

**Homily for the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, Illinois  
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

In her book, *Mother Teresa: No Greater Love*, St. Teresa of Calcutta tells the story of a little girl she found on the street. She took the child into the Missionaries of Charity children's home and gave her clean clothes, good food, and a nice place to stay. The sisters tried hard to make the girl happy. After a few hours, she ran away, and it was a few days before Mother Teresa found her again. She brought her back to the children's home, but the little girl ran away again. One of the sisters followed her and discovered that the little girl was running back to her mother, who was so poor that she lived in the street under a tree and had meager food. When asked why she ran away, the girl replied: "I could not live without my mother. She loves me." The whole time the child was with the Missionaries, she did not smile. But with her mother, she was smiling. Why? Because they were family. The mother and daughter in Mother Teresa's story show how strong this bond can be.

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The Holy Family is the model of the ideal family. Their devotion to each other is unequalled, and their obedience to God is perfect.

We are called to be reflections of God's love and our families should reflect the love of the Holy Family. The mutual love we share in our homes should extend outward, to others, as an example of God's love. We must show this in all that we do and say to each other and to those outside the family.

In his book, *Understanding Marriage & Family: A Catholic Perspective*, Father Sebastian Walshe, a priest of the Norbertine community at St. Michael's Abbey in Orange, California, describes the Holy Family as a source of revelation about the family. While marriage and family life were around long before the birth of Jesus, the Holy Family holds up for us the epitome of what family life should be like. As Father Walshe explains,

When God became man, He could have assumed our nature in any number of ways. He could have come like a full-grown man, like Adam, without human generation. He could have been born of a virgin who was not married. But instead, he desired to assume our nature as part of a complete human family, with both father and mother. This simple fact of revelation already manifests a profound truth: the natural human family is the ideal

place for a child to come to be and live. With all His wisdom and omnipotence, God could find no better place in which to be born and live. Attempts by modern man to find a better substitute for the natural family are destined to fail.<sup>1</sup>

Father Walshe describes five signs marking what a flourishing Christian family should look like. Before doing so, however, he notes that it is not necessary that there be no trials or difficulties for a Christian family to flourish: “Many trials such as financial failure, tragedies from accidents, sickness, physical or mental disabilities, etc. . . . are often key aspects which allow the supernatural character of a flourishing Christian family to shine forth. Certain Christian virtues simply cannot grow to perfection without serious trials and difficulties.”<sup>2</sup>

Keeping that in mind, Father Walshe then describes the five marks of a flourishing Christian family:

**1<sup>st</sup> Mark: Integrity**

The first mark of a flourishing Christian family is integrity, namely, that the whole family (i.e., father, mother and children) is present and active. The family is not divided by divorce, or strife between the parents or among the children. The family is often together as a whole on a daily basis. The father does not go off frequently on his own away from the family. The mother is

not frequently away from her husband or her children. The children are not usually out with their friends apart from the rest of the family.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Mark: Communion**

Communion . . . means that the members within the family share one life. Each person in a happy family knows, loves, is known by, and is loved by all the others. Therefore there is a mutual containment of each in each, or of all in all, by love and knowledge. . . .

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Mark: Order and Harmony**

In a flourishing Christian family, there is order and harmony. . . . In summary, the love of the husband for his wife leaves no doubt that he exercises his authority for her good, and that he respects her as an equal . . . Moreover, the love of the parents for the children leave no doubt that they exercise their authority over their children for their good. The wife for her part respects and supports her husband, especially in difficult circumstances. The children give honor and cheerful obedience to their parents. As a consequence, the family is able to act together as one, and work in harmony with one another. Each member of the family prefers the common good of the family to their private interests.

**4<sup>th</sup> Mark: Begetting New Life**

The good is diffusive of itself. In other words, goodness draws and incorporates others into its own goodness. The happy family will diffuse its own goodness in the same way and will reflect more profoundly the generative aspect of communion found in God. A happily married couple who live in a communion of love will be generous in bringing new life into the world and communicating their own happiness to their children. This communication of goodness and life to the children is the main business of Christian education, for the life of man is primarily the life of the spirit. It is also a sign for the children of the very love of God for them as well as the love found in the Trinity of the Father for the Son. . . .

**5<sup>th</sup> Mark: Striving Beyond the Natural to the Supernatural**

The most proper mark of a flourishing Christian family is that the supernatural goods are preeminent in such a way as to complete and perfect the natural goods of family life. . . . The goods which the parents communicate to their children and to others outside their homes are primarily spiritual goods: the truths of the faith, the love of prayer and the sacraments, etc. The entire life of the flourishing Christian family should be suffused with the supernatural: with faith, hope and charity, in such a way that the natural goods are perfected, not corrupted.<sup>3</sup>

As we honor the Holy Family today and consider our own families, let us keep in mind these marks of a flourishing Christian family: integrity, communion, order and harmony, begetting new life, and striving beyond the natural to the supernatural. We pray that God will help us to overcome hardships, disappointments, disagreements, and any other obstacles that may come our way, that we may grow in the communion of God's love and love for one another. In this Eucharist, may our hearts be filled with gratitude as we prepare to unite as one in the Body of Christ.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Father Sebastian Walshe, O. Praem. *Understanding Marriage & Family: A Catholic Perspective* (Waterloo, Ontario: Arouca Press, 2020), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168-173.