

THE FAMILY: A COMMUNITY OF PRAYER (Matthew 7:7-11)

Prayer makes the Son of God present among us. The words with which the Lord Jesus promises his presence can be applied to the members of the Christian family in a special way: "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:19-20)

In effect, the baptismal priesthood of the faithful, exercised in the sacrament of marriage, constitutes the basis of a mission for the spouses and the family by which their daily lives are transformed into "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). The Christian communities must become genuine "schools of prayer," where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening, and ardent devotion until the heart truly "falls in love." Intense prayer, yes, but it does not distract us from our commitment to history. By opening our heart to the love of God, it also opens it to the love of our brothers and sisters and makes us capable of shaping history according to God's plan.

Christian parents have the specific responsibility of educating their children in prayer, introducing them to a gradual discovery of the mystery of God and to personal dialogue with him. It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and the office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from the earliest years, according to the faith received in baptism, to know God, to worship him, and to love their neighbor.

Family prayer has its own characteristic qualities. It is prayer offered in common, husband and wife together, parents and children together. Communion in prayer is both a consequence of and a requirement for the communion bestowed by the sacraments of baptism and matrimony. The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray. Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother -- exercising their royal priesthood -- penetrate the innermost depths of their children's hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to destroy.

It is significant that precisely in and through prayer people come to discover in a very simple and yet profound way their 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 it to partake of God's own "strength."

An important purpose of the prayer of the domestic Church is to serve as the natural introduction for the children to the liturgical prayer of the whole Church. Hence, there is the need for gradual participation by all the members of the Christian family in the celebration of the Eucharist and of the other sacraments, particularly the sacraments of Christian initiation of the children. The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the source from which all her power flows. It is, therefore, the privileged place for catechizing the people

of God. Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of people.

--Pontifical Council For The Family