



“Making Memory of His Legacy to Strengthen Our Identity”

ST. MARY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Cathedral of the Diocese of Peoria

November 18th, 2013

Theme: “The Family, the heart of the new civilization of love”

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO AND LETTER TO THE FAMILIES

JOYFUL MYSTERIES

I. The Annunciation

“The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming to her he said: “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.” Mary said: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:26-33, 38).

(FC, n.17)s 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 that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, become what you are.

Accordingly, the family must go back to the "beginning" of God's creative act, if it is to attain self-knowledge and self-realization in accordance with the inner truth not only of what it is but also of what it does in history. And since in God's plan it has been established as an "intimate community of life and love,"(44) the family has the mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love, in an effort that will find fulfillment, as will everything created and redeemed, in the Kingdom of God. Looking at it in such a way as to reach its very roots, we must say that the essence and role of the family are in the final analysis specified by love. Hence the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride.

Every particular task of the family is an expressive and concrete actuation of that fundamental mission. We must therefore go deeper into the unique riches of the family's mission and probe its contents, which are both manifold and unified. Thus, with love as its point of departure and making constant reference to it, the recent Synod emphasized four general tasks for the family:

1) forming a community of persons;

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- 2) serving life;
 - 3) participating in the development of society;
 - 4) sharing in the life and mission of the Church.

Mother and Queen of the Family, pray for us!

II. The Visitation

“During those days Mary set out and traveled to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.” (Luke 1: 39-45)

After affirming that man is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, the Council immediately goes on to say that he cannot “fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self”. This might appear to be a contradiction, but in fact it is not. Instead it is the magnificent paradox of human existence: an existence called to serve the truth in love. Love causes man to find fulfillment through the sincere gift of self. To love means to give and to receive something which can be neither bought nor sold, but only given freely and mutually.

By its very nature the gift of the person must be lasting and irrevocable. The indissolubility of marriage flows in the first place from the very essence of that gift: the gift of one person to another person. This reciprocal giving of self reveals the spousal nature of love. In their marital consent the bride and groom call each other by name: “I... take you... as my wife (as my husband) and I promise to to be true to you... for all the days of my life”. A gift such as this involves an obligation much more serious and profound than anything which might be “purchased” in any way and at any price. Kneeling before the Father, from whom all fatherhood and motherhood come, the future parents come to realize that they have been “redeemed”. They have been purchased at great cost, by the price of the most sincere gift of all, the blood of Christ of which they partake through the Sacrament. The liturgical crowning of the marriage rite is the Eucharist, the sacrifice of that “Body which has been given up” and that “Blood which has been shed”, which in a certain way finds expression in the consent of the spouses. (LF, n. 11)

The Second Vatican Council, particularly conscious of the problem of man and his calling, states that the conjugal union, the biblical “una caro”, can be understood and fully explained only by recourse to the values of the “person” and of “gift”. Every man and every woman fully realizes himself or herself through the sincere gift of self. For spouses, the moment of conjugal union constitutes a very particular expression of this. It is then that a man and woman, in the “truth” of their masculinity and femininity, become a mutual gift to each other. All married life is a gift; but this becomes most evident when the spouses, in giving themselves to each other in love, bring about that encounter which makes them “one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

They then experience a moment of special responsibility, which is also the result of the procreative potential linked to the conjugal act. At that moment, the spouses can become father and mother, initiating the process of a new human life, which will then develop in the woman's womb. If the wife is the first to realize that she has become a mother, the husband, to whom she has been united in “one flesh”, then learns this when she tells him that he has become a father. Both are responsible for their potential and later actual fatherhood and motherhood. The husband cannot fail to acknowledge and

accept the result of a decision which has also been his own. He cannot hide behind expressions such as: "I don't know", "I didn't want it", or "you're the one who wanted it". In every case conjugal union involves the responsibility of the man and of the woman, a potential responsibility which becomes actual when the circumstances dictate. This is true especially for the man. Although he too is involved in the beginning of the generative process, he is left biologically distant from it; it is within the woman that the process develops. How can the man fail to assume responsibility? The man and the woman must assume together, before themselves and before others, the responsibility for the new life which they have brought into existence. (LF, n. 12)

Mother and Queen of the Family, pray for us!

III. The Birth of Our Lord

"The time came for Mary to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.'" (Luke 2:6-12)

When a man and woman in marriage mutually give and receive each other in the unity of "one flesh", the logic of the sincere gift of self becomes a part of their life. Without this, marriage would be empty; whereas a communion of persons, built on this logic, becomes a communion of parents. When they transmit life to the child, a new human "thou" becomes a part of the horizon of the "we" of the spouses, a person whom they will call by a new name: "our son...; our daughter...". "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Gen 4:1), says Eve, the first woman of history: a human being, first expected for nine months and then "revealed" to parents, brothers and sisters. The process from conception and growth in the mother's womb to birth makes it possible to create a space within which the new creature can be revealed as a "gift": indeed this is what it is from the very beginning. Could this frail and helpless being, totally dependent upon its parents and completely entrusted to them, be seen in any other way? The newborn child gives itself to its parents by the very fact of its coming into existence. Its existence is already a gift, the first gift of the Creator to the creature.

In the newborn child is realized the common good of the family. Just as the common good of spouses is fulfilled in conjugal love, ever ready to give and receive new life, so too the common good of the family is fulfilled through that same spousal love, as embodied in the newborn child. Part of the genealogy of the person is the genealogy of the family, preserved for posterity by the annotations in the Church's baptismal registers, even though these are merely the social consequence of the fact that "a man has been born into the world" (cf. Jn 16:21).

But is it really true that the new human being is a gift for his parents? A gift for society? Apparently nothing seems to indicate this. On occasion the birth of a child appears to be a simple statistical fact, registered like so many other data in demographic records. It is true that for the parents the birth of a child means more work, new financial burdens and further inconveniences, all of which can lead to the temptation not to want another birth. In some social and cultural contexts this temptation can become very strong. Does this mean that a child is not a gift? That it comes into the world only to take and not to give? These are some of the disturbing questions which men and women today find hard to escape. A child comes to take up room, when it seems that there is less and less room in the world. But is it really true that a child brings nothing to the family and society? Is not every child a "particle" of that common

good without which human communities break down and risk extinction? Could this ever really be denied? The child becomes a gift to its brothers, sisters, parents and entire family. Its life becomes a gift for the very people who were givers of life and who cannot help but feel its presence, its sharing in their life and its contribution to their common good and to that of the community of the family. This truth is obvious in its simplicity and profundity, whatever the complexity and even the possible pathology of the psychological make-up of certain persons. The common good of the whole of society dwells in man; he is, as we recalled, "the way of the Church". Man is first of all the "glory of God": "Gloria Dei vivens homo", in the celebrated words of Saint Irenaeus, which might also be translated: "the glory of God is for man to be alive". It could be said that here we encounter the loftiest definition of man: the glory of God is the common good of all that exists; the common good of the human race.

Yes! Man is a common good: a common good of the family and of humanity, of individual groups and of different communities. But there are significant distinctions of degree and modality in this regard. Man is a common good, for example, of the Nation to which he belongs and of the State of which he is a citizen; but in a much more concrete, unique and unrepeatable way he is a common good of his family. He is such not only as an individual who is part of the multitude of humanity, but rather as "this individual". God the Creator calls him into existence "for himself"; and in coming into the world he begins, in the family, his "great adventure", the adventure of human life. "This man" has, in every instance, the right to fulfill himself on the basis of his human dignity. It is precisely this dignity which establishes a person's place among others, and above all, in the family. The family is indeed—more than any other human reality—the place where an individual can exist "for himself" through the sincere gift of self. This is why it remains a social institution which neither can nor should be replaced: it is the "sanctuary of life".

The fact that a child is being born, that "a child is born into the world" (Jn 16:21) is a paschal sign. As we read in the Gospel of John, Jesus himself speaks of this to the disciples before his passion and death, comparing their sadness at his departure with the pains of a woman in labour: "When a woman is in travail she has sorrow (that is, she suffers), because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world" (Jn 16:21). The "hour" of Christ's death (cf. Jn 13:1) is compared here to the "hour" of the woman in birthpangs; the birth of a new child fully reflects the victory of life over death brought about by the Lord's Resurrection. This comparison can provide us with material for reflection. Just as the Resurrection of Christ is the manifestation of Life beyond the threshold of death, so too the birth of an infant is a manifestation of life, which is always destined, through Christ, for that "fullness of life" which is in God himself: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). Here we see revealed the deepest meaning of Saint Irenaeus's expression: "Gloria Dei vivens homo".

It is the Gospel truth concerning the gift of self, without which the person cannot "fully find himself", which makes possible an appreciation of how profoundly this "sincere gift" is rooted in the gift of God, Creator and Redeemer, and in the "grace of the Holy Spirit" which the celebrant during the Rite of Marriage prays will be "poured out" on the spouses. Without such an "outpouring", it would be very difficult to understand all this and to carry it out as man's vocation. Yet how many people understand this intuitively! Many men and women make this truth their own, coming to discern that only in this truth do they encounter "the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6). Without this truth, the life of the spouses and of the family will not succeed in attaining a fully human meaning.

This is why the Church never tires of teaching and of bearing witness to this truth. While certainly showing maternal understanding for the many complex crisis situations in which families are involved, as well as for the moral frailty of every human being, the Church is convinced that she must remain

absolutely faithful to the truth about human love. Otherwise she would betray herself. To move away from this saving truth would be to close "the eyes of our hearts" (cf. Eph 1:18), which instead should always stay open to the light which the Gospel sheds on human affairs (cf. 2 Tim 1:10). An awareness of that sincere gift of self whereby man "finds himself" must be constantly renewed and safeguarded in the face of the serious opposition which the Church meets on the part of those who advocate a false civilization of progress. The family always expresses a new dimension of good for mankind, and it thus creates a new responsibility. We are speaking of the responsibility for that particular common good in which is included the good of the person, of every member of the family community.

Mother and Queen of the Family, pray for us!

IV. The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

"There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon... When the parents brought in the child Jesus, Simeon took him into his arms and said: 'Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation' Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother: 'Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and you, a sword shall pierce your heart that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'" (Luke 2:25-35)

Dear families, the question of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is an integral part of the "civilization of love", which I now wish to discuss with you. From what has already been said it is clear that the family is fundamental to what Pope Paul VI called the "civilization of love", an expression which has entered the teaching of the Church and by now has become familiar. Today it is difficult to imagine a statement by the Church, or about the Church, which does not mention the civilization of love. The phrase is linked to the tradition of the "domestic church" in early Christianity, but it has a particular significance for the present time. Etymologically the word "civilization" is derived from "civis" – "citizen", and it emphasizes the civic or political dimension of the life of every individual. But the most profound meaning of the term "civilization" is not merely political, but rather pertains to human culture. Civilization belongs to human history because it answers man's spiritual and moral needs. Created in the image and likeness of God, man has received the world from the hands of the Creator, together with the task of shaping it in his own image and likeness. The fulfillment of this task gives rise to civilization, which in the final analysis is nothing else than the "humanization of the world".

In a certain sense civilization means the same thing as "culture". And so one could also speak of the "culture of love", even though it is preferable to keep to the now familiar expression. The civilization of love, in its current meaning, is inspired by the words of the conciliar Constitution Gaudium et Spes: "Christ... fully discloses man to himself and unfolds his noble calling". And so we can say that the civilization of love originates in the revelation of the God who "is love", as John writes (1 Jn 4:8, 16); it is effectively described by Paul in the hymn of charity found in his First Letter to the Corinthians (13:1-13). This civilization is intimately linked to the love "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5), and it grows as a result of the constant cultivation which the Gospel allegory of the vine and the branches describes in such a direct way: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (Jn 15:1-2).

In the light of these and other texts of the New Testament it is possible to understand what is meant by the "civilization of love", and why the family is organically linked to this civilization. If the first "way of

the Church" is the family, it should also be said that the civilization of love is also the "way of the Church", which journeys through the world and summons families to this way; it summons also other social, national and international institutions, because of families and through families. The family in fact depends for several reasons on the civilization of love, and finds therein the reasons for its existence as family. And at the same time the family is the centre and the heart of the civilization of love.

Yet there is no true love without an awareness that God "is Love"—and that man is the only creature on earth which God has called into existence "for its own sake". Created in the image and likeness of God, man cannot fully "find himself" except through the sincere gift of self. Without such a concept of man, of the person and the "communion of persons" in the family, there can be no civilization of love; similarly, without the civilization of love it is impossible to have such a concept of person and of the communion of persons. The family constitutes the fundamental "cell" of society. But Christ—the "vine" from which the "branches" draw nourishment—is needed so that this cell will not be exposed to the threat of a kind of cultural uprooting which can come both from within and from without. Indeed, although there is on the one hand the "civilization of love", there continues to exist on the other hand the possibility of a destructive "anti-civilization", as so many present trends and situations confirm. (LF, 13)

Mother and Queen of the Family, pray for us!

V. The Child Jesus Lost and Found in the Temple

"Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover...As they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it...Not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers." (Luke 2:41-47)

Who can deny that our age is one marked by a great crisis, which appears above all as a profound "crisis of truth"? A crisis of truth means, in the first place, a crisis of concepts. Do the words "love", "freedom", "sincere gift", and even "person" and "rights of the person", really convey their essential meaning? This is why the Encyclical on the "splendour of truth" (Veritatis Splendor) has proved so meaningful and important for the Church and for the world—especially in the West. Only if the truth about freedom and the communion of persons in marriage and in the family can regain its splendour, will the building of the civilization of love truly begin and will it then be possible to speak concretely—as the Council did—about "promoting the dignity of marriage and the family".

It is evident that in this sort of a cultural situation the family cannot fail to feel threatened, since it is endangered at its very foundations. Everything contrary to the civilization of love is contrary to the whole truth about man and becomes a threat to him: it does not allow him to find himself and to feel secure, as spouse, parent, or child. So-called "safe sex", which is touted by the "civilization of technology", is actually, in view of the overall requirements of the person, radically not safe, indeed it is extremely dangerous. It endangers both the person and the family. And what is this danger? It is the loss of the truth about one's own self and about the family, together with the risk of a loss of freedom and consequently of a loss of love itself. "You will know the truth", Jesus says, "and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32): the truth, and only the truth, will prepare you for a love which can be called "fairest love" (cf. Sir 24:24, Vulg.).

The civilization of love evokes joy: joy, among other things, for the fact that a man has come into the world (cf. Jn 16:21), and consequently because spouses have become parents. The civilization of love means "rejoicing in the right" (cf. 1 Cor 13:6). But a civilization inspired by a consumerist, anti-birth mentality is not and cannot ever be a civilization of love. If the family is so important for the civilization of love, it is because of the particular closeness and intensity of the bonds which come to be between persons and generations within the family. However, the family remains vulnerable and can easily fall prey to dangers which weaken it or actually destroy its unity and stability. As a result of these dangers families cease to be witnesses of the civilization of love and can even become a negation of it, a kind of counter-sign. A broken family can, for its part, consolidate a specific form of "anti-civilization", destroying love in its various expressions, with inevitable consequences for the whole of life in society.

The love which the Apostle Paul celebrates in the First Letter to the Corinthians—the love which is "patient" and "kind", and "endures all things" (1 Cor 13:4, 7)—is certainly a demanding love. But this is precisely the source of its beauty: by the very fact that it is demanding, it builds up the true good of man and allows it to radiate to others. The good, says Saint Thomas, is by its nature "diffusive". Love is true when it creates the good of persons and of communities; it creates that good and gives it to others. Only the one who is able to be demanding with himself in the name of love can also demand love from others. Love is demanding. It makes demands in all human situations; it is even more demanding in the case of those who are open to the Gospel. Is this not what Christ proclaims in "his" commandment? Nowadays people need to rediscover this demanding love, for it is the truly firm foundation of the family, a foundation able to "endure all things". According to the Apostle, love is not able to "endure all things" if it yields to "jealousies", or if it is "boastful... arrogant or rude" (cf. 1 Cor 13:5-6). True love, Saint Paul teaches, is different: "Love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7). This is the very love which "endures all things". At work within it is the power and strength of God himself, who "is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). At work within it is also the power and strength of Christ, the Redeemer of man and Saviour of the world.

Meditating on the thirteenth chapter of the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, we set out on a path which leads us to understand quickly and clearly the full truth about the civilization of love. No other biblical text expresses this truth so simply and so profoundly as the hymn to love. The dangers faced by love are also dangers for the civilization of love, because they promote everything capable of effectively opposing it. Here one thinks first of all of selfishness, not only the selfishness of individuals, but also of couples or, even more broadly, of social selfishness, that for example of a class or nation (nationalism). Selfishness in all its forms is directly and radically opposed to the civilization of love. (LF, 13 and 14)

Mother and Queen of the Family, pray for us!

Totus Tuus!

