

**THE CATHOLIC FAMILY IS
THE PLACE WHERE GOD MAKES HIS HOME**

Is. 66: 10-14 & Lk. 10: 1-12, 17-20

The family is the basic unit of society, and the Christian family is the basic unit of the Church. Indeed it is called the “Domestic Church” and, of all the vocations from God to which we might be called as a means of making our way to Heaven, the first in the Bible is the vocation to family life. It was God’s will from the dawn of creation that the human family should flourish. Every nuclear human family is meant to be a reflection of God, the Trinity. Just as the love between God the Father and God the Son is God the Holy Spirit, so also the love between a husband and wife issues forth as a child. The health of both Church and society depends on the health of the basic family. Today, there are many factors in western society which seek to undermine family life. There is an urgent need, therefore, to affirm the beauty of family life, to celebrate it in the liturgy and to proclaim to each family the Good News of the joy of peace from today’s readings, “Rejoice, be glad! Peace to this house!”

The foundation of family life is the love between a man and a woman. In the opening of the Book of Genesis we are told that when God looked for a helpmate for the man, God created a woman, not another man. While we must show compassion for people’s disordered sexual orientations, it is clear that a homosexual union is deeply offensive in God’s sight, and can never become the basis of the human family. This is not a matter of human rights, but of God’s will.

In the same biblical narrative, the man formally accepts the woman in the presence of God saying, “This, at last, is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh.” The new family is integrated by such a mutual consent and acceptance, given publicly in the presence of witnesses. This public act is what we call marriage. For a baptised Catholic marriage should always take place in the presence of a Catholic priest and two witnesses. Marriage is not a private affair which permits the couple to cohabit by mutual consent. Again, by God’s will, a family only comes into being through marriage.

Another feature of this love is that it endures until death. It is only such a permanent commitment that can guarantee the environment in which the family can grow and flourish. Living out this commitment will often demand a heroic degree of love, involving sacrifice and forgiveness, but such is the substance of which true love is made. That is the kind of spousal love which Christ showed for His Bride, the Church – love which goes beyond feelings and endures until death. So from the beginning “What God has joined together, man must not divide.”

The intimate sharing of life and love which culminates in a sexual union is, of necessity, exclusive to the spouses. This may seem naive to a permissive culture, but is of paramount importance. As Catholics, we have a mission to demonstrate to the world the sanctity, not only of fidelity within the marriage, but also virginity before marriage. Our young people should be encouraged to live chastely, so that they present themselves to their spouses as a pure, unsoiled gift on the day of their wedding.

Family life, by its very nature, is meant to be open to the creation of new life. When God created Adam and Eve, He gave the command, "Be fruitful and multiply." This command is impossible in a homosexual relationship! Children are precious gifts from God, and are rightly called the "crowning glory of marriage." We are reminded in a special way, today, of the inviolable dignity of life which begins at the moment of conception. We pray that the evil of abortion will be ended, and that those who have had an abortion will repent and be healed of the pain. If we are truly "Pro Life" then we would not only be opposed to abortion, but totally open to new life within marriage. Our Lord asked His disciples not to stop children coming to Him. In the same way, He asks every married couple not to put barriers which obstruct the conception of children. Thus, the Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit teaches us that the unitive and procreative parts of marital love should not be separated by using artificial methods like the pill and the condom. God wants us to accept and welcome children, as and when He sends them. The family is the community where the children first experience love, education and formation in the faith. We count today the blessings with which God desires to endow family life!

Lord Jesus, every Catholic family is a place where Father, Son and Holy Spirit make Their home. Let the parents and children together welcome You into their midst by praying together regularly as a family. Today, as we celebrate the blessings of family life, we pray for couples who have suffered bereavement or separation, that they may experience God's healing and love. Finally, we pray for all children that their dignity may be respected and that they will grow up in a loving and faith-filled family environment to know, love and serve You in this world - and to be happy with You in Heaven.

**WHAT WE CAN LEARN
FROM THE BABY AT ITS MOTHER'S BREAST**

Is. 66:10-14 & Lk. 10:1-12, 17-20

If we were asked to think of an image which conveys to us the meaning of peace, each of us would probably come up with a different, though valid suggestion. Today's First Reading from Isaiah presents us with one particularly beautiful image of peace with which few people would disagree - a baby sucking away at its mother's breast.

A baby's world is its mother, on whom it is totally dependent for all its needs. As long as its mother is around, it knows for certain that these will be met. What then are some of the needs which the baby expects its mother to satisfy?

The first and most obvious requirement is food. The baby's physical survival depends on the availability of milk, and therefore the primary function of the breast is lactation.

Second is security. Whenever the baby feels frightened, it instinctively turns to its mother for support, or cries out for her if she is absent. Once the mother comes round to carry the baby, the crying stops.

The mother's presence is also a source of comfort during times when the baby is physically indisposed, such as when restless, or experiencing a gripe, or suffering from some illness. The baby looks to the mother for healing.

Fourth, on a psychological and spiritual level, the baby's greatest need is love: for a healthy development it needs the assurance of the mother's unconditional love, expressed in concrete ways which are intelligible to its senses – in smiles, talk, kisses, cuddles etc.

When we say that a baby is at peace at its mother's breast, therefore, we mean that is in a state of contentment in which its needs for food security, comfort and love have all been met. The same can now be transformed to the world of adults.

As the Second Vatican Council reminded us, peace is not merely the absence of war but much more than that. Indeed the absence of war is merely one of the consequences of peace, and this peace must first take root in individual hearts. It is from these that it spreads to the society, to the nation and, finally, to the whole world. This means that if the world is to be at peace every individual, too, must be at peace. All the elements that go to make up this peace are to be found in Christ, in the person of whom the Kingdom of God has come. That is why Jesus sends out His disciples in pairs, to announce the arrival of the Kingdom of God and to communicate its peace ... "Peace be to this house". The Kingdom of God cannot be separated from peace. To welcome the one is to welcome the other.

For those who welcome the Kingdom of God and accept Jesus as their Lord and Christ, Jesus Himself becomes their food to satisfy their hunger. One of the ways He does this is by His words in Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospel. "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." The Gospel is like a spring which never runs dry, but perpetually refreshes us and quenches our thirst for the truth. Jesus is, indeed, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The second way by which Jesus satisfies our hunger is through His Sacraments which He has entrusted to the Church. Every Sacrament is a powerful encounter with Christ, but it is in the Eucharist that we especially receive Jesus as our food. His Body and Blood are given to us as our ultimate nourishment. Holy Mother Church feeds us with our spiritual milk who is Christ Himself. Day after day, and Sunday after Sunday, the faithful are nourished

Just as a baby is nourished and fed at its mother's breast and there finds love, security and peace, so we at the altar of the Lord are fed on the word of God and the Body of Christ - and find all the love, security and peace we need for a fulfilled life.

Lord Jesus, may we listen attentively to Your word and receive You at least every Sunday in Holy Communion and so come to that peace You wish us to enjoy.

PRAY FOR A MISSIONARY HEART

Lk. 10:1-12, 17-20

Just before I began to write this homily I received two letters one from my elder sister and one from a friend. Both were lamenting the fact that for the first time in their parishes were unable to have daily Mass. This was due to a shortage of priests. They just took it for granted that they could go to Church every day and there would always be a priest to say Mass for them. Now they are realising what they are missing. This lack of daily Mass is going to be more frequent in our Churches. You could say we have been spoiled. It is only now that we are feeling the pinch.

I don't know what you think but there are times like these I wish I was a bishop. The Church in Aid of Need tell us that in some countries, like Africa, South America and Asia there are so many young men who feel called to the priesthood but there are no seminaries to train them. If I was a bishop in our country I would ask all the bishops to raise funds and build seminaries in these countries, staff them and train these young men to be missionaries in our country. A fund could be set up in each parish to raise the money needed to build these seminaries and ask these young men once they are ordained to come and serve our needs. I really believe this can be done. If you feel as strongly as I do about this why not approach your bishop and put this project to him. I am writing this sermon during Low Week when the bishops meet annually to discuss the needs of the faith in our country. I shall put this idea to them, if they have not thought of it already. We can only sow the seed.

In today's Gospel we see Jesus sending out seventy-two disciples to do His work. Jesus said, 'the harvest is rich but the labourers are few'. Those words are as true today as they were when He spoke them. There are so many people in our country who don't know the Good News that Jesus who is God became Man, died and rose from the dead to save us from sins and Hell and lead us to Heaven. If we are really grateful for what He did for us we should not only express our thanks to Him in words but do all we can to spread the Good News that He came to bring us. The missionaries from our countries are smaller in number but they are still doing marvellous work, travelling hundreds of miles each week to bring the Mass and sacraments to people who hunger for them. They also offer them financial and medical aid. Now is the time for young men and women from Third World countries to be missionaries to us. I'm convinced that the vocations in the world are there. If the young people in our country are not heeding His call we have to help those in poorer countries whom God is calling. They are so poor that they haven't the funds to fulfil their hopes and dreams. We may not be millionaires. We have mortgages and bills to pay but in comparison to them we have much more. If each gave as they can we could

get this project off the ground. Now is the time to help them so that they in turn can help us.

We don't like to see our Churches closing and communities being broken up in our country. This need not be if we could get vocations from abroad. Those young men and women could serve us in Churches that are ready made and fulfil the desires of parishioners who long for their churches to remain open.

It is so easy for us to be despondent. We have to think positively. If knowing Jesus means the world to us, we can help to make it mean the world to others. We should all commit ourselves personally to making Him known to others and that will make a difference. We could pray today, when we read about Jesus sending out His seventy-two disciples, to the Holy Spirit to give us a missionary spirit not only in our own hearts, but the whole of the Church. We could offer our prayers that our bishops who have the power and influence to fulfil the hopes and dreams of potential vocations in the Third World would do so. May it be the dream of every young couple who love Jesus and the Catholic faith to rear a family from which God would sow the seed of a vocation to the priesthood and religious life.

Lord Jesus, give each one of us a missionary spirit so that we would do our part in helping young men and women to be labourers in Christ's vineyard and so draw in His rich harvest.

GO SPREAD THE KINGDOM

Lk.10:1-12, 17-20

How carefully did we listen to today's Gospel? Were we conscious that the words Jesus addressed to His seventy two disciples were addressed to us His followers? Jesus' command is "Go." The Kingdom cannot be spread while sitting in an easy chair. We cannot wait for the world that needs Christ to come to our door. Christ's work is out there in the world. We cannot sit back and let opportunities go by, hoping someone else will take the initiative. To do that is simply to say a "no" to Christ's command.

"Go" means sensitizing our heart and eyes to those who are hungry for Christ and those who do not know Him. We must believe the power and grace of Christ can transform the lives of our family members who have strayed from the Lord and those who feel they have no need of Him. In the culture of sickness and death that we see all around us we should hear Jesus saying, "Go. Reach out to these people who need to know Me, so that My Kingdom will expand." We cannot take the easy route of preaching to the converted; we must reach out to those professions and fields of study that have lost all sense of the dignity of the human person - especially medicine, law, politics and education. This is what the King is asking. What response are we giving to our King?

Christ's command is to give from what we have received. We cannot give from what we do not possess. If every day we make ourselves more aware of the gifts we have been given through Christ's power, we will be better equipped at giving Christ to others.

As apostles, we go not with our own power; rather, we carry Christ's power to heal, save and conquer evil. It is He who drives the mission, who makes the apostles a team. How often when we work for the Lord we are only conscious of our own strength and abilities and we do not rely on the force of His power? How often we give only from what is just ours, rather than from the graces we have received from the Holy Spirit? We should not measure our effectiveness solely from our own individual perspective, but from that of the whole body of the Church, in which other apostles are locked arm-in-arm with us for the cause of Christ? We must never forget that God's saving power is found where obedience and unity are, not where only natural talents, gifts and abilities are at play.

Jesus affirms and reminds us that when we reach an impasse in our lives, this does not mean a lack of the authenticity of our mission. Rather it should make us aware that the effectiveness of our efforts is tied to the free-will choices of others. There are some who will cooperate with us and others who will not. It is also a moment when we have to ask is this apparent barrenness a part of God's economy of salvation. A period of few fruits in the mission can be a period of consolidation of our commitment to follow Him whether we taste success or failure. This should be our opportunity to prove to the Lord that we want to banish all discouragement and doubt and how authentic is our "yes". A pure "yes" will seek God's will and we leave the success or failure of our efforts in His hands. We look upon the mission at hand simply as He wants it, not for any easy or short-term results.

So let our prayer be, "Lord Jesus, we wish to ignite our own zeal for Your Kingdom from the furnace of divine love which burns in Your heart. We offer You the promise of a soldier in combat: to be courageous, honourable, persevering, and worthy of the name we bear - "Apostle of the Kingdom of Christ." We work aware of the fact that we have only one life to live on this earth. Not one minute must be wasted in comfort-seeking and selfishness. Lord Jesus make our hearts ready for this mission. Sustain it today with Your strength and the ability you have given us.

THE WORK OF AN APOSTLE

Lk. 10:1-12, 17-20

This has to be a very special Gospel for all Franciscans. It was on the feast of one of the Apostles that this Gospel was being read out in a Church. Francis of Assisi had recently been converted from a worldly life to one dedicated to the Lord. He was wondering how God wanted him to live his life from now on. On hearing these words he said to himself, "These words are being addressed to me. I am to travel light for God will provide for me. I am to go to every town and village and tell them this simple message, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand.' He was excited for now his vocation was to preach everywhere and tell people all about Jesus.

At this moment of my life I am happy that like Francis I have been given the job of preaching parish Missions up and down the country. Jesus told us that we were to travel light. Times have changed and I can't travel as light as Jesus described. I have a red Vivaro Vauxhall van to carry me around. Instead of cash I carry a credit card to buy diesel. In my van I take my guitar and computer, change of clothing, crochet needle and wool for I

am a crochetic and raise money for the starving. I also carry books I have written and CDs I have recorded to be sold at the Missions. I certainly don't travel light. I have asked myself the question, "What does Our Lord and Francis think of me travelling in this fashion?" I am sure they would approve. In fact our Constitutions encourage us to keep up with the times, to have those modern things that will help us in our work. If I was to walk from place to place I would never be able to give the many Missions a year as I do.

I hope that the message I preach is the one that Jesus would have me preach. I pray that it can be summed up in the words, "The Kingdom of God is at hand for you." I go through the Commandments helping people to examine their conscience in order to make a good preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The topics I preach about are the Person of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Mass, our greatest treasure, Mary, Prayer, Marriage and family life. I make myself available for Confessions before and after each Mission service. It is wonderful to see how many penitents humbly and truthfully confess their sins. Some are given the grace to come back to this Sacrament after many years away from it, as long as 20 or 30 years. God gives some the grace to pluck up courage and make good Confessions after being afraid for years from confessing sins of abortion, adultery and theft. Jesus says in the Gospel that you are to bring peace wherever you go and I can assure you those people who make Confessions like these are given the peace of Christ. Something they have not experienced for years. Satan must hate such work because all he wants is to see people worried and fearful. He hates us to be at peace with God and one another. This peace fits in so well with what Jesus says in the Gospel, "I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky." That is just what I experience when I hear people making truthful and humble confessions.

There is another point that we need to stress from today's Gospel and that is, "The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few; so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to His harvest." So praying for vocations, the kind of work that I am doing at the moment, is not an option. It is a command of the Lord. If there has been a dearth of vocations in the last twenty or thirty years could it be because we have not taken this command of the Lord seriously? In this country we desperately need priests and religious to carry on the work of Christ and His Apostles. People are complaining that Churches are closing and Masses have to be dropped because of a shortage of priests. If you don't want this to happen beg the Lord to send labourers to work in His harvest. Remind Our Lord of His words, "Ask and you will receive." In other words we are not going to take no for an answer.

One of my ambitions in life is that before I die I pray that two young men will look at the life I lead and will follow in my footsteps. So if there are any young men out there who would like to lead the life of an apostle, like Francis of Assisi, they can get in touch with me and we will get in touch with our Vocation's Director and ascertain if you have a vocation for this type of work. I can assure you it is not always easy but it has loads of job satisfaction and the reward as Jesus says in the Gospel is that 'your names will be written in Heaven.'

Lord Jesus, instil in the hearts of our young people the grace to be apostles like St. Francis of Assisi for the harvest is rich but the labourers are few.