

THE FAMILY: SANCTUARY OF LIFE (John 10:10-15)

The fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator -- that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person (cf. Genesis 5:1-3).

The family has a decisive responsibility that flows from its very nature as a community of life and love, founded upon marriage, and from its mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love. Here, it is a matter of God's own love, of which parents are co-workers and, as it were, interpreters when they transmit life and raise it according to his fatherly plan. This is the love that becomes selflessness, receptiveness, and gift. Within the family, each member is accepted, respected, and honored precisely because he or she is a person; and, if any family member is in greater need, the care which he or she receives is all the more intense and attentive.

The family has a special role to play throughout the life of its members, from birth to death. It is truly the sanctuary of life: the place in which life -- the gift of God -- can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. Consequently, the role of the family in building a culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable.

As the domestic Church, the family is summoned to proclaim, celebrate, and serve the Gospel of Life. This is a responsibility that first concerns married couples. They are called to be givers of life on the basis of an ever-greater awareness of the meaning of procreation as a unique event that clearly reveals human life as a gift received in order then to be given as a gift. In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, as the fruit of their mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift that flows from them.

It is above all in raising children that the family fulfills its mission to proclaim the Gospel of Life. By word and example, in the daily round of relationships and choices, and through concrete actions and signs, parents lead their children to authentic freedom, actualized in the sincere gift of self, and they cultivate in them respect for others, a sense of justice, cordial openness, dialogue, generous service, solidarity, and all the other values that help people to live life as a gift.

Even amid the difficulties of the work of education, difficulties that are often greater today, parents must trustingly and courageously train their children in the essential values of human life. Children must grow up with a correct attitude of freedom regarding material goods by adopting a simple and austere lifestyle and being fully convinced that a person is more precious for what he or she is than for what he or she has.

In raising children, Christian parents must be concerned about their children's faith and help them to fulfill the vocation that God has given them. The parents' mission as educators also includes teaching and giving their children an example of the true meaning of suffering and death. They will be able to do this if they are sensitive to all kinds of suffering around them and, even more, if they succeed in fostering attitudes of closeness, assistance, and sharing toward sick or elderly members of the family.

--Pontifical Council For The Family