

THE FAMILY AND LOVE FOR THE WEAKEST - Matthew 15:29-39

The social role of the family certainly cannot stop short at procreation and education, even if this constitutes its primary and irreplaceable form of expression. Families, therefore, either singly or in association, can and should devote themselves to manifold social service activities, especially in favor of the poor or, at any rate, for the benefit of all people and situations that cannot be reached by the public authorities' welfare organization. The social contribution of the family has an original character, one that should be given greater recognition and more decisive encouragement, especially as the children grow up, and actually involving all its members as much as possible.

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. 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.

The Christian family places itself at the service of the human person and the world, really bringing about "human advancement." Another task for the family is to form persons in love and also to practice love in all its relationships so that it does not live closed in on itself but remains open to the community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others, as well as by a consciousness of its responsibility toward the whole of society.

In particular, note must be taken of the ever greater importance in our society of hospitality in all its forms, from opening the door of one's home and still more of one's heart to the pleas of one's brothers and sisters, to concrete efforts to ensure that every family has its own home, as the natural environment that preserves it and makes it grow. In a special way, the Christian family is called upon to listen to St. Paul's recommendation: "Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13). Imitating Christ's example and sharing in his love, the family must welcome the brother or sister in need: "Whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42).

The unjust distribution of wealth between the developed and developing world and between rich and poor in the same country, the misuse of natural resources consumed by the few, mass illiteracy, the continuance and re-emergence of conflict, and armed conflicts generally are also having a devastating effect on the family.

The service to the Gospel of Life is expressed in solidarity. A particularly significant expression is a willingness to adopt or take in children abandoned by their parents or in situations of serious hardship. True parental love is ready to go beyond the bonds of flesh and blood to accept children from other families, offering them whatever is necessary for their well-being and full development.

The Fathers of the Church have spoken of the family as a "domestic church", a "little church." It is called "to be together" as a family, to be for one another, to make room in a community for affirming each person as such, for affirming "this" individual person. At times, it is a matter of people with physical or psychological handicaps, of whom the so-called "progressive" society would prefer to be free. Even the family can end up like this kind of society. It does so when it hastily rids itself of people who are aged, disabled, or sick. This happens when there is a loss of faith in that God for whom "all live" (cf. Luke 20:38) and are called to the fullness of life.

--Pontifical Council Of The Family