

## **THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY: DOMESTIC CHURCH**

Christ chose to be born and to grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. The Church is nothing other than "the family of God." From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers "together with all [their] household" (cf. Acts 18:8). When they were converted, they desired that their whole household should also be saved (cf. Acts 16:31 and 11:14). These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world.

In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are by word and example the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation that is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation.

It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity. Thus, the home is the first school of Christian life and a school for human enrichment. Here, one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous -- even repeated -- forgiveness, and, above all, divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life.

The absolute need for family catechesis emerges with particular force in certain situations that the Church unfortunately experiences in some places. In places where anti-religious legislation endeavors even to prevent education in the faith, and in places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, "the Church of the home" remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis.

The family is the domestic church that is also called to be a luminous sign of the presence of Christ and of his love for those who are "far away," for families who do not yet believe, and for those Christian families who no longer live in accordance with the faith that they once received. The Christian family is called to enlighten by its example and its witness those who seek the truth.

Just like Aquila and Priscilla (cf. Acts 18; Romans 16:3 & 4) at the dawn of Christianity, today the Church shows forth her perennial newness and fruitfulness by the presence of Christian couples and families who dedicate at least a part of their lives to working in missionary territories, proclaiming the Gospel and doing service to their fellowmen in the love of Jesus Christ.

Many single people remain without a human family often due to conditions of poverty. Some live their situation in the spirit of the Beatitudes, serving God and neighbor in exemplary fashion. The doors of homes, the "domestic churches", and of the great family, which is the Church must be open to all of them. No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who "labor and are heavy laden" (Matthew 11:28).

--The Pontifical Council for the Family