

THE FAMILY AND THE GOOD NEWS (Luke 2:6-14)

The Church as Mother gives birth to, educates, and builds up the Christian family. By proclaiming the Word of God, the Church reveals to the Christian family its true identity, what it is and should be according to the Lord's plan; by celebrating the sacraments, the Church enriches and strengthens the Christian family with the grace of Christ; by the continuous proclamation of love, the Church encourages and guides the Christian family to the service of love so that it may imitate and relive the same self-giving and sacrificial love that the Lord Jesus Christ has for the entire race.

In turn, the Christian family is grafted into the mystery of the Church to such a degree as to become a sharer, in its own way, in the saving mission proper to the Church. The Christian family welcomes and announces the Word of God; it thus becomes more and more each day a believing and evangelizing community.

Christian spouses and parents are required to offer the obedience of faith (cf. Romans 16:26). They are called upon to welcome the word of the Lord that reveals to them the marvelous news -- the Good News -- of their conjugal and family life sanctified and made a source of sanctity by Christ himself. Only in faith can they discover and admire with joyful gratitude the dignity to which God has deigned to raise marriage and the family, making them a sign and meeting place of the loving covenant between Jesus Christ and his bride, the Church.

The very preparation for Christian marriage is itself a journey of faith. It is a special opportunity for the engaged couple to rediscover and deepen the faith received in baptism and nourished by their Christian upbringing. In this way, they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the kingdom of God in the married state.

The celebration of the sacrament of marriage is the basic moment of the faith of the couple. This sacrament, in essence, is the proclamation in the Church of the Good News concerning married love. It is the Word of God that "reveals" and "fulfills" the wise and loving plan of God for the married couple, giving them a mysterious and real share in the very love with which God himself loves humanity. The sacramental celebration of marriage is a proclamation of the Word of God that is made within and with the Church as a community of believers. This also requires that it be prolonged in the life of the married couple and of the family. God, who called the couple to marriage, continues to call them in marriage. In and through the events, problems, difficulties, and circumstances of everyday life, God comes to them, revealing and presenting the concrete demands of their sharing in the love of Christ for his Church in the particular family, social, and ecclesial situation in which they find themselves.

To the extent in which the Christian family accepts the Gospel and matures in faith, it becomes an evangelizing community. The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family that is

conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms a part. One cannot fail to stress the evangelizing action of the family in the evangelizing apostolate of the laity. In fact, the future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of the home. This apostolic mission of the family is rooted in baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan. The future of humanity lies in the hands of the families that are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living.

--Pontifical Council for the Family