

ARTICLE 79

Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

Marriage a gift from God

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Marriage! The Virtue of Hope

Pray for Vocations

The brother of the young eighteen year old American lady, whom I wrote about recently, arrived for a visit with our family on New Year's day to join his sister. His name is Joe and he is in his early twenties. Joe feels a certain call to serve God as a priest but he not certain about this just yet. Please pray to help him to discern if indeed he is called to serve God as a priest. Last week, these young people returned to America. Gianna, the young lady, had been with us for nine weeks in total. Something unusual happened to me after she had gone. I began to feel emotional, sometimes quite strongly, and I was a little perplexed at myself. I realised that I was missing this young lady's presence in my home, but there was something deeper than that. Young people have stayed with our family before, some for quite some time, but their departure didn't affect me as much. I needed to discern what was going on within me. What were these emotions about?

So I knelt down on my prie-dieu before the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in our home. I am very fond of this particular image of the Sacred Heart which was a gift from friends in France, and it is where I say my morning prayers. I asked the Lord for some insight into these emotions or to let me know if I was just becoming an emotional old fool.

A Background to the American Visitors

A little background about our visitors may help with regard to understanding the point that I am trying to get across in this article which, I realise, is quite personal. One of my sons spent a year in Christendom College in Virginia in the United States of America. Joe was in his class. After my son left Christendom he kept in contact with Joe via "facebook", as the young people nowadays do. Another of my sons noticed this 'American friend' on his brother's facebook account and he also made contact with Joe.

A little bit of teasing goes on in our house as to who made contact first with Joe's younger sister Gianna. Did she make contact with my sons first or did they make contact with her first? Anyway, the contact was made and they became facebook friends and they also had a shared interest in speaking Spanish. So these young people have known each other for about four years through facebook and some of my other sons have also made 'friends' with Gianna and Joe through facebook.

School Going Catholics not well Catechised

Joe and Gianna are both Catholics. Joe is very interested in the Latin Mass and is involved in organising Latin Masses near where he lives. He once served Bishop Schneider's Mass when Bishop Schneider was in the U.S. Gianna is a practicing Catholic although her faith formation would not have been that great or thorough on account of attending public school in the U.S. They also have a sister who currently lives in Venice, and last year Gianna decided that she would go to visit this sister in Venice. When one of my sons heard that Gianna was going to be in Europe, he thought it would be a good idea to invite Gianna to Ireland for Christmas. He asked me if this would be OK and this is how Gianna came to be staying in our home over the Christmas.

The Journey to Modesty

My last article covered Gianna's journey from wearing somewhat immodest clothing to her conversion to, and new found delight, in wearing modest clothing and her discovery of true femininity and the great dignity of her own womanhood. It also transpired during her visit that she and one of my sons had developed romantic feelings for each other. Knowing this, I needed to make sure that everything that happened under my roof would be proper and in line with Catholic living and teaching.

The Importance of a Dress Code in your Home

I instructed my older boys and Gianna about the proper code of conduct that must be maintained in a Catholic home especially as they grow older and when visitors, who are not family, are staying. Boys are forbidden from entering girls bedrooms, and girls are forbidden from entering boys bedrooms. This applies regardless of the time of day. A curfew was imposed for the older ones. They must be in their beds by midnight. No sitting up into the wee hours of the morning 'chatting', especially after the parents may have retired.

Gianna was not to be alone in a room with any of my boys unless the door to that room was left open. They were welcome to have private conversations, but leaving the door open meant that anyone could walk in at any time. All of these protocols are safeguards against what the Church calls 'proximate occasions of sin'. They protect the young people and their purity. They allowed my wife and I, as parents, to be able to leave our house or to retire early knowing that these young people would respect our wishes and rules. They allow God's peace to reign in our home.

The Purpose of Romance is Marriage

As regards the ones who had romantic feelings for each other, I explained to them that the purpose of these romantic feelings has to do with marriage and the founding of a family in accordance with God's plans for humanity and the building of His Kingdom. They needed to decide if they wished to begin the process of discerning marriage, otherwise they should just remain friends and ignore the romantic feelings and let them fade away. There is no purpose in a boy and a girl becoming romantically involved in a relationship, unless they are discerning marriage!

The Protocols and Rules of Courtship

If they are discerning marriage, then once again there are protocols and rules that need to be put in place in order to protect their purity and to protect them from unnecessary 'heartbreak'. Romantic relationships which are entered into without a clear purpose and goal in mind, will generally tend to degenerate into the type of relationship which causes the young couple involved to fall in the area of purity. As parents we have a duty to protect our children and young people from such harm.

A couple of days later these young ones came back to me and said that they would like to begin the discernment process for marriage. I gave them the 20 courtship guidelines from Carmen Marçoux's website www.courtshipnow.com and we went through them together. I explained about the benefits of having someone to mentor them in their relationship and said that they must remember that the discernment process can lead to a 'yes' or a 'no' answer as regards marriage, but that safeguarding their purity and their hearts for God is what is paramount. I also gave them my fatherly blessing on their relationship.

So I now have two sons who are in romantic relationships and who know about discerning marriage and about the purpose of romantic relationships.

Parting is such Sweet Sorrow

The time came for the Americans to go and, as I said in the beginning of this article, I began to have some strong emotional feelings after Gianna was gone, which I took to prayer. When Gianna accepted my guidance with regard to modest clothing, when she humbly accepted the few corrections that I had to give her during her stay with us, when she accepted the guidelines for discerning marriage, and when we discussed how one should put the faith into practice in one's life

based on the 'Spiritual Exercises' of St Ignatius, I realised that this young eighteen year old woman is serious about her Catholic faith and about discerning Catholic marriage.

The Virtue of Hope

I realised that the emotion that I was feeling was not some foolish pining after the happy times that we had as a family over the Christmas, but that it was the re-kindling of the virtue of HOPE in my heart. This young American lady, filled with the desire to become a saint, gave me Hope. Hope for the future, Hope for the family, Hope for Ireland, Hope for America, Hope for the world.

In these times when the family is under such tremendous attack, when there is great strife and contradiction within the bosom of the Catholic Church it is so important for us to keep this virtue of Hope alive in our hearts. Without my noticing it (my wife had noticed), the virtue of Hope had become a dim and distant reflection in my heart. I had allowed the current troubles within the Church to almost quench my Hope.

Hope for the Families of the Future

One day as I was standing looking out the window contemplating all of these things, the thought struck me that if one or both of my son's relationships does end in marriage, then, because they are trying to live out their lives as Catholics, I would probably become a grandfather shortly thereafter. Once again I was filled with Hope for the future. This is all part of what family life is about. Passing on the torch of faith to the next generation who will pass it on to their children in their turn all the time building God's Kingdom.

I recalled an e-mail that was sent to me by a friend wishing me a happy new year. This man is older than I and he included a picture of his family with his wife and their children and grandchildren. There were more than twenty people in the photograph. Hope once again.

Discouragement is not from God

I care passionately about the family but I now realise that there is a danger, in the current climate of unrest and uncertainty, of succumbing to a kind of discouragement and even despair. The devil has not triumphed over the family! The devil will never triumph over the family! Our young people love to hear the Truth and they are more than willing to respond to that Truth when it is presented to them clearly and unambiguously.

The Contraceptive Mentality

Gianna informed me that most of the girls who were in high school with her in America, were put on the contraceptive pill by their mothers from about the age of fourteen. They thought her own mother was crazy for not doing the same for her. I mentioned this to a pro-life pregnancy counsellor here in Ireland and she told me that Irish mothers are doing the same to their own school age daughters.

The fault is not with our young people. They are not being instructed and challenged to live up to the standards that Jesus Christ and his Blessed Mother expect of them.

The Young are Our Hope

As Pope St John Paul II said to the young people when he visited Galway,

“On returning home, tell your parents, and everyone who wants to listen, that the Pope believes in you and that he counts on you. Say that the young are the strength of the Pope, of the Church in Ireland, of the world, and that the Pope wishes to share with them his hope for the future, and his encouragement”

If we have become fearful for the future, then let us re-kindle our Hope for the Catholic family and for the future of Catholic society in Ireland. Let us share our Hope in God's plan for marriage and family with our young people and let us challenge them to live holy lives by demanding and

expecting high standards from them. Let us not accept low standards of behaviour from our young people. The Truth is compromised when young people are told that contraception is better than pregnancy and our young people are seriously damaged by these lies. A life where purity is valued leads to happiness here on earth and ultimately, will lead to eternal happiness in Heaven with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and the blessed of heaven.

Trusting in God's Providence

Will Joe become a priest? Will my son marry Gianna? Will my other son marry his girlfriend? I leave the answers to these questions in the hands of God's providence but with a renewed Hope in the future. Thank you Gianna for giving me Hope. Thanks to all our young people who are striving to live out their lives as loyal sons and daughters of the Catholic Church. Let those of us who are heading into our twilight years be sure to encourage and nurture these youthful Catholics on their journeys.

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