

Family Life: Spiritual Womb and Temple

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

Ave Maria Catholic Church, December 29, 2024 - Fr. David M Vidal

The feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth invites us to reflect on family life. We just celebrated the Nativity of the Lord. Jesus came to us. A baby boy was born in Bethlehem. He didn't suddenly appear in this world. He chose to come, and when he came, he chose to enter this world within a human family. He chose Mary, his most beautiful Mother. He chose Joseph, his faithful foster father. He could have come to us in a different way, but He didn't.

At the age of twelve, we see Jesus going to the Temple in Jerusalem with his parents. Jesus stayed behind in the Temple, in his Father's house, listening and asking questions to the doctors of the law. After finding him, Mary asked: *"Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety."* Then, the gospel indicates that Jesus, the Son of God, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, went down to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and was obedient to them, (Lk 2: 49-51).

As we learn from these passages, having a family was a crucial element in God's plan of redemption. This is why it is important for us to consider the meaning 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. Without the foundational love of husband and wife, the love of sons and daughters, siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nieces, and nephews would not exist. The love of husband and wife is a strong force that expands in time.

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

In the letter to the Colossians, St. Paul teaches that "love" is the bond of perfection, (Col. 3:15). Then, when he describes in his letter to the Ephesians 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! We can be children of God because of Jesus's love! The love of husband and wife is also beautiful and fruitful since it is the foundation of beautiful families. The constitution of a family is the summit of marriage, at least in intention, if not in act.

What is family?

Family is a natural institution formed by the community of father, mother, and children. Saying that family is a natural institution means that it is not a human invention. We, human

beings, have invented banks, basketball teams, and restaurants, but we did not invent family life. This is God's creation. 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. The institution of the family was not created by the state or a government; on the contrary, families have created nations, governments, and states.

Every human being has the right to form a family. At the same time, every human being has the right to be born into a family, that is, a communion of father, mother, and siblings. Why? Because a child needs the love of a father, the love of a mother, and the company of brothers and sisters. This is what our human and spiritual development demands. Just as a human being cannot grow outside his mother's womb, so he cannot properly mature emotionally, morally, and spiritually outside a family. Family life can be compared to a "spiritual womb," which is the name Thomas Aquinas uses by quoting the ancient philosophers.

Now, in Christ, a family is more than a "spiritual womb." In Christ, a family becomes a temple. Within a family, the members grow together physically, psychologically, and emotionally. Parents and children are companions in their meals, recreations, hospitality, celebrations, sorrows, and sacrifices. A family grows together.

However, that growth must have an ultimate goal greater than just a moment in life. The ultimate goal of a family, as a community of love, is to share the love of the family of the blessed in heaven. This is why "family" is also known as the "domestic church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11).

In the domestic church, parents have a fundamental role. Thomas Aquinas compares the role of Christian parents with the ministry of priests. He teaches: "*Some only propagate and guard spiritual life by a spiritual ministry: this is the role of the sacrament of Orders; others do this for both corporal and spiritual life, and this is brought about by the sacrament of marriage, by which a man and a woman join in order to beget offspring and bring them up to worship God*" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, IV, 58).

This is the gift of parents. They are ministers of the domestic church. Parents not only cooperate with God in the physical formation of their children but are also called to educate them spiritually.

The Second Vatican Council calls "the educational role of parents" a gift and a solemn duty. It says: "*Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely*

anything can compensate for their failure in it. . . . The family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs” (Gravissimum educationis, 3).

It is true that the State and the Church must create and foster institutions to support the needs of families. However, St. John Paul II teaches that those who are in charge of these institutions “*must never forget that the parents have been appointed by God Himself as the first and principal educators of their children and that their right is completely unchallengeable*” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 40)

It is the parents’ gift and responsibility. In their homes, in their domestic church, by virtue of their ministry of educating, parents must preach the good news of the gospel to their children with words and actions: by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them, and by introducing them to the Sacraments that Jesus gave to the Church.

Let us turn to the Holy Family and pray:

May St. Joseph—a ‘just man,’ a tireless worker, the upright guardian of those entrusted to his care—always guard, protect, and enlighten our families.

May the Virgin Mary, who is the Mother of the Church, sustain with her motherly love the “little church,” the “domestic church” of our families who live their vocation of love in Christ.

May Christ the Lord, King of the Universe, and the King of families be present in every home and radiate the light, joy, serenity, and peace He brought to the Holy Family in Bethlehem and Nazareth.