



Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis
Consilium Internationale
FAMILY COMMISSION
Silvia Diana OFS

FAMILY LIFE - MARRIED TO SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT BELONG TO THE OFS.

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...speaking from my personal experience.

I professed in the OFS when I was only 15 years old, seeking to live an experience of faith that allowed me to live my Christianity more and more deeply. Since I was a little girl I was close to the Franciscan charism, having studied in Franciscan schools and also because my mother was also a professed member of the SFO. I became a "cord-girl" at the age of 9, meaning that when I met Richard at 18, he used to say, I was already in love with the Order.

This narration of my personal experience is based on the deep mystery of love that is woven between a man and a woman when they love each other and decide to share their life together, blessed with the sacrament of matrimony. It is a path that is not always easy, because you have to "fight" because that love does not become a possession or domination of one towards the other. That love relationship should be based on respect and understanding of what each one brings as personal "luggage" and that should be shared between them. There is no doubt that my personal experience confirms that when there is true love, love can do everything!

When we speak of LOVE we refer to the LOVE that Jesus himself taught us, considering this word that comes from the Greek: EROS and AGAPE, that is, selfishness and sharing, receiving and giving. And so, from this true love, we have tried to build our family, trusting that God would lead us to live in accordance with our most sincere commitments: to be faithful to our sacred marriage, through listening, understanding and willingness to learn from one another. And it is beautiful to see that if the center of our life is Christ himself, He is there to support us in moments of joy, sadness, celebration and darkness. (How much it has inspired us and how much we have felt strong, living the Eucharist with our children!)

From the beginning of our marriage, it was clear that belonging to my OFS fraternity was very important for me ... however, it was not easy to fulfill the commitment *to participate in the life of the fraternity* (CCGG 53.3), because these were times when the priority were the "children" that were arriving. However, somehow I was always connected with the brothers and sisters of my fraternity and with any support I could give to it. Thus my husband's understanding with my sense of belonging to my OFS was growing. In the same way that I

respected and appreciated his different "passions" (amateur radio, amateur astronomer ...) he was also respecting and understanding my passion for the Order.

It is evident that today, having lived fifty years of marriage and after the sad and very recent, departure to the kingdom of heaven of my beloved Richard, I can clearly see the years spent together, how happy our home became to be, and how our marriage relationship matured with time.

Conjugal love does not have to do with pure "feelings" but is based on the will and personal effort to cross all obstacles with the firm purpose of staying together forever; keeping in mind that the love of each other is not a bond, because it enjoys the freedom that love itself provokes. "The feelings come and go. They can be a wonderful initial spark, but they are not the totality of love "(Encyclical God is Love, Benedict XV)

My husband, not being a secular Franciscan, felt more and more closed to the OFS, calling himself "a member of the Fourth Order" ... that one, to which the non-Franciscan husbands belong with affection!! And just as our love was maturing with respect and understanding, it was consolidating a beautiful mutual support, in our very different activities. But, always attentive to good communication, knowing that EVERYTHING was always in the hands of God, that it is ultimately the one that has to resolve the dilemmas! This is a beautiful conclusion when it is verified that God is holding you whenever a project is placed on His hands.

There is no doubt that in our case we could have been considered an "uneven" couple because we were of very different characters, but "we complemented ourselves". We found that it was not about having the same tastes or not, but living under the same scheme of values, which we also had to transmit to our children. A teaching that should be not only of words but with the testimony of our lives, having as a priority, living honestly, not lying, not pretending.

As Franciscans, we commit ourselves to consider our own family to be the first place in which to live our Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation, (CCGG Art.24). This article asks us to make space within our families for prayer, for the Word of God and for Christian catechesis. This same Article 24 recommends that married couples find in the Rule of the OFS an effective aid in our own journey of the Christian life, aware that, in the sacrament of matrimony, our love shares in the love that Christ has for his Church.

It should be noted that these guidelines of our legislation, fit perfectly well within the project of family life that we set out to build from the beginning, helped with dialogue and mutual understanding, which was not always easy, but that we were aware we should find the most convenient for our family.

I must emphasize that my willingness to trust and leave everything to God's will was part of the "luggage" I brought with me when I got married. I was sure that God would lead us in such a way that we could harmonize with patience, to mature and strengthen our relationship as couple. So it was a fact, that over the years, we could share and support each other, within the wonderful balance of tolerance and mutual respect. And there is no doubt, that the Eucharist was for us the center and source of grace!

Reflecting then on our Rule and Constitution, it is clear that my husband Richard appreciated that it was a grace of God my belonging to the Order, because this always helped me to be a better person, a better Christian, a better wife and a better mother, and therefore, it was a contagious attitude. All of which, we could see in the day to day of our family life. And that is the reason, that not only my husband, but my children, have all supported and respected my belonging to the OFS. (As a matter of fact, my daughter is also a professed member of the OFS).

Soon in our marriage the children came, so we taught them, at the same time that we learned to be parents. The first 20 years of our marriage were very demanding. We had to deal with family duties and our professional work. But it was always clear to us that family came first.

Today as the years go by, we see how our children have overcome us as people full of virtues, and that despite the mistakes in education that we as parents could have committed, they have filled us with pride, in every sense! Today they are excellent as children, brothers, parents, striving to be good Christians, as well.

Charity exercise - Service of love

The experience of charity, understood as the reflection of loving the neighbor, is essential for the life of the Christian. Hence the need that as a family, charity be practiced in the search for the common good. A family cannot lock itself in, because it would cease to be a social expression of the Christian faith.

Some more than others, have the predisposition to serve the needy found "casually" as referred to in the parable of the Good Samaritan. (Lk 10,31). It is not easy to open up to the other, because of the fear of getting entangled in commitments that can surpass us in time and capacity. So it is also a task learned in family, that as Christians we should be attentive to the other because, *there will always be suffering that needs comfort and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always also be situations of material need in which an aid that shows a concrete love for one's neighbor is indispensable* (Encyclical "God is Love" No. 28.b)

St. Francis of Assisi, in his encounter with the leper, ran head-on into human misery, which led to his radical internal change that in turn, led him to his own investment of values. His conversion began in this beautiful act of charity: when St. Francis saw in this dirty and sick person his own brother. And it is almost always a fact that each one of us has had his respective "casual encounter" that has led him to change the course of his/her life.

For our family, a natural catastrophe lived in our country, motivated us to assume serious responsibilities in favor of those who had suffered great losses. Hence, I became seriously involved and together with me, came the support of my husband and children. It was this reality that hit us strongly, the one that led us to the real CONVERSION, which actually means, communion with others.

Charity also manifests itself when the individual, faithfully fulfills his duty as a citizen, when he seeks justice -with love, towards those around him, when he becomes involved in the

community where he lives, when he participates in public life, when he is able to share situations and difficulties.

The obstacles that we put ourselves to exercise charity, are always a challenge, because we lack the confidence that we must put in God's hands so He'll be the one who opens the way for us.

Conclusion

It is a great challenge the one we assume, once we stand before the altar swearing eternal love. From there on, we share our commitment aware that we ought to be an example for our children. But in front of everything, the Lord comes along our journey, always willing to open the way to full happiness. This happiness is achieved when love becomes COMMUNION, which means to take the Eucharist to the smallest things of our daily life, aware that as parents, we must form men and women of pure hearts.

Questions to answer in groups:

- 1. Evaluate how aware we are of the commitment we have as parents to form "Christian" men and women, that is, followers of Christ.**
- 2. If we are professed in the SFO, we must bear witness to our life in Christ. Reflect how we allow ourselves to be molded by the Gospel, and therefore, by our Rule of the SFO, being coherent in our family life.**
- 3. Share some of your family life experience, where your life of faith and your sense of belonging to the SFO unfolds.**

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