

RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS IN THE FAMILY (Ephesians 2:13-18)

An essential and permanent part of the Christian family's sanctifying role consists in accepting the call to conversion that the Gospel addresses to all Christians, who do not always remain faithful to the "newness" of baptism that makes them "saints."

Often refusing to acknowledge God as their beginning, people have disrupted also their proper relationship to their own ultimate goal as well as their whole relationship toward themselves, others, and all created things. The Christian family, too, is sometimes unfaithful to the law of baptismal grace and holiness proclaimed anew in the sacrament of marriage.

Family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon, to reconciliation. There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension, and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion. Hence, there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life. At the same time, every family is called by the God of peace to have the joyous and renewing experience of "reconciliation," that is, communion re-established, unity restored. In particular, participation in the sacrament of reconciliation and in the banquet of the one body of Christ offers to the Christian family the grace and the responsibility of overcoming every division and of moving toward the fullness of communion willed by God, responding in this way to the ardent desire of the Lord: "that they may be one." (John 17:21)

This capacity depends on the divine grace of forgiveness and reconciliation, which always ensures the spiritual energy to begin anew. For this very reason, family members need to encounter Christ in the Church through the wonderful sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

Repentance and mutual pardon within the bosom of the Christian family, so much a part of daily life, receive their specific sacramental expression in Christian penance. Pope Pius VI wrote of married couples: "If sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is abundantly poured forth in the sacrament of penance."

It is necessary to rediscover Christ as the "mystery of piety," the one in whom God shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the sacrament of penance, which for the faithful is the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of serious sins committed after baptism. The celebration of this sacrament acquires special significance for family life. While they discover in faith that sin contradicts not only the covenant with God but also the covenant between husband and wife and the communion of the family, the married couple and the other members of the family are led to an encounter with God, who is "rich in mercy," (Ephesians 2:4) who bestows on them his love that is more powerful than sin and who reconstructs and brings to perfection the marriage covenant and the family communion.

--Pontifical Council For The Family