

THE FAMILY: NUCLEUS AND SOURCE OF SOCIAL GOOD - (Acts 2:42-47)

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. It is also 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.

The family is, in fact, a community of persons whose proper way of existing and living together is communion, communion of persons. Therefore, the family is the first and fundamental school of social living. As a community of love, it finds its self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow. The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family. And, the communion and sharing that are part of everyday life in the home at times of joy and at times of difficulty are the most concrete and effective instruction for the active, responsible, and fruitful inclusion of the children in the wider horizon of society.

Every child is a gift to his or her brothers, sisters, parents, and entire family. The child's life becomes a gift for the very people who were givers of this life and who cannot help but feel its presence, its sharing in their life, and its contribution to their common good and to the good of the community of the family. This truth is obvious in its simplicity and profundity, whatever the complexity and even the possible pathology of the psychological makeup of certain persons. The common good of the whole of society dwells in man; he is "the way of the Church."

The very existence of communion and sharing that should characterize the family's daily life represents its first and fundamental contribution to society. The relationships between the members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of "free giving." By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service, and deep solidarity.

Thus, the fostering of authentic and mature communion between persons within the family is the first and irreplaceable school of social life, an example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue, and love. The family is thus the place of origin and the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society. It makes an original contribution in depth to building up the world by making possible a life that is properly speaking "human," in particular by guarding and transmitting virtues and values.

Consequently, faced with a society that is running the risk of becoming more and more depersonalized and standardized and, therefore, inhuman and dehumanizing, with the

negative results of many forms of escapism -- such as alcoholism, drugs, and even terrorism -- the family possesses and continues still to release formidable energies. These energies are capable of taking people out of their anonymity, keeping them conscious of their personal dignity, enriching them with deep humanity, and placing them, in their uniqueness and unrepeatability, within the fabric of society.

Solidarity also needs to be practiced through participation in social and political life. Serving the Gospel of Life, thus, means that the family, particularly through its membership in family associations, works to ensure that the laws and institutions of the state in no way violate the right to life, from conception to natural death, but rather protect and promote it.

The Charter of the Rights of the Family presented to the United Nations by the Holy See in 1983 is also directed to the families themselves. It aims at reinforcing among families an awareness of the irreplaceable role and position of the family. It wishes to inspire families to unite in the defense and promotion of their rights. It encourages families to fulfill their duties in such a way that the role of the family will become more clearly appreciated and recognized in today's world.

--Pontifical Council For The Family