

ARTICLE 20

Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

Marriage a gift from God

First Published in '*The Catholic Voice*', Ireland, September 2014



Marriage and Holiness

True Devotions.

This series of articles began with a look at the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and its basis in Sacred Scripture. For the past month or so, in conjunction with a new Apostolate called 'True Devotions', we have been looking at the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and also at the life of St Thérèse and of her family. I would like to talk a little more about family life and prayer before returning to Catholic teaching on marriage this time looking at it from the perspective of the Church's magisterium.

The Soul of the Apostolate

Let me begin by recommending another good Catholic book, which is amongst the classics, and applying some of the lessons therein to family life and prayer. The book is by a former Trappist Abbott of the Sept-Fons monastery in France, Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, and is called 'The Soul of the Apostolate'. Now normally when we think of 'apostolate' we think of an organisation that is set up for the purpose of spreading the faith, and this is true. However there is a danger in this view of overlooking one of the most important apostolates in the Church, namely the family. Rearing a Catholic family is an apostolate dedicated to populating the Kingdom of God with future Saints. In his book Dom Chautard addresses this point to parents as follows.

"Parents for whom the 'Introduction to a Devout Life' is not out of date, husbands and wives who feel bound to an apostolate towards each other as well as to their children whom they train in the love and imitation of the Saviour, may also apply to themselves the teaching given by this little book. May they see more clearly the necessity to lead a life not only pious but interior, so as to make their zeal efficacious and spread in their homes the sweet odour of the spirit of Christ, together with that unchanging peace which in spite of the trials of life will ever remain the attribute of families thoroughly Christian."

The Need for a Metric

In some recent discussions with my older boys I introduced them to the concept of the '**metric**' as it relates to the spiritual life. A 'metric' is a system or a means of measuring something. The term is often used in business to establish performance criteria for improving the quality of the business. The first thing to be done is to decide ones purpose and where one is going. Then one must establish a base line or a 'where are we at now' point and from this one tries to formulate a plan and a time frame for getting to the destination. What I say to my boys is "if you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you want to go, then how are you going to get anywhere".

For the Catholic family we first must look at the question "what is the purpose of the Catholic family?" The answer to this question establishes what we are and where we are going. We must then ask ourselves where we are now on that journey and then look to see if we are heading in the right direction towards our goal. The answers to these further questions will help us to establish a plan of action so that we reach our goal which, as a Catholic family, is for all members of the family to be united with the Holy Trinity and the Saints in Heaven where we hope to see God face to face.

Without God we can do nothing

It is very important to realise that this is God's work and without Him we can do nothing. Jesus is the Life and the vine onto whom we must be grafted. We are channels of grace in so far as we co-operate with Him and we are nothing without Him. Dom Chautard says of this "The apostle who would disregard this principle and think that he can produce the least sign of supernatural life without borrowing it all from our Lord, would make one think that his theological ignorance was equalled only by his silly self-conceit" You can see that Dom Chautard is a straight talking man!

What Dom Chautard encourages us to develop as a priority is the interior life. That is, a sacramental life of deep prayer which seeks to unite our soul, our mind, our will, our intentions and our actions to the life giving will of Jesus Christ. The first part of the book outlines why this is important especially as concerns the active life and the second part of the book gives practical advice on how to go about achieving this. He suggests that we make out a time table for each activity in consultation with a wise, holy and experienced priest and of this timetable he says "*Let this be impressed well upon your mind, that without the time table and the firm resolve to keep to it habitually, especially with regard to a fixed hour for rising, the soul cannot lead an interior life*"

Morning Mental Prayer

Next he says that the interior life must be based on its absolutely necessary foundation which is morning mental prayer then the liturgical functions of the Mass, Holy Communion, the Divine Office and also a particular and general examination of conscience.

The father, as spiritual head of the family, needs to take stock of where he is leading his family. How often does he attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and receive Holy Communion? What about morning mental prayer? Does he recite any of the Divine Office on a daily basis? Does he pray and encourage the family Rosary in his home? Does he make a particular and a general examination of conscience? The examen is the '*metric*' of the spiritual life. By means of it we can deduce whether or not we are becoming holy or whether we are slipping towards indifference and sloth.

The Absent Father

In many families the father may have fallen away from the practice of his faith and this creates a particular set of problems. Nevertheless, in such a situation the mother must strive, against great difficulties, to preserve and increase her own interior life in order to win the soul of her husband for Christ. How sad the situation where within a family there are no members who take their faith and their interior life seriously. That is why we need to come together as parents and as families to help each other along and to encourage each other in the ways of the interior life. We need strong and determined families who are prepared to abandon themselves totally into the hands of God to win souls for Christ and His Church.

We can lament on the state of society. We can lament on the current state of the Church in Ireland. However, it is prayer and particularly family prayer, it is holiness and particularly family holiness, not lamentations, which will rebuild Christ's house and reform society.

On October 25th and 26th this year, the Faith of our Fathers conference in Knock will address the theme "The Catholic Family: Cradle of the Culture of Life". This promises to be an excellent opportunity for fathers in particular and for families in general to come together in mutual support to learn how best to live the Catholic life and to see how best we can help and encourage each other in the difficult mission of raising a Catholic family. I hope to be there myself God willing and I would be delighted to meet with readers of this column with a view to sharing and developing ideas. So put a mark in your diary for October 25th and 26th in Knock. God bless.

These articles are free to download, to print and to distribute provided that authorship is acknowledged and contact details for the author are provided as follows.

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