



Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis

Consilium Internationale

FAMILY COMMISSION

Jennifer Harrington OFS

YOUNG MARRIAGES AND THEIR ENTRY INTO THE FRATERNITY

We continue proposing what was assumed as a priority in the 2014 General Chapter that invites us "to include the meaning of sexuality and the sacrament of marriage in all formation programs of the OFS and YouFra. " In this article we share articles from: Lumen Gentium – (LG), Familiaris Consortio – (FC), Evangelium Vitae – (EV) Guardium et Spes – (GS), Letter to Families (LF) and Catholic Catechism of the Catholic Church – (CCC), on marriage and the family and refer to our Rule and General Constitutions.

In our fraternity discussion let us share how we as family, some married for many years, some widowed and some single, encourage our young married couples to live out our “**call to holiness**” following the spiritual way in communion with the Church, in our fraternity life and experience how the sacrament of marriage has a very significant role in God’s plan for mankind.

Marriage in God’s plan

Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God and concludes with a vision of "the wedding-feast of the Lamb"..... (CCC 1602.)

Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground." God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Gen 1: 26-28

"The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws.... God himself is the author of marriage."

"The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life." (CCC 1603.)

God who created man out of love also calls him to love – the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. (CCC 1604,)

The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery, it is so to speak the nuptial bath (Eph 5:26-27) which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist. Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the New Covenant. (CCC 1617)

The Domestic Church

Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. the Church is nothing other than "the family of God." From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers "together with all [their] household." When they were converted, they desired that "their whole household" should also be saved. These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world. (CCC 1655).

In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, ..., calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are "by word and example . . . the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation." (CCC 1656).

It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way "by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and

thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity." Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and "a school for human enrichment." Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous - even repeated - forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life. (CCC 1657)

.....It is significant that precisely *in and through prayer, man comes to discover in a very simple and yet profound way his own unique subjectivity*: in prayer the human "I" more easily perceives the depth of what it means to be a person. *This is also true of the family*, which is not only the basic "cell" of society, but also possesses a particular subjectivity of its own. This subjectivity finds its first and fundamental confirmation, and is strengthened, precisely when the members of the family meet in the common invocation: "**Our Father**". Prayer increases the strength and spiritual unity of the family, helping the family to partake of God's own "strength" (LF 4)

The Family in God's Plan

Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. It was God Himself WHO said, "*it is not good for man to be alone*" (Gen. 2:18) and "*Who made man from the beginning male and female*" (Matt. 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: "Increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior. Who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day. (GS 50)

When they become parents, spouses receive from God the gift of a new responsibility. Their parental love is called to become for the children the visible sign of the very love of God, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." (FC 14)

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.

In this context, we can realize how important *prayer* is with families and for families, in particular for those threatened by division. We need to pray that married couples *will love their vocation*, even when the road becomes difficult, or the paths become narrow, uphill and seemingly insuperable; we need to pray that, even then, they will be faithful to their covenant with God.

"The family is the way of the Church". In this Letter we wish both to profess and to proclaim *this way*, which leads to the kingdom of heaven (cf. *Mt 7:14*) through conjugal and family life. It is important that the "communion of persons" in the family should become a preparation for the "communion of Saints". This is why the Church both believes and proclaims the love which "endures all things" (*1 Cor 13:7*); with Saint Paul she sees in it "*the greatest*" virtue of all (cf. *1 Cor 13:13*). The Apostle puts no limits on anyone. Everyone is called to love, including spouses and families. In the Church everyone is called equally to perfect holiness (cf. *Mt 5:48*). (LF 14)

Co-operators in the Love of God the Creator

With the creation of man and woman in His own image and likeness, God crowns and brings to perfection the work of His hands: He calls them to a special sharing in His love and in His power as Creator and Father, through their free and responsible cooperation in transmitting the gift of human life: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'"

Thus the fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator—that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person. (FC 28)

It is for themselves that married couples want children; in children they see the crowning of their own love for each other. They want children for the family, as a *priceless gift*. This is quite understandable. Nonetheless, in conjugal love and in paternal and maternal love we should find inscribed the same truth about man which the Council expressed in a clear and concise way in its statement that God "willed man for his own sake". It is thus necessary that the will of the parents should be in harmony with the will of God. *They must want the new human creature in the same way as the Creator wants him: "for himself"*. Our human will is always and inevitably subject to the law of time and change. The divine will, on the other hand, is eternal. As we read in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (*Jer 1:5*). The genealogy of the person is thus united with the eternity of God, and only then with human fatherhood and motherhood, which are realized in time. At the moment of conception itself, man is already destined to eternity in God. (LF 9)

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*). (LF 12)

The Family as the First and Vital Cell of Society

"Since the Creator of all things has established the conjugal partnership as the beginning and basis of human society," the family is "the first and vital cell of society."

The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself. Thus, far from being closed in on itself, the family is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society, and undertakes its social role. (FC 42)

Fatherhood and motherhood presume the coexistence and interaction of autonomous subjects. This is quite evident in the case of the mother when she conceives a new human being. The first months of the child's presence in the mother's womb bring about a particular bond which already possesses an educational significance of its own. The *mother*, even before giving birth, *does not only give shape to the child's body, but also, in an indirect way, to the child's whole personality*. Even though we are speaking about a process in which the mother primarily affects the child, we should not overlook the unique influence that the unborn child has on its mother. In this *mutual influence* which will be revealed to the outside world following the birth of the child, the father does not have a direct part to play. But he should be responsibly committed to providing attention and support throughout the pregnancy and, if possible, at the moment of birth. (LF 16)

For the "civilization of love" it is essential that *the husband should recognize that the motherhood of his wife is a gift*: this is enormously important for the entire process of raising children. Much will depend on his willingness to take his own part in this first stage of the gift of humanity, and to become willingly involved as a husband and father in the motherhood of his wife. (LF 16)

Parents are the first and most important educators of their own children, and they also possess a *fundamental competence* in this area: they are *educators because they are parents*. They share their educational mission with other individuals or institutions, such as the Church and the State. (LF 16)

It represents a challenge for the political life of individual States and an area for careful study in the Church's social doctrine. It is urgently necessary, therefore, to come up with courageous solutions capable of looking beyond the confines of one's own nation and taking into consideration the many families for whom lack of employment means living in situations of tragic poverty.

While speaking about employment in reference to the family, it is appropriate to emphasize how important and burdensome is *the work women do within the family unit: that work should be acknowledged and deeply appreciated*. The "toil" of a woman who, having given birth to a child, nourishes and cares for that child and devotes herself to its upbringing, particularly in the early years, is so great as to be comparable to any professional work. This ought to be clearly stated and upheld, no less than any other labour right. (LF 17)

Family Life as an Experience of Communion and Sharing

In the light of faith and by virtue of hope, the Christian family too shares, in communion with the Church, in the experience of the earthly pilgrimage towards the full revelation and manifestation of the Kingdom of God. (FC 65)

This holds true especially for young families, which, finding themselves in a context of new values and responsibilities, are more vulnerable, especially in the first years of marriage, to possible difficulties, such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children. Young married couples should learn to accept willingly, and make good use of, the discreet, tactful and generous help offered by other couples that already have more experience of married and family life. Thus, within the ecclesial community-the great family made up of Christian families-there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace. Animated by a true apostolic spirit, this assistance from family to family will constitute one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means for transmitting from one to another those Christian values which are both the starting point and goal of all pastoral care. Thus young families will not limit themselves merely to receiving, but in their turn, having been helped in this way, will become a source of enrichment for other longer established families, through their witness of life and practical contribution. (FC 69)

The dignity and integrity of the Human Person

The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message. Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as "good news" to the people of every age and culture. ... When He presents the heart of his redemptive mission, Jesus says: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). ...In truth, he is referring to that "new" and "eternal" life which consists in communion with the Father, to which every person is freely called... (EV 1)

The incomparable worth of the human person.... Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. (EV 2)

The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and everyone-of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consumator of this holiness of life: "*Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect*". (Mt 5:48) ...The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received. (LG 40)

The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God. (CCC 1700)

Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman. (CCC 2337)

Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear; either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy. (Sir 1:22)"A man's dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in himself or by mere external constraint. Man gains such dignity when, ridding himself of all slavery to the passions he presses forward to his goal by freely choosing what is good and, by his diligence and skill, effectively secures for himself the means suited to this end." (GS 17) (CCC 2339)

Education in love as self-giving is also the indispensable premise for parents called to give their children a clear and delicate sex education. Faced with a culture that largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something common place, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure, the educational service of parents must aim firmly at a training in the area of sex that is truly and fully personal: for sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person-body, emotions and soul-and it manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love.

Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents.

In this context education for chastity is absolutely essential, for it is a virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of respecting and fostering the "nuptial meaning" of the body. Indeed Christian parents, discerning the signs of God's call, will devote special attention and care to education in virginity or celibacy as the supreme form of that self-giving that constitutes the very meaning of human sexuality.

In view of the close links between the sexual dimension of the person and his or her ethical values, education must bring the children to a knowledge of and respect for the moral norms as the necessary and highly valuable guarantee for responsible personal growth in human sexuality.

For this reason the Church is firmly opposed to an often widespread form of imparting sex information dissociated from moral principles. That would merely be an introduction to the experience of pleasure and a stimulus leading to the loss of serenity-while still in the years of innocence-by opening the way to vice. (FC 37)

Inspired and sustained by the new commandment of love, the Christian family welcomes, respects and serves every human being, considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God.

It should be so especially between husband and wife and within the family, through a daily effort to promote a truly personal community, initiated and fostered by an inner communion of love. This way of life should then be extended to the wider circle of the ecclesial community of which the Christian family is a part. Thanks to love within the family, the Church can and ought to take on a more homelike or family dimension, developing a more human and fraternal style of relationships. Love, too, goes beyond our brothers and sisters of the same faith since "everybody is my brother or sister." In each individual, especially in the poor, the weak, and those who suffer or are unjustly treated, love knows how to discover the face of Christ, and discover a fellow human being to be loved and served. (FC 64)

At Cana in Galilee Jesus is, as it were, the *herald of the divine truth about marriage*, that truth on which the human family can rely, gaining reassurance amid all the trials of life. Jesus proclaims this truth by his presence at the wedding in Cana and by working his first "sign": water changed into wine. (LF 18)

Marriage however remains *the usual human vocation*, which is embraced by the great majority of the people of God. It is in the family where living stones are formed for that spiritual house spoken of by the Apostle Peter (cf. *1 Pet* 2:5). The bodies of the husband and wife are the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit (cf. *1 Cor* 6:19). Because the transmission of divine life presumes the transmission of human life, marriage not only brings about the birth of human children, but also, through the power of Baptism, the birth of adopted children of God, who live the new life received from Christ through his Spirit. (LF 18)

May the Holy Family, icon and model of every human family, help each individual to walk in the spirit of Nazareth. May it help each family unit to grow in understanding of its particular mission in society and the Church by hearing the Word of God, by prayer and by a fraternal sharing of life. May Mary, Mother of "Fairest Love", and Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer, accompany us all with their constant protection.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. How can we promote the dignity of marriage and the family. How involved is your fraternity in society to stand up for the values of marriage and family life? Are there marriage preparation programs available for young and single members? Do we celebrate the anniversaries of our marriages?
2. Is this true, the new human being is a gift for the parents, a gift for society?
A bond is formed with the mother in the first few months of the baby in the mother's womb, what can influence the affects on the child's personality?
3. What is involved in raising children and how is the subject of sexuality approached in your families?
4. What does the family as an institution expect from society?
5. Do the young families in your fraternity feel they have the support and assistance of the brothers and sisters if needed. Are the times of fraternity meeting suitable for the young couples to attend?
6. Having reflected on this article what post modern challenges are we facing today that are having a detrimental affect on our young children and young families?

APRIL 2019