is what distinguishes us from those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. This is not just a formula, it is a living mystery in which we are invited to participate. It is the reason for our living in Christ, the reason for submitting to Christ and His Gospel. The Paschal mystery should order every aspect of the life of the disciple. It should speak in and through our daily living.

A mystery is not something to be understood with our minds, it has to be entered into with our whole selves: body, mind, soul, spirit. It informs all aspects or dimensions of our life.

After 2000 years, I sometimes believe we have only just scratched the surface of the Paschal mystery. The journey has only just begun.

## **The Paschal mystery lived**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life” (CCC 654).

This is vital for family life. A family that is “in Christ” has been redeemed from sin by the costly price of Christ’s sacrifice of His life. Thus, by meditating on the life, suffering and death of Christ, the family should begin to see a pattern for their living, forgiving, and their life in Christ.

The modern world makes several great mistakes about love. First, we believe love is a feeling, so we believe people can fall in and out of love. Feelings are either nouns or adjectives, but love is a verb. It is an action word. It is something that one does. This is best demonstrated during Holy Week. Do you think Christ felt like being beaten and spat upon and rejected and ridiculed? NO! But He accepted it all.

And in His actions, we see laid bare the true nature of love. It is through this love that we have been brought to salvation. It is through this love we begin to understand that the true logic of the world is love.

## **The nature of love**

In his first letter, St. John says:



Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him (1 John 4:7-9).

To read Jesus' Passion through the lens of love is to begin to understand the high call of family life. What is the nature of our love for each other? How much tolerance do we have? Are our actions ones of love that imitate Jesus, or of hurt, selfishness, and self-protection – the actions that crucified Him? Now, we have a new way of evaluating our actions in the family.

To enter into the Paschal mystery is to choose the way of love at every turn. By contemplating Jesus' actions and choices in the Passion, we begin to see ours very differently.

I am not speaking here about domestic abuse or violence in the family. That is a separate matter which can never be accepted. It is not an action for the good of the spouses. I am speaking about the daily sacrifices that family life calls us to, and whether we are ready to die to the self or not.

To enter into the Passion of Christ is to raise the bar on love. It is to act in the way of humble sacrifice. It is to die to the self a thousand times a day so others may have life. It is to choose, time and time again, to do the loving thing when the feelings tug us in the opposite direction.

So you have had a hard day at work, you reach home and there is utter chaos, the usual spat between the children. What does love require?

Your spouse has forgotten, again, to go to the grocery on the way home. What does love require?

Your spouse or parent comes home, clearly in a bad mood; you could escalate it or calm it down. What does love require?

Your child has been on his or her device for several hours, and you know if you were to speak again it will lead to an eruption and a bad mood. What does love require?

Family life gives countless opportunities every day for dying to self. This is the beginning of the Paschal mystery.

As the evangelist St. John says: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24).

Spousal love is about dying to oneself. This is not morbid or dark, it is the way to fullness of life. By each of us seeking to save his or her life, we are losing a generation. We are destroying families and the children.

I want to invite all families during the Paschal mystery to enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ’s saving love. Let it guide your family and be a way to Easter and new life for you.

## **Key Message**

Love is a verb; it is an action word. It is something we are called to do for the sake of the other.

## **Action Step**

Look at your reactions to members of your family and evaluate whether they are loving actions. Ask the risen Christ to help you to express concrete actions of love.

## **Scripture Reading**

John 12:23-25



## CHAPTER 22

### **Living the Resurrection in the Family**

In the previous chapter, I began the journey of exploring the Paschal mystery from the perspective of the family. We reflected on the dying to self that is engrained into the daily family experience.

This opportunity for grace, given in the family a thousand times a day when understood and entered into, will yield a rich harvest. We call these holy moments: times when we pause and ask God to show us His perfect will in the moment, then do whatever He asks.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life” (CCC 654).

This is an invitation to meditate on both the death and Resurrection, as it relates to the family. Christ’s death saves us from sin. Our dying to self, countless times a day in the family, unites us with Christ’s suffering and opens up a path to humility and a way to discipleship for us – a way to love.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has often said that the family is the “first and vital cell of the society” – a perspective from the depths of Catholic social doctrine (*Compendium* # 211). If the Resurrection of Christ is to have meaning and efficacy, this must become more and more visible in the Catholic family.

If this is true, the family is the primary place where the Paschal mystery needs to be lived and seen to be lived. Then, the family will be “the primary place of ‘humanization’ for the person and society” (Benedict, *Human* #2) and a “cradle of life and love” (Benedict, *Human* #2). What does it mean to live the power of the Resurrection in the family?

## The Resurrection

The big challenge to the modern Catholic is in understanding and living the Resurrection. We know how to live the death: we make sacrifices, offer alms and prayers. The Resurrection needs a different religious imagination, one that most modern Catholics have not yet grasped.

Let us take the road to Emmaus as a way of understanding this mystery and its impact on the disciple.

Two disciples are leaving Jerusalem. They are downcast and distressed, filled with failure, disappointment, and despair. Their hopes are dashed as they recount the death of their leader.

This, I believe, is an accurate description of many families today. Rather than staying in Jerusalem, the city of destiny and mission, they have left and are heading away from the place to which God has called them.

Is this the case with your family? Is your family on mission? Is your family living as Jesus asked you to live? Or are you in distress and disappointed, your hopes dashed? Then, you are on the road to Emmaus.

## The journey

The story recounts that “Jesus himself came up and walked with them” on their journey (Luke 24:15). This is quite amazing. The Scripture continues: “But they were kept from recognising him” (Luke 24:16).

It is not that Jesus is not there, it is that the disciples do not recognise Him. Although it is not important in itself, many believe that Cleopas refers to the same man whose wife stood at the foot of the cross with Jesus’ mother (John 19:25). It is also believed that the two persons walking to Emmaus were husband and wife. This, then, would have been Jesus’ uncle and aunt – a family.

The family is distressed – in despair, despondent, disappointed – and Jesus comes up to them and walks with them, but they cannot recognise Him.

What is wonderful is that Jesus calls them foolish and slow: “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?” (Luke 24:25-26).

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in the Scriptures concerning Himself (Luke 24:25-27). Of critical importance is that, after all this, they still do not recognise Him.

The Christ has had to suffer and die and then enter into His glory; suffering is part of the story. We have been sold a lie that we are not supposed to suffer, we are not to have pain, we are not to struggle.

Because of the lie, many couples blame each other for their struggles, suffering, and pain. If the Christ had to suffer

and die, why do we believe we are exempt from pain and suffering?

## **Family catechesis**

It is important that this catechesis be given to the family. The Resurrection comes through the suffering and death, and not without it. The story goes on to say they were pressing Him to stay with them because it was almost evening. Then, He breaks bread and gives it to them, and their eyes are opened (Luke 24:31).

Jesus was walking with the family, but they did not recognise Him. After getting the catechesis on the cross, they still did not see Him. It was in the breaking of the bread – the Eucharist – that their eyes were opened.

How many good families are on the journey to Emmaus, filled with despair and disappointment, feeling crushed, dejected, and utterly alone? We cannot open our eyes; only God can.

It is interesting here that, when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, their eyes were opened. They looked at themselves and saw they were naked. The couple on the road to Emmaus eat the fruit of the tree of life (the Eucharist), their eyes are opened, and they see God. And promptly return to Jerusalem and mission.

Families! Turn your eyes to God!



## **Key Message**

The family is the place to encounter the risen Christ, and when it does, the family will be turned to mission again.

## **Action Step**

Reflect on your family. Are you looking at yourself – your needs, wants, disappointments, distress? Or are you looking to God – His desire, love, and presence calling you to mission? Does your family come to the Eucharist to encounter the risen Christ?

## **Scripture Reading**

Luke 24:13-35



## CHAPTER 23

### **True Faith: Let Go and Let God**

What is the Resurrection if it does not transform the way we live as a family? Christianity is not a philosophy, it is a living religion. It informs the way we relate and live and open our hearts to grace and mercy.

In the time of Easter, and thereafter, we need to ask the hard question: Does my family live in the power of the Resurrection of Christ?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

Christ's Resurrection, and the risen Christ himself, is the principle and source of our future resurrection: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep... For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." The risen Christ lives in the hearts of his faithful while they await that fulfillment. In Christ, Christians "have tasted... the powers of the age to come" and their lives are swept up by Christ into the heart of divine life, so that they may "live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (CCC 655).

Let us explore this in terms of the family.

## **Christ: Principle and Source**

If we believe that God raised Christ from the dead, then our belief would impact our lives. We would not be afraid to die or to die to ourselves for the sake of the other. At the heart of the Paschal mystery is the total self-emptying of Jesus. On the night before He died, He gave all to His Father. While at prayer in the garden, falling to His face, He said, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

This surrender of the will to God represents complete abandonment and trust in the Father. If I have this trust in the Father, then I do not need to secure anything for myself.

This is true freedom: knowing that all is in God’s hands and all will be well. I do not need to secure my life because it is God who is the source and foundation of my life.

Think of the useless quarrels. What brings them about? I guess we believe we have to preserve our life, win at all costs, exert our wills, to demonstrate we are valuable. They begin with a desire that is unmet or unrealised.

Here is what St. James says:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures (James 4:1-3).

If we believed that Christ is the “principle and source of our future resurrection”, would we be so wilful? Would we continue to fight and struggle for things that are not really important? If each one knew his or her true dignity as a child of God, would we take things so personally?

If God in Christ is raising our mortal bodies from the dead, then each moment is an opportunity for living in the power of the Resurrection. That is to see, in the moment, our trust in the risen Christ is far more important than our wilfulness. “Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Mark 14:36).

The act of abandonment is the act of faith in the Resurrection. Being willing to let go and go into God also demonstrates true faith. God raised Jesus from the dead so death has no more sting or power over me. Jesus is the first fruit; I, too, am called to participate in the Resurrection of Jesus.

## **Death in Adam, life in Christ**

As Christians, we have a choice: we can belong to Adam or to Christ.

When we choose our lesser selves by exerting our authority or will, or to be dominant, when we become demanding or unforgiving or selfish and put ourselves first, we are children of Adam.

To belong to Christ, we gaze on the risen Christ in His humility and love, and build a filial relationship with Him, begging Him to transform us into another Christ. This is not being perfect; it is being dependent upon Christ and in deep relationship with Christ who is risen.

What does it mean to say that we will be made alive in Christ? When we look at our inadequacies and our foibles, when we see the many ways death has stalked us in our character and choices, we will not despair. We will know that God and God alone will raise us from this mortal body doomed to death.

When husband and wife recognise the weakness and frailty of their condition and turn their gaze to Christ who is risen, both have a chance to experience the transforming power of Christ in their lives and in their marriage.

Then, marriage moves from being a contract to being a sacrament – a portal of grace. With spouses focused on the risen Christ, the children see a vital connection between life and spirituality.

## **Live for Christ**

The last part of the text from CCC 655 says those who follow Christ “live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised”. This is the fundamental question: for whom are you living? Are you living for yourself or for Christ? This makes a world of difference.

If I am living for Christ, my prayer, study, and generosity will lead me to sharing God’s love with others – especially the family. This means that, in things little and big, you raise your eyes to Christ and seek His will.

## **Key Message**

Belief in the Resurrection of Christ is the portal to inner transformation through dying to yourself and living for others, and ultimately, for Christ.

## **Action Step**

Reflect on the useless conflicts and ego battles in your family. Each day, ask God for the grace to die to yourself and accept His will.

## **Scripture Reading**

Philippians 3:10-12





## CHAPTER 24

# Jesus' Peace for Right Relationships

### The Resurrection peace

“Peace be with you!” This is the standard greeting that a bishop gives at the beginning of Mass. It is different from the priest’s greeting: “The Lord be with you!”

The greeting, “Peace be with you” is given by Jesus four times after the Resurrection (Luke 24:36; John 20:19; John 20:21; John 20:26). During His earthly life, He uses the phrase once in His farewell discourse (John 14:27) to speak about the promise of His gift of peace. How does this gift of peace relate to the family?

### Jesus' peace

In the farewell discourse, Jesus distinguishes between two types of peace. He says: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).

This verse comes in the midst of Jesus instructing His disciples about His impending departure, and their consequent agitation and distress. But also: “Peace I leave with you” (*shalom*) is more than a greeting that says, “Hi” or “How are you?” *Shalom* is right relationship. *Shalom* is not

the absence of war or strife, it brings about the conditions that are required for peace.

In the garden, when Adam and Eve sinned, peace was broken. The harmony that existed in the beginning where God walked with man in the cool of the evening was disrupted (Genesis 3:8). This disruption is the beginning of strife in the family: the man blames his wife (Genesis 3:12), the wife blames the serpent (Genesis 3:13); there is pain in childbearing (Genesis 3:16); and the notion of “ruling over” between husband and wife, also in Genesis 3:16.

To Adam, God says, “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread”, with implications for the whole family (Genesis 3:17-19). Here, we see the untangling of harmony and disruption of peace.

Through sin, the four fundamental relationships were broken: the relationship between God and us, the relationship between woman and man, the relationship between the human and creation, and the relationship between us and ourselves. We hid (Genesis 3:8).

The peace, *shalom*, was broken and strife entered the human situation. This is the natural state of the family.

When Jesus says: “My peace I give you”, what does He mean? Well, Jesus is in complete harmony with God the Father, with us, with the creation, and with self. He, after all, is the Prince of Peace. Not only is Jesus living in complete harmony, but through the Paschal mystery, He gives this harmony to us as a gift.

Through the family, harmony was destroyed. Through the family, Jesus intends to restore the harmony with His gift of peace.

## **Peace: gift and work**

Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical letter, *Populorum Progressio*, reflects on the nature of peace. He says:

For peace is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day toward the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men (*Populorum Progressio* #76).

If the family is to be a school of love, it needs also to be a school of peace, and for this, it needs to be a school of justice. Love, justice, and peace are inseparably bound. And we cannot have peace on our own; peace is a gift from the risen Lord. He gives us His peace, His harmony, and His participation in the divine harmony.

The ancient heresy of Pelagianism would have us believe that sin did not mortally wound human nature, so we could fix the problem if we tried hard enough. Christianity teaches us that it is only through the gift of the Paschal mystery that we have the possibility of peace.

While peace is a gift given to us freely by the risen Lord, it is also something that we need to strive for more perfectly every day. Peace in our families comes because of the gift of Christ, but it also requires that we do the work of love, of justice, of peace. It requires a surrender to the will of God who orders all things according to His perfect plan.

## **Peace in the family**

The first time Jesus greets the disciples, there is a context. Peter denied Him, as Jesus had prophesied the previous

Thursday night. All the disciples ran and left Him alone. Only the beloved disciple reached the cross and stayed with Him through the ordeal.

The context of the greeting of peace and the gift that Jesus gives is the utter failure of the disciples. In the face of this failure, Jesus gives them right relationship with God, with each other, with the creation, and with the self.

And in case they miss the radical extent of the gift, He invites them back to mission. He breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit, and then, the power to forgive sins (John 20:21-23).

To build peace in the family, we need to first receive the gift of peace that Jesus gives, not the peace of the world, which is empty and hollow. This requires both husband and wife surrendering to God's will, both striving to be docile to God and to each other.

To receive the gift of peace from Christ, we need to surrender. If we are filled with our own self-interests, we cannot receive. We also need to receive forgiveness from the Lord, and from one another, for all the ways we have contributed to strife. We need to receive the Holy Spirit and we need to forgive each other. Peace is built up in the family every day when we relate to one another with love and justice. This is how the family becomes the source of peace for the world.

## **Key Message**

Peace is a gift from the risen Christ to His Church. Peace must be constantly built up through the dynamic of the family as a school of love, justice, and peace.

## **Action Step**

Reflect on your family. Is it a place where harmony is experienced? What can you do as a family to build up peace every day?

## **Scripture Reading**

John 20:19-29



## CHAPTER 25

### **Living the Resurrection: Betrayal to Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is a deep part of the Resurrection story, an aspect on which we do not often focus. But it is integral to understanding the Resurrection and God's call of the Twelve.

How do we deal with those who hurt and betray us? That is a question the Resurrection poses. It would have been much easier for the apostles if Jesus had not been raised from the dead. But He was raised, and they needed to face Him in all their shame and pain and failure.

Have you ever been betrayed by someone who loves you and professes they will always be at your side, no matter the cost? Has your family ever had to live through public failure and betrayal?

If you have experienced this, then the Resurrection story has something to teach you about God's way of dealing with this kind of gut-wrenching experience.

Public failure is devastating. There is no easy way to live through it as a family. Regardless of the issue, if there is a perception of betrayal and a hint of failure, it tears a couple apart and is the cause of very deep pain, and many times, a wound that is lasting.

How do families recover from this wound? Well, the Resurrection has something to teach us about betrayal, failure, hurt, and public scandal. Let us look at the story again.

## **Betrayal and failure**

Table fellowship in the first century is very intimate. Each person is sitting on the ground, leaning on the person next to him to prop him up. You are in constant contact with the person next to you. This is the setting on the night before Jesus dies.

“Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve,” Scripture says. “And while they were eating, he said: Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me” (Matthew 26:20-21). There is denial and even deflection. Even after Jesus speaks of the impending betrayal, He consecrates bread and gives them His body to eat and the cup of His blood to drink.

He gives Himself fully in an act of intimate love to the one who will betray Him. I want you to ponder this for a moment. It is a very bitter and difficult teaching.

After the Eucharist, Jesus then predicts that all His disciples will be scandalised by Him (Matthew 26:31). Peter famously gives his assurance that he is prepared to die for Jesus.

We know the story: Judas betrays Him, and Peter denies Him three times that night. The others scatter. Only the Beloved makes it to the cross. How do we respond after such public failure?

When a spouse is unfaithful or has done something really wrong that has become public, how do you respond? This, too, is the Resurrection story.



Jesus' example is very difficult. He gives Himself completely without holding back, although He knows they will disown Him. To love is to give yourself to another. Jesus shows this love in its most profound sense. He gives Himself even when He knows they will not give back in return.

## **Love in the face of betrayal**

There is a very touching scene in the Resurrection appearance. The disciples, even after encountering Christ, are lost. They do not know what to do and Peter says he is going fishing. The others follow him. Remember that Jesus called Peter from fishing? He goes back to what he did before the call.

Jesus meets Peter where he is; He shows him unconditional love and extraordinary generosity. This is our first challenge. How do we greet the person who has betrayed us? Are we generous or stingy to them?

Jesus prepares breakfast for these men on the seashore and invites them to bring some of the fish they had caught. This is touching. He is inviting them to participate and to share the fruit of their labour. He brings them to table fellowship and gives them bread and fish. They know it is Him.

## **Peter reinstated**

The next part of the text is also very moving and a real pattern of reconciliation. Three times Jesus asks Peter: "Do you love Me?" Three times, he said, "Yes". But the story is much more complicated than the English allows us to see.

First, Jesus addresses him as Simon – his name before he was called. Secondly, the Greeks have four words for love; English has only one.

Jesus says: “Simon, do you love (*agapē*) Me more than these others?” *Agapē* is a love that is expressed in laying down one’s life and sacrificing oneself for the sake of the other.

Peter, chastened by failure, answers: “Lord, you know I love (*phileo*) you.” *Phileo* is a lesser form of love; it is the love of friends, but not of laying down one’s life, not sacrifice, not martyrdom.

Each time Peter answers, he is reinstated in his mission as leader of the flock – to take care of the lambs, take care of the sheep, to feed the sheep.

With great compassion, Jesus asks Peter the third time, “Do you *phileo* Me?” – meeting Peter where he is, asking him to give what he can. By lowering the bar, Jesus shows what we do when the one who professes to love us messes up. We meet the individual where he or she is, and we accept what the other can give.

Jesus was the one who was hurt and betrayed. Yet, He was the one who made the first move, the one to show mercy.

This should challenge all of us. To live the Resurrection is to give till it hurts; it is to love by reinstating the one who has betrayed us and dishonoured us publicly, and to do so with tenderness. The Church is God’s family. So every family needs to see the example of forgiveness at the heart of the Church.

We often think we are helping people change by rubbing their faces in their failure. Jesus thinks differently. He loves

much and trusts us to change. Peter eventually displays *agapē*. He dies a martyr.

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### **Key Message**

In God's family there is forgiveness, trust, and restoration. Is this lived out in your family?

### **Action Step**

Have a conversation with God about how you treat those who betray and hurt you. Make a step with one person.

### **Scripture Reading**

John 21:15-25



## CHAPTER 26

### **Called by Name**

There is a moment in spousal relationship where the vision grows dim and hope dwindles. The drudgery of life, or the pain, or shame colours the interaction between spouses.

That first spark of joy and life is gone, and each day, you turn up out of duty, out of habit, because it is what you know. It is as if someone sucked the oxygen out of the room and you can hardly breathe. You lie on a bed with the person you love with little to speak about. This is the dark night of marriage that many couples have experienced.

At this stage, many people try different things to just feel like they are still living: a new car, house, or a job. And those are the safer options. Others have affairs or turn to alcohol, drugs, or pornography during this dark time.

I want to propose this as a spiritual malady. It cannot be fixed by the external change in job, house, et cetera. It is the soul that needs attention, and if it is given attention correctly, it will move the person to a new stage of life that is infinitely better than could have been imagined.

### **The night of desolation**

Mary Magdalene followed Jesus to the foot of the cross. She had all her hopes dashed on that fateful Friday evening when they crucified Him. She would have wept bitter tears

that night because of the disappointment and horror she experienced. She was plunged into complete desolation – the dark night of the soul.

I would ask you to meditate on her experience at the foot of the cross and the days after. This is complete desolation. She lost what was most precious to her. The grief was palpable and must have consumed her whole body. Unlike the disciples, she stayed, she waited, and prayed.

In the dark night, whatever its configuration, there is a way to proceed. You stay, you wait, and you pray. Do not look to the left or right; it will be a distraction or a temptation. God is doing something in the midst of this night. You need to be patient.

There is a stage in the spiritual life that St. John of the Cross calls “purgation”. It is a stage of darkness that leads to inner freedom and incredible life. It is painful, but the pain turns to joy if you can stay, wait, and pray.

We all begin our adult life with bad habits, attachments, and desires that take the place that God and God alone should have. These attachments, desires, and habits give us a false sense of life, but they cannot sustain us or keep us happy over the long haul. They will fail because they are not God and cannot supply what God alone can supply.

In the first stage of marriage, these habits, attractions, and desires eventually fall flat. As St. Augustine says: “Lord, ... our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” The inner restlessness, the darkness, and the sense of drudgery is the soul’s way of saying the time has come to grow up.

We must no longer rely on external motivation and enticement. We now learn to love in the sense of *agapē* – laying down our life for another, expecting little or nothing in

return. This is the invitation to detachment of the soul from all the habits, attractions, and desires.

## The Resurrection

In the time of deep desolation, St. Mary Magdalene is a good model for us. She stayed at the foot of the cross till the end. She did not run or hide from the suffering, she stayed, watched, and prayed.

Keep turning up and doing all the things that you committed to do. Do it with as much love and feeling as you can muster. This is not the moment to shrink and lessen your commitment to your family. It is actually the time to strengthen it through rites, rituals, and reaching out as a family to other families.

After her fidelity to the cross, St. Mary Magdalene was faithful to the Sabbath. This is what needs to become high priority in your life at this time. You need to be faithful to your duties during this stage of the journey. But first of all, be faithful to God.

This is the time when you should seek spiritual accompaniment, join a group for *Lectio Divina*, or Christian Meditation, or a prayer meeting – something that will strengthen you spiritually. You may not feel like it, but investing in the inner life during this stage will pay great dividends.

Coming out of the Sabbath, we see Mary Magdalene spring into action. The Scriptures say: “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance” (John 20:1).

It is interesting that St. John has Mary going alone to the tomb. In the face of disillusionment, all hope dashed, her heart broken into a million pieces, she goes to the tomb as soon as she can. There is duty in her. There is devotion in her still; there is hope. But she cannot let go of her attachment to the human Jesus.

Because of this attachment, she does not understand. She looks into the tomb and sees the two angels, but she is still weeping (John 20:12). Her heart is broken, and the situation is compounded by the thought that Jesus' body is stolen. Then Jesus calls her by name, "Mary". And immediately, she sees Him, and says, "*Rabboni!*"

Called by name is one part of the structure of the Resurrection that opens the eyes of the disciple to see what was always there. Jesus was with her, but she did not have eyes to see.

Being called by name is a spiritual awakening. Many have experienced it through a Life in the Spirit seminar, or a retreat, or spiritual conference. Through the spiritual awakening, nothing changes in your family or relations. But at the same time, everything changes, because the whole world is now filled with the glory of God.



## **Key Message**

The Resurrection is not only an event, it is also part of our spiritual journey. We, too, should expect to meet the risen Lord.

## **Action Step**

If you are in a spiritual dark night, turn to rites, rituals, and reaching out to keep you focused on your journey.

## **Scripture Reading**

John 20:11-18



## CHAPTER 27

### **God's Invitation to Grow Up**

You know how hard it is when your children go away for an extended time? When one goes off to university, for example? Feelings of inadequacy and worry set in. Did you do enough for this child? Does he have the proper foundation? Will she be able to stand on her own two feet? What if he messes up and does something really stupid? These are just some of the anxieties parents can have when a child leaves for university.

The time of separation is often filled with great apprehension. Much of the parents' dread is often about how the child's actions might affect the family. As we say in Trini: "How it go look?"

If they mess up, it will show the family as inadequate and reflect badly on the parents. But this time of separation is a time of great anxiety for the child, as well. All the bravado dissipates into nervousness around making friends, being part of a group that accepts you, being able to succeed, and making all the great decisions required for success. This is a moment of great anxiety.

### **The Ascension**

Put yourself in Jesus' shoes now. His disciples had failed by every standard imaginable. They denied Him. They ran

away from the cross, leaving Him all alone. They showed neither character nor spine during the Passion – this is after three years of intense formation that Jesus gave them. They messed up big.

He told them they would, but Peter told Him it would not be so: “Not me!” They proved to be utterly untrustworthy. From this perspective, what Jesus does in the Ascension makes no human sense. He places complete trust in a group of men who had let Him down over and over again.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we learn of Jesus’ earthly ministry for forty days before the Ascension. St. Luke says: “After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). See also 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

From all accounts, the Resurrection appearances were phenomenal. Jesus had their attention. He reinterpreted Scripture for them, showed them that the Christ was to suffer and die. He also showed them that all of Scripture pointed to Him.

Jesus, during these forty days, did a really great job in getting the apostles’ attention, opening their eyes, breathing new courage in them, and redirecting them to the Kingdom of God.

So why did Jesus leave the disciples after forty days? When He left, they were still locked up in the upper room in fear. Why did He leave? If it were me, I would have stayed around for another 2000 years doing the super-appearance thing, sitting with them and opening humanity’s mind to the truth, settling disputes, making the will of God

abundantly clear, and ensuring each vital figure knew their path.

There would have been no Atlantic slave trade; He would have sorted that out. There would have been no forced missions where people converted or died. No Hitler or Jewish holocaust.

Popes, priests, and religious who felt lost would have received an appearance and been put right. The terrible dark legacy of the Church would not have been. So why did He leave?

## **Growing us up**

One important reason, I believe, is connected to the reason we must separate from children when they reach young-adult status: it is important for them to grow up. As long as you are there to pick up the pieces and sort out the mess, they will not take ultimate responsibility.

There are many young people who were never given the opportunity to grow up. They continue to live with parents who do everything for them – clean their room, cook their food, and pick up after them. Even when they work, they do not contribute to the house, so they have more disposable income than the parents.

The Ascension is an essential lesson for families. There is a moment when children must stand on their two feet and grow up. And you must withdraw and allow them to take up their lives. This is what Jesus did for us.

In His Ascension, we see God's complete trust in humanity. He does not have a Plan B in case we fail. The mission that the Father entrusted into Jesus' hands is now

completely entrusted into our hands. If we fail, it fails. God fails. This measure of trust and confidence is worthy of deep contemplation.

## **Unity in His Body**

The Catechism identifies another reason for the Ascension: we are drawn into the Holy Trinity.

The Father's power "raised up" Christ his Son and by doing so perfectly introduced his Son's humanity, including his body, into the Trinity. Jesus is conclusively revealed as "Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his Resurrection from the dead". St Paul insists on the manifestation of God's power through the working of the Spirit who gave life to Jesus' dead humanity and called it to the glorious state of Lordship (CCC 648).

This mystical connection between Christ and His body, the Church, means that, through His ascending, we, too, have ascended with Him. We, too, partake in the grace of the Trinity. He said He was going to prepare a place for us in Heaven (John 14:1-3).

Further, Colossians states: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him (Christ) to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (1:20).

Where the head is, there, too, the members are destined to go. Jesus has opened a way for each of us and our families to participate in the divine life of grace while here on earth. This is more precious than His sticking around to sort us

out. But also, we are now destined for Heaven. We need to learn to live in and through this reality.

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### **Key Message**

The Ascension is God's invitation to grow up and participate in the Holy Trinity.

### **Action Step**

Contemplate the trust and affirmation that God has put in us and the invitation to participate in Him.

### **Scripture Reading**

Acts 1:1-11





## CHAPTER 28

### **Clothed From On High**

Handing on the faith to the next generation is one of the great challenges of our time. It is a complex and difficult challenge.

Think of your family, your brothers and sisters, your extended family, your cousins – do they still practise the faith? If you are a grandparent, think of the grandchildren. This is a really vexing challenge that we face in our time, but one in which we need to become experts.

We cannot make anyone believe in Jesus. The best we can do is to witness to the truth by our words and actions.

Here is the great challenge. Many times, we are not good witnesses to our families. They know our faults and see our deficient discipleship. They see where we fall short of the high moral ground that we promote and posture.

Christianity is not about a group of heroes and heroines; we are weak, fallen, and flawed, a people redeemed by the grace of Jesus Christ. We are an unfinished work, a transformation in progress.

Speaking to this, St. Paul said: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). We are jars of clay, fragile and deficient. It is simply that we have been redeemed by Christ. That is the great treasure! In the family,

we need to begin living a Christianity that is real, not a show or pretence.

We need God's mercy every moment of every day. We need to own our weakness and apologise for it, asking forgiveness. All too often, this is not what we do. We cover over the failing, hide it, and work hard at making others believe we have it all together.

That may work for people outside of the family, but not for those on the inside. In our family, they know, they see, and they are hurt by our lack of inner transformation, our lack of integrity and witness.

Thus, St. Paul concludes: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24)

## **The Holy Spirit and mission**

The early Church, too, faced this challenge between the Resurrection and Pentecost. Even after the Resurrection of Jesus and His several appearances, the disciples were timid and afraid of the dominant culture and its threat of death and expulsion. They were incapable of witnessing in word and action.

The last action of Jesus on earth was to tell the apostles to wait in Jerusalem! These are His final instructions: "Wait!" They needed to wait because they were lacking a necessity for mission. He went on to say: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In the Gospel of Luke, the text reads slightly differently: “[But] stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). It is the Holy Spirit that prepares the Church for mission. Without it, we are naked!

Being “clothed with power from on high” means being wrapped and immersed in God the Holy Spirit.

There are four New Testament texts that speak to the clothing of the Christian: putting on Christ (Galatians 3:27), putting on the armour of light (Romans 13:12), putting on the armour of God (Ephesians 6:10-18), and being clothed with God’s power (Luke 24:49).

## **God’s Power**

The most common error of our time is the thinking that we need to fix humanity. This is not only a lie, it is a heresy. We cannot fix it! It was broken before we existed, and it was redeemed by the high cost of the cross of Jesus. Without God, there is no fix!

This is the heresy of Pelagianism, which claims that, through our own efforts, we can achieve sanctity. It is at the core of our self-help literature which blinds us to God and our desperate need.

We are called to bend our hearts to God’s will. In bending to His will, things get redeemed. St. Monica prayed for sixteen years for a wayward son, Augustine. In the process, both became saints. What changed?

Well, maybe God changed Monica’s heart and made her really open to God. Then, maybe through the prayer, as she became a purer conduit of God’s love and grace; she was a better instrument in God’s hands to reach her son.

It is the Holy Spirit that makes us truly humble and available to God. It is the Holy Spirit that makes us great instruments in God's hands. It is when we are clothed by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can be His witnesses in our families, our communities, in the Church, and to the ends of the world.

Let us pray together as families:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful,  
And kindle in them the fire of Your love.  
Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created,  
And You will renew the face of the earth.

Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit  
You have taught the hearts of Your faithful.  
In the same Spirit,  
help us to relish what is right  
and always rejoice in Your consolation.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## **Key Message**

We need God's Holy Spirit to become better persons and to be equipped to hand on the faith to our families.

## **Action Step**

Obtain a copy of the Holy Spirit Novena from the Family Life Commission and do the action every day in your family. Also, pray the Holy Spirit prayer above.

## **Scripture Reading**

Acts 1:1-11



## CHAPTER 29

### **Being Transformed**

At the beginning of Lent 2020, we found ourselves in the desert, then we moved to the Upper Room, after which we missioned the domestic Church.

There is an integral connection between Pentecost and mission. In Acts 2:1-11, the Holy Spirit came upon the assembled disciples, and they then went on mission, speaking in public about Jesus and what He had done for them.

Missioning the domestic Church is not just about calling that Church to mission, but rather, inviting the family to understand and assume their true identity as Church miniature, and to participate fully in the mission of Christ.

We have spent more than two years praying, reflecting, and teaching on the family and the integral connection between the family as miniature Church and God's intention.

In our day, the great challenge to the family remains inner transformation, and being a credible witness within the family. This also requires a healthy understanding of what life in Christ is all about.

As I said earlier, we are fragile earthenware vessels containing a great treasure. Many times, the family is given a model of life in Christ that is filled with “shoulds” and “oughts”, with an expectation of perfection, according to the imperative in Matthew 5:48.

Here is the challenge. There are two notions of perfection: the Greek concept, which says that perfection is the absence of the imperfect, and the Hebrew, which says perfection is the incorporation of the imperfect. Carl Jung would call this owning your shadow. Thus, “[the Father] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45).

## **Transformation**

With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we have the expectation of inner transformation. Galatians 5:16-25 is very clear about what the Spirit brings and what is from the flesh.

St. Paul speaks about the opposition of the flesh and the Spirit. He says the work of the flesh is: “[I]mmorality, impurity, lust, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like” (vv. 19-20). Alongside this, St. Paul gives the fruit of the Spirit: “[L]ove, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (vv. 22-23).

When parents, as spiritual leaders of the family, examine their lives according to these markers, they find themselves wanting. They see how many of the negative attributes they have and how few of the positive.

This lack of inner transformation is the challenge of human relations, spiritual growth, and credibility to be a spiritual leader for the family. St. Paul ends his text by saying: “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the



Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit” (Galatians 5: 24-25). But how do we become people of the Spirit?

## **Obstacles to transformation**

The first obstacle to deep inner transformation is sin. The solution is to make a genuine confession, recognise what we have done, ask for the interior disposition to see its impact on others and God, and with tears and supplication, ask God for mercy through the ministry of the priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Many times, because of our habit of sin, we set our expectations of God very low. We do this not to be disappointed, just in case! The desire for inner transformation is already a grace from God. We need to move on God’s prompting. We need to recognise we cannot transform ourselves.

Another obstacle for many people is wanting to be in control. To live a life in the Spirit is to choose to let go, and go into God. This is scary to many.

Practically, this means putting your life in God’s hands and allowing Him to lead and guide you in the direction He chooses. Sounds simple, doesn’t it? However, a major source of underlying tension in the family tends to arise over who has control in the most trivial and the most serious of family matters.

Ultimately, one person will give in, or the fight will be brutal. But giving in for the sake of peace is a false peace. Speaking to husbands and wives, Ephesians 5 teaches: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (v. 21). It is not one submitting to the other, but both submitting to

Christ. Both surrendering their will to God's will. Both being docile before God.

To move from the flesh to the Spirit, we need to surrender our will to God's will. Here, an examination of relationships between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between siblings offer many opportunities for revealing just how entrenched the desire for exercising control is. It is the opportunity to beg God for mercy and the grace of transformation through the Holy Spirit.

A spiritual writer speaks of original sin as a viral strain of rebellion against God. This is where the trouble is. It was the first sin of Adam and Eve, and it is our sin also.

We rebel against God, and do not really believe that God's way and will are best. This rebellion is often unconscious, but we know it. We should pray more and give God more time, and we simply do not.

## **More of God**

The only way forward is an increased desire for God through deep inner work and prayer. God wants to pour out the Holy Spirit on us without reserve. We are the ones who resist and limit God. Through our control, insecurities, and resistance, we limit God, in general, and the Holy Spirit, in particular.

For the deep inner transformation that we need to live vocation and mission, God needs unhindered access to our lives. And we need to cry out to God: "Father, send us Your Holy Spirit! We need more of You!" "Bend my heart to Your will, O Lord!"

## **Key Message**

Living credibly as a family requires deep inner transformation. This comes as a grace from God that opens us to a deeper desire for God. It also gives the grace to do the human inner work to become a better person.

## **Action Step**

Make a deep preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and then receive it. Do an internal inventory of the ways in which you seek control and resist the will of God. Through conflict in your family, hear God's invitation to bend your heart to His will.

## **Scripture Reading**

Galatians 5:16-25



## CHAPTER 30

### **The Eucharistic Sacrifice and Family Life**

The Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is pivotal in the life of the Catholic. It contains core mysteries and invites us to reflect, live, and act very differently. In the strictest sense, Corpus Christi is not part of the Paschal mystery; it falls outside of the Easter season. But what the feast celebrates is at the heart of the Paschal mystery.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. It must also be the source and summit of family life.

For a family to become domestic Church, it must draw from the source of all grace – Jesus Christ in the communion and sacrifice of His Body and Blood. Its participation in the Eucharist calls the family to be more than itself, more than human beings living in one house. The family is called to be a Church miniature where Christ is constantly being made present.

What has Corpus Christi to say to families? There is much to say, but let us focus on the Eucharist as meal and sacrifice. In this, we will find a fruitful relationship between family and the Eucharist.

That first Eucharist was a meal: “And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer’ ”(Luke 22:15).

Holy Thursday and Good Friday are inseparable, that is why it is called the Paschal mystery. The Book of Hebrews speaks of Christ's saving mystery as a sacrifice:

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God ... For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified (Hebrews 10:11, 12, 14).

Meal and sacrifice are themes of family renewal; without them, there is no family and no renewal.

## **Meal**

In the culture of Jesus, a meal was a matter of great intimacy. Jews did not allow Gentiles or the ritually unclean to table fellowship. The meal was a space of intimacy; people leaned on those next to them for support as they reclined against each other. They were in each other's space.

Jesus breaks the mould of Jewish table rules to the horror of the teachers of the Law (Mark 2:16). He eats with sinners and tax collectors, retorting: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

There are several instructive elements here for today's family. First, the family is called to intimacy. We live in a fast-paced culture where families no longer eat together; this is a great tragedy.

It is at table that family members give themselves to one another in love, listen to the stories and exchange ideas, putting everything aside to be with the other.

There is a second, and more instructive, point flowing from the Eucharist. In his 1980 Letter to Priests, *Dominicae Cenaе*, Pope St. John Paul II said the Eucharist is a school of active love for neighbour:

If our Eucharistic worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of the dignity of each person. The awareness of that dignity becomes the deepest motive of our relationship with our neighbour (*Dominicae Cenaе* #6).

Because Christ offers Himself equally for each of us, we, in turn, need to recognise the true dignity in the other, as Christ sees us. This is the foundation of the family as a school of love. It works best when the family is fed from both the Eucharistic table and from the table of the home.

Human dignity, inclusivity, treating others right, stopping prejudice and discrimination are all lessons of table fellowship. In this school of love, the family should grow daily in human virtue and divine love. This is how we birth a new Caribbean humanity.

## **Sacrifice**

The Eucharist is also a sacrifice.

The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption,

and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all ‘thanksgiving’ (CCC 1360).

This element of sacrifice is not always present in family life. We look at sacrifice as a bad or difficult thing. It is not. It involves pain, delaying gratification, suffering, and a desire to serve others.

A sacrifice is giving up something good for the sake of something better. We delay some “me time”, so the family could have a wonderful meal together. That is a great sacrifice.

Bishop Robert Barron quotes theologian Matthew Levering’s musing: “In a world gone wrong, there is no communion without sacrifice.” Such is the challenge of the modern family. The point of sacrifice is building communion. When family members hurt each other, there is no communion without pain and sacrifice.

Do we teach our children to make daily sacrifices, to offer up something good for something better? Do we help them to delay gratification in small things, so they will be able to do it in the big things? To build communion in the family, sacrifice will be demanded of each member.

By participating in Mass and meditating on the Last Supper and the Cross, we also begin to understand the nature of true love. Christ gave His all for our sake that we may understand what true love really is.

This measure of love is what each person in the family is called to imitate. By imitating this self-sacrificing love, the family is transformed into a school of love and a house of healing for others.



## **Key Message**

The family draws vital lessons and rituals from the Eucharist to transform it into a school of love.

## **Action Step**

Reflect on the Eucharist, its intimacy and sacrifice. Is your family being transformed into a school of love?

## **Scripture Reading**

John 15:9-17



## CHAPTER 31

# **Contemplating the Many Mysteries of Mary Our Mother**

In 2018, Pope Francis instituted the feast of Mary, Mother of the Church, celebrated on the first Monday after Pentecost. This feast pulls together many mysteries that we are asked to contemplate.

Mary becomes mother of God. The angel said to her: “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus ... The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:31, 35).

Christmas invites us to contemplate this mystery. A baby is born in a manger to a virgin and a carpenter. Two thousand years later, we have not begun to scratch the surface of this profound mystery.

## **Motherhood of Mary**

Mary becomes mother a second time. In St. John’s Gospel, we read:

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, ‘Woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here

is your mother'. From that time on, this disciple took her into his home (John 19: 26-27).

A new son is entrusted to Mary – the beloved disciple. It is interesting to note here that Jesus refers to Mary, not as mother, but as woman. This is done twice in John's Gospel: first at the wedding feast of Cana, and then, at the foot of the cross.

To understand Jesus' use of "woman", we need to go back to Genesis. In this first book of the Bible, Eve is called woman eleven times in Chapters Two and Three. At the time of the Fall, God says: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:16).

In the wedding feast of Cana and at the foot of the Cross, Mary is cast as the new Eve, the mother of a new humanity. The first of her children, born at the foot of the cross, is the beloved disciple.

After this entrustment of the beloved to Mary, the evangelist says:

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished", and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:28-30).

The drinking of the wine ties the cross to Cana and to the Last Supper. Jesus said: "It is finished", but a better

translation is: “It is consummated.” Here, a son, a beloved disciple, is born of the woman.

## **Mother of the Church**

After Jesus’ Ascension, we read in the Acts of the Apostles that 120 of the disciples gathered in the upper room. “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14).

Here, Mary is cast in a new role. After the finding of young Jesus in the temple, we met her in Cana and twice when the family had concerns about Jesus. From the crucifixion to Pentecost, Mary is clearly in a different role. What has changed?

Mary was the only human who had experience of the Holy Spirit. She alone knew what it was like to be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and to have a relationship with the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity.

During the days between the Resurrection and Pentecost, Mary, gathered in the upper room with the disciples, would have had great influence over them, helping them prepare for what was to come.

Together, Mary and the disciples are devoted to prayer. Mary would have spoken to them about the mysteries she pondered in her heart (Luke 2:19). They would have shared with her the experiences they had during the three years of ministry. This fruitful exchange prepared the Church for Pentecost.

They speak about Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit. She speaks, not of the promise, but of the reality of the

relationship between the human and the Holy Spirit. She speaks to them of what to expect, what it means to be overshadowed and to be in this vital relationship.

Mary had no resistance to the Holy Spirit, so the Holy Spirit did with her everything that was possible and necessary. We have resistance to God, so we need to understand how to cooperate, how to let go, and trust.

The early Church taught that Mary is already everything the Church was destined to become. Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit; the Church at Pentecost is overshadowed by the Holy Spirit.

Mary gave birth to Jesus; the Church will bring forth Christ in all nations, to all people, in all times.

Mary ponders the sacred mysteries in her heart; the Church ponders these mysteries and brings them to all her children.

In all the iconography of Pentecost, Mary is at the centre of the picture with the apostles around her. The images portray her as presiding over Pentecost.

We call Pentecost the birthday of the Church. If this is so, the Church, which is the Body of Christ, is birthed by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. And for a second time, with Mary's *fiat*, "Let it be done to me according to Thy word."

Now the Paschal mystery has come to a close. A new birth has taken place and the apostles go forth to mission and to bring Jesus to all nations, just as Mary went to mission bringing Jesus to Elizabeth.

The Decree on the celebration of the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of the Church, 2018, says:

[T]he Virgin Mary ... is both the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. In some ways this was already present in the mind of the Church from the premonitory words of Saint Augustine and Saint Leo the Great. In fact the former says that Mary is the mother of the members of Christ, because with charity she cooperated in the rebirth of the faithful into the Church, while the latter says that the birth of the Head is also the birth of the body, thus indicating that Mary is at once Mother of Christ, the Son of God, and mother of the members of his Mystical Body, which is the Church (Sarah, *Decree*, par. 1, 2).

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### **Key Message**

Mary is mother of the Church. She teaches us how to be open to the Holy Spirit and to fully cooperate with the design of God.

### **Action Step**

Ask Mary's intercession to assist you to be open to the Holy Spirit and be available for God's mission.

### **Scripture Reading**

John 19:25-34





# **SECTION 3**

## **Essential Extras**



## CHAPTER 32

### **Caribbean Masculinity – Work in Progress**

(Previously published: *St Joseph: A Pathway to Holy Caribbean Masculinity*. 2021.)

Every Caribbean man who shows up consistently to father all his children is a special man. If he is married to the mother of all his children and turns up every day as a spouse and father, he is honourable.

If, with his wife, he is willing to submit to God's will in big and little things, he is a hero. For this is the true nature of mature masculinity and fatherhood: taking responsibility, turning up for all your children, and a mutual relationship with your spouse where you both submit to God's will.

#### **Our reality**

Caribbean masculinity is a work in progress. The model of the older generation is patriarchy: the father is treated like a king and the boy like a little prince, usually doing no chores in the house.

The model of the younger generation is more of a mixed bag, but machismo is one dominant trend where the logic is conquest and irresponsibility.

One young man said in despair, “We have plenty fathers, but not enough daddies.” This translates as: “We have plenty of sperm donors, but not enough daddies who commit emotionally, financially, spiritually, and physically to their children.”

Some have made the commitment to be daddies, but it has been tough; many of them never had daddies themselves. Some may have lived in the same house as their fathers, but found him emotionally unavailable.

They are inventing fatherhood, as it were, by the seat of their pants. But they are becoming hands-on dads who are spiritually, emotionally, and physically available to their children in union with their spouse.

## **The father wound**

Caribbean civilisation is a *mélange* of pain and dismantling of the family. The African ancestors were brought by force, plunged into slavery, and their family structure systematically disassembled.

It was the owners’ right to have sex with the slaves, and alliances between slaves were often broken very early because a man with a family was dangerous. After slavery, many men went to sea or to other countries to work for long periods, sending remittances home. Female-headed households, therefore, became the norm during, and certainly after, the abolition of slavery.

The matrifocal family and the absent father have been a social structure in the Afro-Trinidadian household for over 400 years; it will not be easily redeemed in a generation or two. This culture was intact long before the sexual

revolution or television or the current madness that is imported from the northern countries.

The East Indian community may have fared a bit better since they came with all the elements of their culture intact. Yet, even here, the struggle for self-possession, for “arrival”, for wholeness is also a sad tale.

V.S. Naipaul, in his classic work, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, chronicles the deep struggle of one East Indian father in his quest for arrival. Speaking to his dog, Tarzan, Mr. Biswas says, “You are an animal and think that because I have a head and hands and look as I did yesterday, I am a man. I am deceiving you. I am not whole.”

The text is very rich for an understanding of the drama of fatherhood in an East Indian Trinidadian family.

Psychologists say Mum gives the “fluid” to the young person – the stuff of soul, imagination, energy, passion – and Dad gives the “container” or sacred boundaries.

Without the container, the young person spirals into addiction, self-absorption, anger, and dark emotions. There is a sense of a permanent hole in the soul. For more on this, see Fr. William Jarema’s *Fathering the Next Generation*.

The greed and violence of our society, the violence towards women, the self-interest, and the inability of our leaders to move the society forward, all speak to the prevalence of the “father wound”.

Until not too long ago, a young man would have had an uncle, a coach, teacher, or scout leader who would act as mentor or a second-chance father. Today, men have receded from many of these roles.

It is far more common for a boy to grow up without a meaningful relationship with an adult male. This has serious consequences for the young man and the civilisation.

## **Healing the father wound**

Healing only happens when younger men meet older men who have done the work. The tradition calls this a “second-chance father” or “Godfather”. Every young man needs a flesh-and-blood daddy to initiate him into conscious mature masculinity. The boy receives masculinity by osmosis – a physical, spiritual, psychological connection with an older man. If you have had this, in part or whole, consider yourself lucky.

The literature also tells us that, to become fully mature, every man needs a “second-chance father” – a spiritual father.

In the myth of Parsifal, this is conveyed by the young man going into combat with the sword which breaks. Commenting on the myth, psychologist Robert Johnson says:

[T]he masculine equipment he carries with him, largely imitation of the father-teachers around him, will not hold up when he tries to use it by himself. Every youth has to go through the humiliation of finding that his imitation masculinity will not hold up. And more, only the father who gave him his sword can repair the broken instrument.

[A] Godfather is a very valuable ally just at this moment. To have a Godfather who will repair

what was transmitted from the father, but did not hold up well, is an extremely valuable asset. (*He: Understanding Masculine Psychology*)

This role of the spiritual father is core to priestly identity and mature masculinity, meeting men, young and old, with imitation masculinity that was shattered. A spiritual father is always needed to assist in the patient task of putting things back together, not as imitation this time, but as an integral connection between the man and his soul.

When the older men are, themselves, working with impaired masculinity, there is need for fatherhood on a different level, a fatherhood that transcends both younger and older men.

It is here that I see St. Joseph as the archetype of fatherhood, a father for both fathers and sons. After all, God thought he was special enough to be father of His Son.

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## **Key Message**

Mature masculinity requires taking responsibility, turning up for all your children, and a mutual relationship with your spouse where you all submit to God's will.

## **Action Step**

Make a list of your “second-chance fathers”; pray for them and thank them. Have you been a “second-chance father”? Reflect on the experience.

## **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 1:18-25





## CHAPTER 33

### **Pride Month: The Paradox of Love and Truth**

There is a historical reason why Pride month emerged. For a long time, persons with same-sex attraction were treated badly within Church and society. In childhood and adolescence, there was name-calling and bullying, labelling and stereotyping.

A boy who appeared effeminate was shunned by “the boys” and ostracised, regardless of his sexual orientation. With girls, I do not think it was as brutal.

Adolescents who were intersexed or experienced same-sex attraction were forced to hide and cover up, lest they were exposed and shamed. Parents and peers were alarmed by the thought of the physical act, often reacting with fear and revulsion.

There was physical, emotional, and spiritual violence; the language we used was not sophisticated enough to understand the pain of a young person growing into adulthood.

The Catholic is invited to hold two things at the same time:

- (1) Love the person and ensure they retain their full dignity as a child of God in need of God’s grace and healing;

(2) Help the person understand why the act is morally wrong – it is unnatural and sinful (CCC 2357).

When Jesus was challenged by the leaders of His day about eating with tax collectors and sinners, His answer was: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:12-13). Unfortunately, we did not heed the words of Jesus.

This point struck me many years ago when my nephew Shane, of happy memory, who was heterosexual and in his early twenties, asked me why I would want to belong to a Church that is so hostile to gay people.

The fact is, we have people in irregular heterosexual unions who are part of our Church, and we do not have the same level of prejudice against them.

We always fear what we do not understand, and homosexuality is poorly understood. The “coming out of the closet” by the gay community evolved into Pride month. It is a statement from that community that they will not tolerate prejudice any more. This is, in part, a social justice cause; we need to uphold the dignity of every person.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, speaking about the homosexual person, says:

This inclination [homosexual tendencies], which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfil God’s will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite

to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter (CCC 2358).

In part, Pride month is about this call to ensure persons who are attracted to others of the same sex do not receive prejudice. Every Catholic is obligated to work to end prejudice, and we must also work for people to live the whole moral life.

## **Emergence of gender ideology**

But this is not all that Pride month is about; gender ideology has become a central theme of it. This is completely opposed to the Christian understanding of the human person. When it comes to the whole of sexual ethics, it is not just about love or only about truth. It is about the paradox of love and truth held together.

The term “gender” was inscribed in a document in preparation for the United Nations Cairo International Conference on Population and Development meeting in 1994. Its real emergence as a five-gender theory was at the IV World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) in New York.

The problem is that the use of the term “gender” is understood as purely socially constructed, and because of this, it is divorced from “sex” which is biologically inscribed in the person. The Book of Genesis says: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

Up until the 1990s, we spoke about male and female as both gender and sex. The divorce of these two has created an ideology – a system of ideas that is not necessarily rooted

in reality. The reality is people have different sexual desires. But the reality is also that people are created male or female (Matthew 19:5).

One of the great challenges to the gender ideology is that the human body has either XY or XX chromosomes, dependent upon whether you are male (XY) or female (XX).

Regardless of a person's sexual desire or operations that may have been done to perfectly functioning parts of the body, regardless of the gender idea to which they subscribe, the individual remains, as far as the chromosomes are concerned, the sex of their birth – XX or XY. The obvious exception here are the intersexed whom Jesus describes as having been so from birth (Matthew 19:12).

Gender ideology, while describing a person's sexual desire, engages a fundamental lie about their biology. When we lie about our biology, we create a world where truth has no meaning.

There is a book published in the UK that has proposed over 100 genders. This is why we currently speak about LGBTQIA+. Christians should not participate in, promote, or champion a lie.

Pope Francis, speaking about gender in a book for which he was interviewed by Rev. Luigi Maria Epicoco, says: "One can see how an idea wishes to impose itself on reality and it does so subtly."

The pontiff affirms that: "The church has the duty of accompanying homosexuals." But he warns: "If we abolish differences then we will remove the most profound and true dignity of people." Pope Francis concludes: "And this [gender ideology] is diabolical" (Giangravé).

## Neo-colonial imposition?

Gender theory is now being weaponised against all those who oppose it. In the US, for example, a photographer and a cake-maker who opposed by refusing their services at LGBTQ weddings were sued.

In “cancel culture”, anyone who seeks to have a rational conversation or debate about this ideology is targeted and “cancelled”.

From this perspective, gender theory needs to be seen as a neo-colonial tool being imposed on others who disagree.

US president, Barack Obama, was challenged in Africa by African leaders when he tried to impose gender theory. British Prime Minister, David Cameron, threatened to withhold aid to Commonwealth nations if they did not change legalisation on homosexuality. Now, international businesses are spending millions of dollars to force this ideology on small republics.

I conclude with Pope Francis’ comment that gender ideology is diabolical. It threatens to separate desire from truth. It is a new form of neo-colonial imposition; it opposes free speech, and ultimately, will seek to suppress religious freedom. What society did to persons with same-sex attractions, the Pride movement is doing to those who see gender differently to them.

## **Key Message**

Every human being deserves to be treated with dignity, but the truth about our biology must remain part of any conversation about sexuality. We must have the courage to love all God's children.

## **Action Step**

Reflect on your reactions to this article; do you speak about all people with love and seek their highest good? Do you subscribe to gender ideology and act with prejudice against others because of it? For a Catholic understanding of these terms, please see [personandidentity.com/the-basics/](http://personandidentity.com/the-basics/).

## **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 9:9-13

## CHAPTER 34

### Gay and Catholic

A young person once told me they were gay and Catholic and wondered what they were supposed to be doing. Maybe someone is reading this chapter and they, too, are gay, Catholic, and unsure of how to proceed.

Well, I'll tell you what I told them: I want for you what I want for every Catholic; I want you to be **holy**!

The first thing you need to know – and I want to stress this first, both in terms of importance and priority – is that you are a child of God, created in Christ Jesus for God's own purpose (Ephesians 2:10).

God loves you more than you will ever know, and this loving God has a plan for your life. I can imagine, in the midst of all the feelings and the anxiety, that it may be difficult to believe this.

I want to stress again – God loves you and He is with you. There is an old bumper sticker which says: “Be patient, God is not finished with you yet”.

You need to grow a very deep relationship with God; the storms of this world will wreak havoc on you if you do not have a solid foundation in Christ. The inner storms of your feelings, desires, and longing to belong, together with the outer storms of gender ideology, relativism, and the culture of permissiveness are being imposed on you. You will not

have the capacity to discern clearly and make wise choices if you are not rooted in Christ.

## **Become a disciple**

What do we do with these storms raging inside and out? Allow Jesus in. He made you, so He knows you and loves you. Enter into deep relationship with Him. How? Through a rhythm of prayer.

Not just times of prayer, but a routine you can rely on. Christian meditation, the *Examen*, Lectio Divina, and the Rosary are all fruitful ways of praying.

Anchor yourself in a living relationship with Christ. Go to the Blessed Sacrament and attend Mass regularly, receive the Body of Christ.

St. John Paul II wrote that in the restlessness we experience inside “beats and pulsates what is most deeply human – the search for truth, the insatiable need for the good, hunger for freedom, nostalgia for the beautiful, and the voice of conscience” (*Redemptor Hominis* #18).

Set aside a time of study every day. Read broadly and widely. But also, read deeply. I want to invite you to think with the Church. This means reading and following the Holy Father, especially his teaching on sexuality and identity. Also, read with me.

Ours is a rich faith. There is a website that gives both great science and a Catholic understanding of the whole area of sex, gender, et cetera – *personandidentity.com*. Go through the information prayerfully, wrestle with it.



Be generous! Not just with your money and talent and your time. Be generous with each of us who let you down when we do not live our Christianity or the high ideals that Christ has put before us.

Be generous with your peers who may not understand you fully or who may ridicule and judge you harshly. Remind us that Jesus says: “Do not judge, lest you be judged” (Matthew 7:1). Above all, be generous to the poor, for in almsgiving, we cover over a multitude of sins.

Become a missionary disciple. As you root yourself in Christ, call others to Christ to live their lives worthy of the vocation that we all received (Ephesians 4:1). Bring all of yourself to Christ. Allow Christ to fill and use all of you for His Kingdom. A relationship with Christ does not seek to repress or give in to the inner longings. Christ will show you a different way. It is the path of freedom and true fulfilment.

## **A life of virtue**

Everything God expects of every Catholic, He expects of you. Live a life of virtue. Sometimes, we act as if there is only one commandment – the Sixth. God gave us *Ten* Commandments – live them all! But above this, live the law of love (Mark 12:30-31).

In seeking after a life of virtue, you will discover the voice of your conscience. Pay close attention to it. Always do what is pleasing to God. Seek good, avoid evil.

You have one primary identity: you are a child of God. Nothing should come before this.

You said to me you are gay. I say, you are a child of God who experiences attraction to the same sex. Your core identity is in Christ and nothing should ever be put in that place.

You have attractions that are emotional and sexual all at once. Both are real. Like every young person, you will need to understand, and consciously distinguish between, your emotional needs for companionship and friendship, and your sexual desires and fantasies.

We were created out of love and for love. We all need loving relationships where we are accepted unconditionally if we are to become the best version of ourselves. This need for love has to be integrated with your sexual desires in a manner that is healthy and holy. Needs and desires are very different.

All persons are called to be chaste. You need to learn your body and how to sublimate these desires and direct them to the good.

Our brains learn either virtue or vice; whatever is repeated will become easier and easier to choose. Choose virtue; it leads to Christ!

If you fall, ask for forgiveness, make a firm purpose of amendment, seek help, and go to Confession.

Pornography is one of the great temptations today. It is an addiction. The brain lights up on porn in the same way as it does on cocaine. It is a drug and will seduce you to lose your soul. Please do everything to avoid it.

If you fall into it, or to lust of any kind, go to Confession as soon as you can. The Sacrament is a healing balm for your soul.

We were created male and female; this is God's design. By God's law, sex and sexual pleasure is for the context of marriage. Outside of marriage it is concupiscence, which is a distortion of God's intention, and therefore, sinful.

**There is a Catholic group called Courage, which I will do my best to begin in Trinidad. It offers you a space for fellowship and a safe space to share. The website has a handbook to start you off. You are part of our family. We have a place for you. I pray for you; please pray for me.**

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## **Key Message**

You are a child of God and part of our family, the Church, called by God to be holy.

## **Action Step**

Regardless of sexual orientation, reflect on your commitment to a life of holiness. Assess your life and make a plan to become a better version of yourself. Pass this to others who may need it.

## **Scripture Reading**

Ephesians 3:16-18



## CHAPTER 35

# **Marriage and Family: Rediscover God's Intention**

The family is the load-bearing wall of civilisation. As the family goes, civilisation follows. So as we look at the family, we have to honestly say both the family and civilisation need God's intervention.

### **Marriage: a sacrament from Creation**

In the beginning of the God-Human relationship, God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). The original loneliness of the man moved God to continue the creation.

So God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep (Genesis 2:21). He took a rib from the man and formed woman (Genesis 2:22). The Bible interprets this as a marriage:

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:18-25).

The woman was created from the rib of the man. This makes his heart more vulnerable and places her, as his equal, at his side. The biblical scholar, Matthew Henry, said:

Women were created from the rib of man to be beside him, not from his head to top him, nor from his feet to be trampled by him, but from under his arm to be protected by him, near to his heart to be loved by him. (Matthew Henry's Commentary – Verses 21-25)

This fundamental equality in difference is integral to the creation of the human person, and ultimately, to God's intention for marriage.

You will notice that in v. 25, Eve is called wife; they are called to be one flesh. And before the Fall, they were naked without shame. The male-female relationship is the image of God: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

The very next verse is the call to procreation: "God blessed them, and said to them: 'Be fruitful and increase in number'" (Genesis 1:28). From the beginning, marriage has been exclusively between one man and one woman for the unification of the spouses and the procreation and education of children.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines marriage as: "Marriage and the family are ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of children... A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family" [CCC 2201 & CCC 2202]. The good of the spouses involve assisting each in their vocation to holiness.

## The challenge of our day

In our culture, marriage is under attack from every side. Slavery, indentureship, and the plantation system all contributed significantly to the demise of marriage, the emergence of alternative family structures, and the current challenge facing us.

A large proportion of our families are not the traditional nuclear family. Most are single mums and children, while others are cohabitational, or non-legal, unions.

The emergence of contraception, with the sexual revolution that emerged, changed the way we saw sex and marriage fundamentally. Pope Paul VI, in his controversial encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, warned that widespread contraception would “lead to conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality” (#17).

In this section, he gave three other strong warnings: the loss of respect for women, the abuse of state power in the area of sexuality, and the false notion that we have unlimited dominion over our bodies.

Fifty years on, we cannot disconnect the current state of marriage and the family from the warning of Pope Paul VI. The separation of the unification of the spouses from the procreation of children has created a civilisation hostile to heterosexual marriage, to mature femininity and masculinity, and to a commitment for life.

Pop music is always a good test of the prevailing sentiment. In 1950, when my father was a young man, the love song was Dean Martin’s *I’ll Always Love You* [1950]. Twenty years later, when I was listening to pop music, the song was *Help Me Make It Through The Night*, Kris Kristofferson

[1970]. When my nephews were listening to pop music, the music was 50 Cent's *Amusement Park* [2007].

We moved from lifelong commitment to a “hook-up” culture in three generations.

Because of the experience of their families and the predominance of the hook-up culture, many young people today do not see any benefit in marriage and family. This is a significant challenge to Church and society.

Add gender fluidity to this equation and the push of LGBTQIA+ making the heterosexual union one option amongst others, and our young now are living pansexuality – anything goes!

## Redemption

We need to put the truth of marriage and family before this generation in a clear, compelling, and coherent way. This is why Pope Francis called the period from March 2021 to June 2022 a time for celebrating *Amoris Laetitia*.

This sexual revolution has touched all of us to some extent. Now, we all need to rediscover God's intention for marriage and the family from the perspective of our rich tradition.

Pope Francis reminds us that your family is the nearest field hospital. By committing to live for each other, by laying down our lives for the good of the other, by learning to put the other before ourselves, we will be on the way to recovery.

In *Amoris Laetitia* #52, the Holy Father asks the most pertinent question: “Nowadays who is making an effort to



strengthen marriages, to help married couples overcome their problems, to assist them in the work of raising children and, in general, to encourage the stability of the marriage bond?”

Our answer must be: the whole Archdiocese of Port of Spain. On the Eve of Pentecost 2020, we launched “Missioning the Domestic Church”. This is recognising that the domestic Church needs to discover its identity as a community of life and love, to discover its mission. In discovering its mission, it will assist other families to discover their identity, and ultimately, their mission.

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## **Key Message**

Marriage and the family are the foundation of civilisation. We need to understand, communicate, and invite people to conversion to God’s intention for marriage and the family.

## **Action Step**

As a family or individual, participate in Marriage and Family Week activities.

## **Scripture Reading**

Genesis 2:18-25



## CHAPTER 36

### **Grandparents: Essential to the Next Generation**

Our grandparents and the elderly are indispensable for a renewed tomorrow. They hold the burden of civilisation past, and represent it to the new generation. They are the bridge between tradition and humanising our present culture. They hold the wisdom of the ages past and bring it to bear on the emerging culture, seeking to integrate the past and the present, offering wisdom and guidance.

Pope Francis begins his letter to grandparents with a reflection on the Scripture: “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). Here, we see the Lord’s promise that regardless of the season of our life, God renews His promise to be faithful at every stage of our journey. Whether young or old, we must all remember, God is with us.

#### **I remember my Granny**

My maternal grandparents lived with two unmarried siblings. When her mother died, Granny left school, stayed home, and became mother to the twelve other children. All of them were more accomplished in the ways of the world than she was, but she was the mother to all of them.

She had an incredible faith. She did not speak a lot about her faith, but her actions were clear. When they were

moving from Belmont, the agent asked where they wanted to live. She said: on the cool side of the road, walking distance from the church and a grocery. That was it.

Granny walked to Mass every morning, so proximity to the church was vital. She did not drive and cooked for the household every day, so the grocery was vital. In the evening, she sat in the verandah and enjoyed the view with Auntie Carmen, her sister. During two years of primary school and all my years of secondary school, I had lunch with them every day. We had a special bond. She was a prayer warrior and often prayed for me during exams and times of need.

A pilgrimage to Mount St. Benedict was reserved for very special needs. The ordinary prayer was focused on her chaplet in her bedroom.

Once I came home from a difficult exam, and saw her outside and greeted her. She smiled and said nothing. She walked inside, went to her chaplet and knelt for a while. She then stood, blew out the candle and turned to me, and said: “How was the exam?”

I might have been the subject of the prayer, but God was the object and much more important than I.

By the time I was ordained in 1991, Granny was in a state of dementia, having been so for several years. She had been holding on to life by a thread for some time. I had this sense that Granny was waiting for me to say Mass for her.

I arranged, and went to say Mass at her bedside, anointed her, and gave her viaticum. Before I reached where I was going, she died. She waited on me to minister to her as a priest. She was the one who taught me that God was always first in everything in my life.

My aunt, Mona, who was caring for her, could not believe the events. A similar thing happened with Granny's brother, Earnest. I said Mass for him, and then he died.

On her dying bed, Granny taught me the power of the priesthood to send a soul to God; that what I was doing was of immense value to the soul; that people in dementia for years were still connected with their family and needed closure to leave this earth; that the sacraments were real and had a power and efficacy of their own.

All these lessons I have used countless times with families who did not know how to release their loved ones. Hers was the first funeral I did. That is as it should have been.

## **Transmitting the faith**

In his letter to grandparents and the elderly, Pope Francis says:

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells the apostles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). These words are also addressed to us today. They help us better understand that our vocation is to preserve our roots, pass on the faith to the young, and care for the little ones. Think about it: what is our vocation today, at our age? To preserve our roots, to pass on the faith to the young, and to care for the little ones. Never forget this. (Francis, *Message to Grandparents and Elderly*)

Granny passed on the faith to us by word and deed, by her practices, her values, and her beliefs. She went to Mass every day, and my sister and I would often ride to church and join her on a morning before school.

All her brothers and sisters, who were financially much better off than she was, came to her home as the family home. She had incredible dignity. Every week, she went to market and bought items for all of us.

Several times a week, she would cook, and mum would pick up dinner on the way home. She had a spirit of humble service and a “can do” attitude. We lived in separate houses, but we were an extended family.

Pope Francis reminds us: “[T]here is no retirement age from the work of proclaiming the Gospel and handing down traditions to your grandchildren. You just need to set out and undertake something new.” (Francis, *Message to Grandparents and Elderly*)

By her life and witness, Granny did this in a most eloquent way.

## **Key Message**

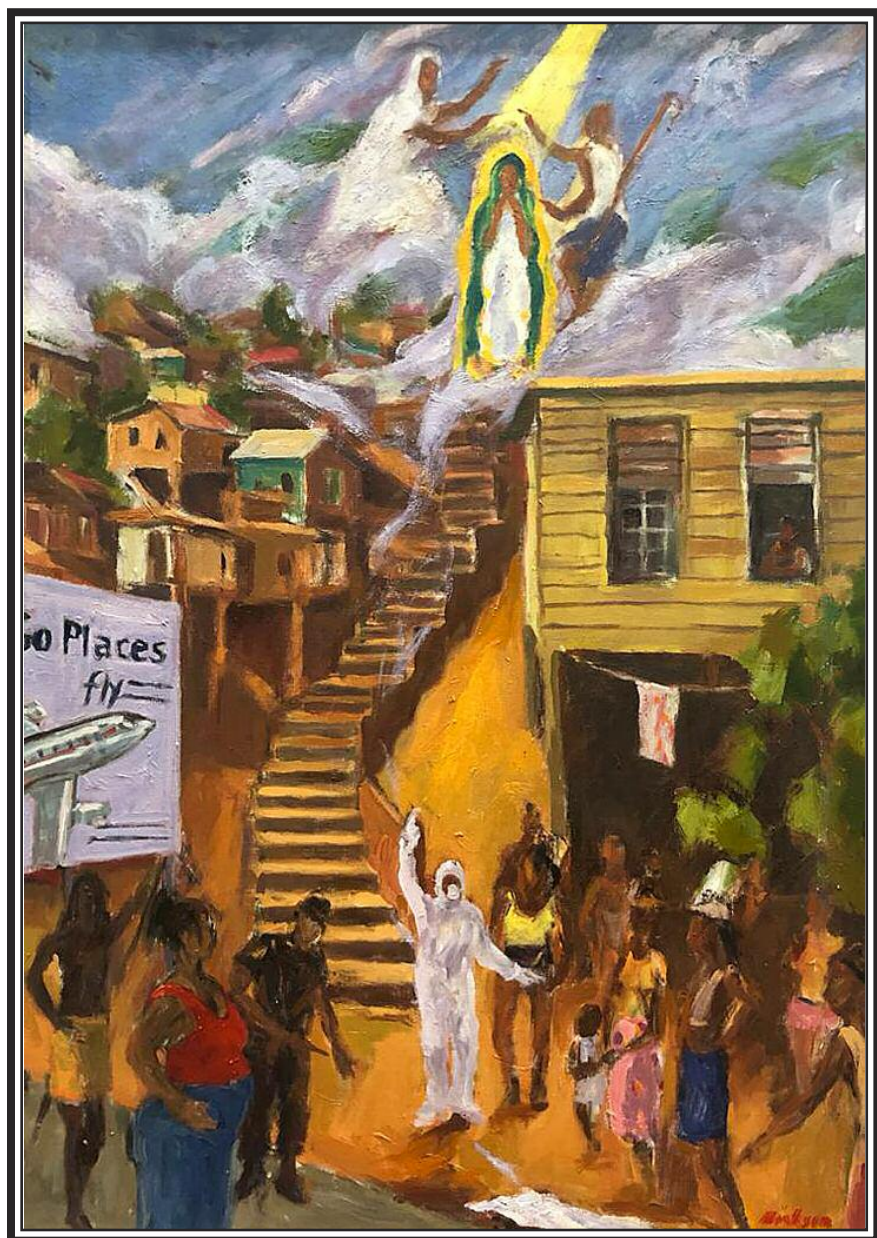
Grandparents and the elderly are essential for socialising, support, and transmitting of the faith to the next generation.

## **Action Step**

On the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, reflect on your grandparents and the elderly in your life. What practices have they handed on to you? What values? What beliefs? If they are alive, contact them. Pope Francis is giving a plenary indulgence for this. If not, pray for them during the day.

## **Scripture Reading**

Matthew 28:19-20





## CHAPTER 37

### **Destined for the Divine**

In 2019, on the Solemnity of the Assumption, we had a meeting of priests who had schools that were doing badly. We usually begin with *Lectio Divina* on the gospel of the day. On that occasion, we began with this image and had a very fruitful meditation on the Assumption. What do you see?

Some people's eyes were drawn to the top of the image with the three persons. Others are drawn to the bottom of the image with the community gathered. Wherever your eye is drawn, begin there and ask yourself: what do I see?

I like to start from below. The community is gathered around a white cloth on the ground. The policeman and the woman in the red top are pointing to it. On the far right, the man in yellow is also pointing to the cloth.

Why is the white cloth so important? Why are the people gathered? All the others are standing around looking on. What are they looking at?

The man in the centre of the frame is all in white. Because of the pandemic, we know he is in PPE. Before the pandemic, we would have known it was a man in a Hazmat suit. A community like this, a policeman, and a man in a Hazmat suit? What is going on? Clearly, there should be a dead body in this scene. But all we have is a white cloth.

You have to hear the woman in the red top and the man in the yellow saying: “I tell allyuh de dead body was here.”

This scene is so familiar in communities like this. We see it over and over on our television and the newspapers: the dead body, the man in the Hazmat suit, the crowd gathered. It is so familiar that we do not look a second time. But let us look again.

Still at the bottom, the far left, there is a Rastafarian man. He is pointing up. He is below a sign which says: “Go places, fly”. This man and the sign are pointing us elsewhere. But also, the central figure in white has one hand pointing up and the other pointing down.

These three characters are pointing us to the steps that are so familiar to us in these communities. Follow the steps. You see that the upper part is wrapped in cloud. Think Jacob’s ladder, when the angels of God were ascending and descending (Genesis 28:12). These communities are now portrayed as portals to Heaven, connections to the divine.

Yes! Laventille, Gonzales, Picton, John John, Never Dirty, St. Barbs – just to name a few of the villages that comprise Yoruba village. These are the portals to Heaven, the sacred stairways to encounter the divine – Go places, fly! Remember when Nathanael was told about Jesus, he said: “From Nazareth? Could anything good come from that place?” (John 1:46).

Following the stairs all the way to the top, we meet three persons. The figure in the centre is easily recognised as Our Lady of Guadalupe. She appeared in the New World in 1531 as a native, dressed in the traditional garb of a New World woman. There is a stream of pure light bathing her.

There are two men. One is holding a staff: the Good Shepherd. The other can be identified as, “[T]he Ancient of Days ... His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool” (Daniel 7:9).

These two, with their hands over the woman, bathe her in pure light and crown her with glory as the yellow light surrounds her. While the woman in red and the man in yellow look to the ground, the Rastaman and the man in the Hazmat suit point to where the body has gone and is now crowned in glory.

## **The Assumption**

Pope Pius XII solemnly proclaimed the Dogma of the Assumption in 1950. The doctrine states: “[T]he ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory” (*Munificentissimus Deus*, # 44).

Eastern Catholics celebrate the feast of the Dormition; they believe Mary fell asleep and was taken bodily into Heaven. The rest of the Church believes Mary died and was then taken up bodily into Heaven.

The dogma does not define which; it simply proclaims that Mary “was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory”.

The painting, like the dogma, emphasises the absence of a body. It also expressly affirms that the body is in Heaven, bathed in glory, and crowned by the Father and the Son.

When the eminent psychologist, Carl Jung, heard about the solemn proclamation of the Dogma of the Assumption, he was delighted. In 1950, the cities of Europe lay in ruins

from the Second World War. Women were still treated as inferior.

Jung saw the dogma as an affirmation of hope both for women and for Europe. If the earthly body of the woman is in Heaven, this spoke to the dignity of womanhood and the woman's body.

It also speaks to the end of death and its power (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

When I asked Jackie Hinkson to paint the Assumption to use as the card for my episcopal ordination, he tried to decline. The work took eight years to complete.

But it gives us religious imagination.

Until we can see and believe that communities like Yoruba Village, Chinatown, Enterprise, and our coastal communities are portals to the divine, we would not have understood the true significance of the Incarnation, the Assumption, or the message of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for that matter.

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## **Key Message**

The Assumption proclaims that the physical body of the woman, Mary, is in Heaven, so all women and all our communities are destined for the divine.

## **Action Step**

Consider your feelings when you heard of Yoruba Village. Was it shock or joy? Ponder this.

## **Scripture Reading**

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

## Conclusion

Thank you for accompanying me through this journey of missioning the domestic Church. We have explored many dimensions of the family. Which one struck you most forcefully? Which one best spoke to your experience or need at this time? What practical steps did you see in the text that could assist you and your family at this stage of the journey? Have you found in the text ways to assist you in missioning the domestic Church?

Each of the three sections plays an important part in missioning the family towards becoming a domestic Church. The first section lays out basic principles that are vital to exploring the visceral connection between the family and mission. In this section, the invitation was to see the family from a very different vantage point: God's perspective. In the Caribbean, we are very accustomed to the sociological perspective: what is. We are not often confronted with God's perspective on the family, God's design and desire.

I know some will argue: "That is not the family I see coming to me every day." I agree. It is not. But we have a choice. Either we continue doing mop-up duty and bandaging the wounds of the Caribbean family, or we begin charting a new course where we point the family to God's intention and accompany them in living this as best we can. By beginning with God's intention, we create a sense of the gap between that intention and the concrete family in all its realities.

My expectation is that as each family recognises the gap, it will do as much as possible to fill that gap. How?

By reflecting on it and recognising the growth and graces God wants to give them in this time to become what they are: a community of life and love.

Will every family arrive at this high ideal? No. In fact, no family will arrive. Because of the Fall, each family is an imperfect representation of the Holy Family. But each family is capable of making significant steps along the journey of transformation. It is this capacity for transformation that is at the fore of my pastoral imagination and heart.

By beginning with the sociological, we condemn the family to the simple status of statistic, and to accepting the model and category into which it falls. The status is true, but it is not the only truth. The other truth is that each family is loved by God, in all of its imperfect splendour. Each family is a conduit of grace, a community of life and love as imperfect as the common bond within it.

By seeing clearly what God intends, I pray and hope that families also recognise areas of possible growth. Every step towards God's invitation, even small ones, brings us closer to God's kingdom, orienting us to accepting grace as a daily practice.

This work is based on some big ideas and I think it best to name and explore them.

## **Missioning**

In his reflection on the call of St. Matthew, (Matthew 9:9-13), Pope Francis says that God “mercied” him; see also *The Name of God is Mercy* by Pope Francis. “Mercied” here is a verb, an action word, not a description of a quality or even an experience. By turning mercy into a verb, with God

as the subject, the Holy Father has made the experience intense, personal, and relational. I am using “missioning” in the same sense; it is an action both of God and others.

As a **present participle**, it is an action that is present and continuous. Similarly, the action is on the family, but the family participates in this action. It is not to the family with the family as the recipient of the mission. All are participants in this process of missioning, but God is the first, and by far, the most important agent.

## **Integral model**

In the Church, we have grown accustomed to seeing the parish as the unit of analysis. Most of our evaluations and action occur in the parish. Consequently, the parish itself has become resistant to cooperation with other entities, even other parishes. In fact, the parish is often seen as the sole actor on the stage. This is a fundamental challenge.

Moving the parish to mission requires that the parish comes to see itself as an integral part of the whole – a member of Christ’s Body. Many times, the parish sees itself in isolation, a lone ranger, the commissions and ecclesial communities considered a bother to its good rhythm, rather than vital partners in the mission.

Shifting the locus of analysis to the family allows us to create a new model, an Integral model. The parish, together with the diocese, other parishes, families, commissions, movements, and ecclesial communities now become partners joining hands in the missioning of the family. The parish is not being displaced as an ecclesial structure, it is given new collaborators in the mission of the Church. By

moving to an Integral model – the body of Christ – we are consciously underscoring a relational approach as vital for the success of the mission.

## Integral Human Development

This Integral model is founded on a deep theological structure: Authentic Integral Human Development. The concept was first expounded by Pope St. Paul VI in his encyclical, *On the Development of Peoples*, 1967. In this seminal work, the saintly pope gave our generation a fundamental theological category that is fast becoming a touchstone for Catholicity.

This notion of development is based on three interlocking concepts expressed in *Development of Peoples* #21:

- (1) Every human has the capacity to develop and grow in all areas of their lives;
- (2) This impulse to grow and develop is a vocation from God;
- (3) We achieve this vocation by making consistently incremental steps.

Pope Benedict XVI took this teaching and elevated it such that it is now the benchmark for all Catholic social teaching in our time. He says of it: “I express my conviction that *Populorum Progressio* deserves to be considered ‘the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age’, shedding light upon humanity’s journey towards unity” (*Charity and Truth* # 8).

Once we accept that we are capable of growth and development – in fact, called by God to work consistently towards this – then we need to see the family from this



perspective. Here, the elements on this continuum could be listed as: least human; a bit more human; more human; and *even more* human. Each family is capable of progress, and is called by God along this sacred journey from wherever it currently is towards a fuller expression of God's will for that family.

Every family is a structure of God's grace, no matter how much growth and development it needs. Every family has far to go, regardless of which sociological model it represents. This is vital; we are all on pilgrimage. It is not that some families are fully domestic Churches and others are poor imitations. ALL families are on pilgrimage. Each family needs to locate itself, wherever it is, ask God to reveal the next step it needs to take, and ask for the courage to take that step. However good we may appear as a family is immaterial; what is important is the progress that we make on our journey to the kingdom.

## **Interconnection between liturgy and life**

A Caribbean architect once said to me: "The inner landscape of the building must resonate with the outer landscape of the community and vice-versa." This same principle applies to liturgy. If a sacrament is an outward demonstration of inner grace, then there is much scope to recognise the interconnection between the inner and outer landscapes.

It is from this perspective that I attempt to reinterpret the Paschal mystery in the light of family dynamics. If the family is a domestic Church, then it is a miniature of the big Church. If the Paschal mystery is vital for the life of the big Church, it must also be vital in the life of the Church miniature. In this second section of the book, therefore, I attempt

to explore the dynamic relationship between the Paschal mystery and the family.

This dynamic is vital to understanding and capturing the transforming power of Christ – the principal actor in the missioning of the domestic Church – in the seasons of the Church. By exploring the interconnection between liturgy and life, it is hoped that families may discern concrete ways of capturing the grace of God in the life of the Church, and gradually, become better versions of themselves.

The final section applies the thinking of the Church to the difficult, and yes, vexing issues of the day. The list of topics is not exhaustive, but they give the Church's approach to tackling them. It is vital that we know that the Church has a good reason for its faith and rich insights on all areas of human experience. This, too, is vital for the missioning of the domestic Church.

Once again, thank you for accompanying me on this pilgrimage. I pray and trust that it has been fruitful for you, your family, and the families that you encounter on your missionary journey.

I place you, this work, and all our families into the hands of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Mother of the Church, and our mother too. May her intercession help all of us mission the domestic Church.

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