

Family Life

The Holy Family of Nazareth - Lk 2:41-52

Ave Maria Catholic Church, December 26, 2021 - Fr. David M Vidal

The celebration of the Holy Family of Nazareth provides us with a perfect opportunity to reflect on the importance of family life. We just celebrated the Nativity of the Lord. He came to us as a little child, choosing to enter this world within the foundation of a human family. He chose Mary, his most beautiful Mother, and He chose Joseph, his faithful foster father. He could have come to us in a different way, but He didn't. To have a family was important in God's plan of redemption. Then, let us consider the importance of family life.

What is the foundation of family life? The foundation of family life is love; particularly, the love of husband and wife united in matrimony. From that love, their children come. They are the visible expression of the love of their parents.

The Union of Husband and Wife in Holy Matrimony is a Great Mystery

Love is the foundation of matrimonies and families. In the letter to the Colossians, St. Paul teaches that "love" is the bond of perfection, (Col. 3:15). Then when he describes the union of a man and a woman in holy matrimony, St Paul indicates that it is a "great mystery" of love, (Eph 5:32), that resembles the mystery of Jesus's love. Saint Paul writes: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her," (Eph 5:25).

How beautiful is the love of Jesus! How fruitful is the love of Jesus! Because of Jesus's love we can be children of God! The love of husband and wife is also beautiful and fruitful, and it is the foundation of beautiful families. Then, the family is the summit of marriage, at least in intention if not in act. Because true love, sacrificial love is always fruitful. The union of husband and wife united in holy matrimony flourishes in the creation of new lives: their children.

Family is a Natural Society.

What is family? Family is a natural society that is formed by the community of father, mother, and their children. When we say that the family is a natural society, we mean that it is not a human invention. Men have invented banks, credit cards, basketball teams, and restaurants, but not the family. Family has its foundation in our human nature. This is God's plan for human beings since the creation of the world. Family life is not an artificial agreement but a natural bond with a natural foundation. It is not the state, nor the government, nor nations that have created the institution of the family; on the contrary, the family has created nations, governments, and states.

Human beings have the natural right to a family. Every man, if he can and wish, has the right to form a family. In the same way, every human being has the right to be born into

a family, that is, a communion of dad, mom, and siblings. Why? Because a child needs the example of a father, the love of a mother, and the company of brothers and sisters. This is what our human and spiritual development demand. Because just as a human being cannot grow outside his mother's womb, so he cannot develop and mature emotionally, morally, and spiritually outside a well-formed family. As Thomas Aquinas indicates by quoting the ancient philosophers, family is like "a spiritual womb."

The family is a community of life caring for the needs of daily life. This is why, Aristotle said that family members are companions at the table and at home. They are companions in play and learning, in psychological and emotional growth and development. The first people with whom a child plays are his parents and later his siblings. Family members are companions in spiritual exchange, in hospitality, and in cultural development. Home is not a mere place for sleeping at night. Home is the place where family members grow together physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is no wonder that "family" is also known as the "domestic church," (*Lumen Gentium*, 11).

Why are families so important for societies?

A nation—a country—exists and grows because it has families that live and grow and give birth to new families, as their children get married. A perfect society, such as a nation, does not depend on individuals but on families. Individuals may give birth to new individuals, as is the case with those who have sexual relations without forming a family. However, they do not give birth to a society because outside of the family, children are not sought, except for accidental and isolated cases, and because outside of the family, children do not usually receive what they need for their emotional, moral, and spiritual development: no one but stable parents can provide this assistance for their children. Then, when family is destroyed, society is destroyed.

What clearer example do we need than the one of those countries where the family is a story of the past and where people speak of "alternative family models"? The results speak by themselves: birth rate diminishes while mortality rate increases. Then, we learn that pleasure is not the origin of life; money is not the origin of life; but true love, sacrificial love is the origin of life. Materialistic societies, without stable marriages, without families, without children, without respect for the elders, sooner or later, if they don't change, will die.

In which way, does family life contribute to society?

At home, each man and woman acquire the principal foundation of spiritual richness which they can later spread throughout society. In the family, one acquires the main social virtues. A society is healthy when family members are socially virtuous. By being sincere with other members of the family, by being able to sacrifice oneself for the

other, by sharing responsibilities, and by setting virtuous goals, a family member learns the foundations of social life.

Now, family life contributes in another important way. Cultures depend on family life. Why do we love visiting different countries? Why do they draw our attention? Perhaps, because we discover different customs and traditions: unique songs, dances, language, paintings, architecture, history, and institutions. And when we are away from our own country, we may remember it with nostalgia because we miss our language, history, and traditions.

The question is: What does allow a culture to be established and flourish? What does keep language and traditions alive? It is not the State but the family. Language and traditions are passed on from parents to children; grandparents tell their grandchildren stories; and children learn the traditions by observing the adults.

Let us draw some important conclusions

First, a civil society lives through the preservation and cultivation of family values.

Second, all social reform that seeks to regenerate or improve society must be centered in pro-family values.

Third, the defense of family life is the primary responsibility of any rational and healthy society.

Fourth and final, we must be aware that any social plan that opposes births and allows abortion and euthanasia, any social plan that fosters division in families and redefines family life, is essentially dangerous and disintegrates a country.

Today, when family life is attacked in many ways, let us place our eyes on the Holy Family and learn from them: from Joseph, the faithful husband of Mary and the guardian of Jesus, from Mary the loving and compassionate mother, and from the child Jesus, who is obedient to his parents. If we turn our eyes towards them, and learn from them, the peace and joy of Bethlehem and Nazareth will also be ours. Amen