

# THE TWO OF US AND GOD

By Jaime Ferrer & Mercedes Escolá

## PROLOGUE

I have known Jaime and Mercedes for many years. The friendship that has always united us, especially in the family and marriage ministries, makes this work in prefacing their book, very pleasant. And the constant harmony of thought with them in all that concerns the Christian concept of marriage and family, makes this prologue not only pleasant, but easy.

Jaime and Mercedes have been parents of a large family - Seven children. But the fidelity to their task of being parents did not prevent them from living their marriage with intensity both inside and out. What I mean to say is that during all their long, married life, their children did not absorb them in a way that prevented them from keeping alive the intimate, burning fire of their love that began in courtship. Not only that, but they did not keep hidden the fruits of their Christian marriage privately, but felt an intense vocation to propagate to the outside world the treasures that God had given them in their conjugal life. They began as a young married couple exercising their ministry in marriage groups back then called, "Pio XII", and extended it throughout their long lives in the "Christian Family Movement", until God decided to take Jaime with Him. They have been aware that God, when granting them the Sacrament of Marriage, had also granted them the graces of love, not just to enjoy it for themselves, but to spread it.

In this book you will find, dear reader, the quintessence of all these rich experiences. It is therefore primarily a book of testimony. Testimony of what? Of the following, amongst other things:

Marriage is a vocation. Suffering is a part of everyone's life - a response to a call from God. Do not think that only the vocation to religious life is a vocation. Although in an objective order, one must give, in proper Christian spirituality, primacy to consecrated virginity, this does not excuse an individual, in a particular subjective order of each personal life, to follow faithfully his/her vocation. Therefore, the future spouses, as the result of a sincere discernment, who feel called by God to marriage, then they have to be convinced that in this Sacrament they will find a way of sanctification for both.

Marriage, then, is a way to holiness. It joins the couple with one another, and both with God. It is a mistake to think that holiness is something unique to priests and religious. The Vatican Council II has made it clear that God calls everyone to holiness. And it is evident that not all are called to the consecrated life. Then, marriage also is a way of holiness.

Marriage is a vocation to happiness. We know that complete happiness can be found only in Heaven. But here and now, Christians can find happiness in living the Beatitudes. And in marriage they could be lived easily: not comfortably, but easily, simply. Eg... A large family has within reach the Christian virtues of austerity, of giving to others, even in today's world, is likely to enjoy the bliss of being persecuted for righteousness' sake, to be criticized for its generous openness to life. To these Jesus has promised - and He never fails to keep His promises-the joys of His blessings.

In marriage you have to unite everything, even your spiritual lives. In the past, there was a common idea that the spiritual life was so personal and intimate that it could not be shared with anyone. Recent Popes, however, have spoken of a spirituality of marriage: a husband and wife should share their spiritual experiences and help each other in their mutual sanctification.

These and other illuminating ideas about marriage and family you will find, dear reader, in this book. The best thing is that all this is not here as a mere theoretical study, but is supported by the joyful experience of over fifty years of marriage and family life. Reading the text I am reminded of the words of St. John in the epilogue of his Gospel: *"He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe"* (Jn 19:35). And these two have seen and experienced Him over 50 years. Enough! I don't want the tedium of reading the prologue to take away your desire to read the text.

Pedro Suner S.J.

## INTRODUCTION

In our walk through this world, seeking guidance on marriage and family, we have found many books and other publications written by theologians, priests, doctors, psychologists, lawyers, etc. Each from their point of view, have studied marriage. And we recognize that we have learned a lot from some of them. But we found missing simple guidelines, more accessible to any marriage, which are not focused from a scientific point of view, but from the marriage itself - marriage seen through the eyes of a married couple. This is what we have tried to present. As far as possible have tried to base this book on our own experiences. What we would very much like is for this book to help many marriages to grow, but especially those that may be unhappy to become very happy.

From the Church we have received our Christian values and over the years, we have been assimilating them until acquiring our own way of life, in accordance with our own state. The years of marriage we have lived and the testimony of other happily married couples have encouraged us to write this, which has become a summary of what we think and believe to be Marriage and Family.

Jaime and Mercedes

*When we had completely finished this book in its drafting and only lacked tidying everything written, Jaime died. With the certainty that from Heaven he provided me the help I needed, and with the collaboration of our daughter Mercedes, I put different materials in order to deliver the texts to the Christian Family Movement, on behalf of the two of us, just as Jaime had wanted to, and with the hope that our experience may be of help to other married couples.*  
*Mercedes*

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NB This English version is intended not as a precise verbatim translation of the original, but rather as a relatively free translation aimed at presenting the overall substance of what was, hopefully, the intention of the authors.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE WILL OF GOD

In the Second Vatican Council Document on Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium I 42) we read: "All the faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state. Indeed they have an obligation to so strive." This call to perfection is really meant for everyone, and not just for Christians. When Jesus admonishes (Mt. 5:48): *"Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"* He is, in effect, telling us that the most important thing that anyone can do in this world is to fulfill the will of God. Therein lies true holiness, and our eternal salvation. We have been created by Love, and for love, and the only way that we can fully respond to God's will is to know and faithfully fulfill our particular vocation.

The initiative always comes from God, for it is He Who makes known His will, and gives us the necessary help to comply. He only asks that we freely collaborate with Him. While this refers in a special way to all Christians, and therefore to all Christian couples and family members, at the same time the natural law that is embodied in the Commandments of the Law of God pre-supposes that His will has some features that are common to each and every person, whether Christian or not. But for Christians there are specific requirements derived from the teachings of Jesus made known to us through the Gospels and handed down to us through His Church.

It is clear that the vocation to the priesthood and consecrated virginity is one that is objectively superior to all other vocations - and this has been clearly defined. But only in relatively few circumstances is it a calling that is subjectively applicable. The vocation given to all others is accompanied with the inherent capability granted by the Lord to live out that vocation; and of course the Lord knows better than anyone the way of life suited to each individual. An example will serve to clarify this point. A man enters a shoe store and asks to be shown the very best shoes they have on hand. He is shown a very beautiful, and very expensive, pair of alligator shoes. Upon seeing them he immediately says: "I will take them". But the salesman says: "Excuse me sir, these shoes are size 39. You need a size 42". They may indeed objectively be the very best of shoes; but they are not at all suitable to the subject.

#### The Calls Of God Are Varied

God's call to each person as well as to each marriage is something special to them, and in many cases a mission that they themselves are meant to carry out. In the Book of Revelation we read: *"And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written that no one knows except he who receives it."* (Revelation 2:17). This is interpreted to indicate that God gives a specific mission to every believer, and desires that it be carried out. Thus, God invites us to carry out a specific task meant only for ourselves, so that we cannot delegate it to others. If we fail to carry it out, it will simply remain unfulfilled. If, however, we do fulfill that mission, not only will it sanctify us and become a means of our salvation, it will also benefit the whole Church and be a means of collaborating in the triumph of Christ. We cannot always completely discern right from the beginning what God wants from us. Typically He manifests His will for us gradually, making it clear to us little by little over a period of time, during which He gives us the strength needed to carry it out. It is a call to do something concrete, and we can be certain that He will provide the means and the support both to discern what it is, and to fulfill it. On our part we must continually ask Him to enlighten us so as to be able to understand the path He has chosen for us; and then to undertake it cheerfully, without looking back.

God's will for us, however, is not limited to that special mission He might have for us, but can be

discovered also in the myriad seemingly insignificant events of everyday life. Whenever we have to make any decision, it should be done in prayer asking: "Lord what can I/we do? What must I/we do now? What is Your will? It should not be a question of wanting God to accommodate His will to mine, but rather my seeking His will (as Jesus prayed from the Cross: "Not my will, but Yours be done!" Lk 22:42). Many women are sorry specimens as nuns because they failed to discern that they were called to be mothers; and many laicized and married priests make disastrous husbands and fathers.

The demands inherent in a vocation differ from person to person according to their own state, but they are no less obligated than a priest, monk or religious. In the case of married couples, they have an obligation to be open to life, start a family, care for and educate their children, help and respect one another as husband and wife, etc. This is common to all married couples; but how they go about it will differ from couple to couple. Just as no two people are alike, so too no two couples are alike. God does not create clones, so that each individual person has a unique way of relating. Similarly each partner in a marriage provides a unique relationship. Even before marriage while they are engaged, a couple should pray as St. Theresa did: "Lord, I am Yours, for You I was born. What do You want from me?" And after they are married: "Lord, *we* were born for You. What do you want from *us*". If we ask Him sincerely, He will answer.

God calls whom He wants, and when He wants, which is always at a time that is most convenient for us; and He asks us to respond generously, and with love. In the case of a married couple, He asked that the response be shared by both partners. If the goal that they seek is high, they will make every effort to achieve it. If it is mediocre there will be no particular effort to achieve it, and as a result married couples will never come even close to the happiness that they had expected from their marital union.

In one of his addresses to young people Pope John Paul II said: "When Christ says: 'Follow me' His meaning for many is: 'I am calling you to another love....I am the spouse of the Church, my wife 'Follow me' in becoming the husband of your wife, the wife of your husband. Both of you become participants in that Sacrament which Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, says is like the love that exists between Christ and His Church."

There is another instance in the Gospel that expresses clearly that God calls to many different ways. In Mark 5:18-19, we have the story of Jesus healing the demoniac by ordering his demons to enter a herd of swine and then having them rush headlong into the sea. Frightened the Gerasenes ask Jesus to leave them. With that, the man who had been possessed wanted to follow Jesus. But Jesus' plan was different. He told the man to go and glorify God among his people. The man accepted that call and did as Jesus requested, generously fulfilling this mission across the Decapolis. We can presume that in responding to that call the man became a saint.

### Marriage Is A Vocation

We have touched on the fact that there are calls within the married state, but we must never forget that Marriage itself is a vocation. When two people are joined through the Sacrament of Marriage it is the Lord Who unites them, and with that so too are the missions that had been given to each of them. Therefore they must thenceforth fulfill their respective missions in mutual cooperation. Moreover, it is our belief that they are, in addition, given a mission particular to their marriage. They are now mutually bound to cooperate in an endeavor to live out that mission. Having completed it over a lifetime with the help of God, they can confidently turn to Jesus and say: "You gave us these talents, this ability to collaborate in doing Your will and carrying out the work You have given us. And now we gratefully offer it to You."

When we were young, we were somehow left with the mistaken impression that true "vocations"

were to be found outside of marriage (i.e. to clerical and religious life) and that the married state was something that God allowed. It may have been due to the unfortunate use of the term "Vocation" in a very restricted sense, but we needed someone to tell us that marriage is something that God wants, that it is His will; and that it is not at all a residual state for those who lacked a true vocation; that it is not at all a kind of permission to use sex in a lawful manner, as if it were a kind of "permitted sin". For whatever reason, this obvious truth that married life in itself is a call from the Lord, had not been adequately adverted to; and there had been no one in our lives to bring that to our attention. When we were asked to pray for vocations, invariably the meaning was to pray that many respond to the call to priestly and religious vocations. In our naiveness then, the presumption was that marriage was a state for those who had not been generous enough to say yes to God's call. We met no one who recommended praying that young people prayerfully discern whether they are "called" to the married state. Such prayers were recommended only for people to discern whether they are called to priestly or religious life. It seems that everyone took married life for granted.

Thankfully recent Popes have over and over stressed that married life is a vocation from God, so that all the world can now be very much aware of its value in His eyes - that it is important for each person to ask the Lord's light to discern to what path He wants him or her to follow. This is a lesson that is learned primarily in the family. There must be an environment of openness to whichever path the Lord desires. Whichever path is finally chosen, if it is to be in keeping with the will of the Lord, is going to require generosity, a spirit of sacrifice, a sense of service, sharing, forgiveness, etc. And there is no better place to learn these virtues than the family. In fact, if they are not learned in the family, then the ability to discern the path that the Lord desires becomes very difficult, resulting in catastrophic and almost insurmountable choices in the lives of such people.

Large families for the most part reflect generous marriages, and this in turn facilitates the flowering of priestly and religious vocations. The current crisis of priestly vocations can be traced in great measure to the current crisis in families. The reality around us makes this abundantly clear. A priest friend once said: "When families go well, priestly vocations also go well". But the same can be said of married life - a vocation that is just as important for life as a priestly vocation. It requires a mature person to make the right choice for one's present and future life. The ability to love always is also learned in the family. When children witness this kind of deep and constant love within their own family, they will naturally repeat it in whatever path they finally choose.

But of course to become the kind of couple and family that will respond to their way of life as indeed a call from the Lord, a modicum of preparation is certainly required. It does not happen automatically. In the course of a conversation about marriage being a vocation with a priest friend of ours, he mentioned coming across a case where a man, late at night, visited an acquaintance who had three daughters. The visitor mentioned that his wife could no longer handle the daily chores and wondered if he could have one of the daughters to become the wife of his son. He was allowed to choose one, and the two fathers settled everything - the time, place, all the incidentals, without either of them making known to the son or daughter what had transpired. This unfortunate couple can hardly be responding to a vocation that they are not even aware exists. There are similar cases throughout the world, which makes us think more deeply about the mystery of God's plan as expressed through His calls.

### Families Under Attack

The family is under attack all over the world with individuals, groups and even governments intent on destroying it. One result of this campaign is the failure not only to take adequate time to prepare for this very important journey together, but to conclude that preparation is not even necessary. Thus, although there are some relatively few exceptions, we have a whole generation of

irresponsible and immature people entering marriage without the slightest idea about the true meaning of love. This makes it impossible for them to safeguard, express, and communicate love. Is it any wonder that the family is collapsing, and with it the stability of society. In our parishes some attempts are being made to remedy this deficiency with marriage preparation courses, usually held immediately prior to the wedding. Some of these are comprised of no more than one or two talks wherein a few ideas are presented; but given all the incidental details involved in preparing for the soon to be celebrated wedding day, too often scant attention is given to such informational talks. In some cases married couples are utilized to prepare the young couples for marriage, and they are amazed at the ignorance of most of them about what married life is all about.

In society we are always reminded that no meaningful profession can be undertaken without several years of preparation, and that without such preparation it is impossible to practice it. Everyone accepts this as plain common sense. Why then is that same common sense not applied to preparing for married and family life, ultimately far more important in the future welfare of the individuals, and therefore of society itself, than any so-called "profession"? Knowing this, is it not imperative that parishes come to realize that one or two talks just prior to marriage is totally inadequate as a preparation for this vastly important step, - and therefore to do something about it?

Another important point to consider is the problem with the disinformation being propagated to blatantly mislead young people into believing that love can be equated with sex; that the purpose of marriage does not go beyond sex; and that where there is this kind of love, anything goes. They are not told about the incalculable harm, the insurmountable problems that this philosophy gives rise to. Any thought of being willing to sacrifice, or to be concerned with the will of God is considered to be old fashioned. Chastity? No one seems to give a second thought to that anymore.

This disinformation has far-reaching effects, so that even many Catholic couples are deceived. As harmful to a healthy married life a lack of information is, even more deleterious is disinformation. A result of this is the tendency on the part of people who should know better, and are in a position to teach Gospel principles, to "lower the bar", as it were, in trying to "help" these misguided people, and in doing so fail to openly confront these misconceptions that are so dominant in society. They hold back in presenting the truth on the pretext that the couple would not understand, might get angry, be laughed at for being presented such old-fashioned ideas, might reject them, or what not. Therefore "lowering the bar" by being silent, they conclude, is a lesser evil than no preparation at all. This reminds us of a lesson in a passage from Ezekiel 33:2-9 wherein if the watchman sees the enemy coming and blows the warning trumpet, but even so the people ignore it and consequently die from the sword, then it is they who are responsible for their own death. If, however, the watchman sees the enemy but fails to blow the warning trumpet, and the people are killed, then the watchman is responsible for their death. In the same way, if those who are responsible for preparing couples for marriage fail to warn them about what God expects from married couples, then it is they who will be held responsible for the sins committed by those who were ignorant because of not having been told the truth. On the other hand if they do courageously present the truth but it is rejected, then those who ignore or reject it will be held responsible.

We simply cannot lament the sad situation in the world and ignore the mission we have to evangelize the world - leaving it up to others. If we ourselves do not do it, it will not be done. And as the recent Popes have insisted, "we" necessarily involves the family. But it also involves the priests who go out to meet the families in their homes. Granted, there are less and less priests to go around; but for those priests who are able and willing to reach out to families in their common endeavor to evangelize, they will surely find willing collaborators who will then make their efforts much lighter, and at the same time much more fruitful.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LOVE

There is a worldwide confusion as to precisely what love is. And when this total lack of understanding exists between married couples - an absolutely essential ingredient for the happiness of any individual, couple or family - we have a recipe for disaster. Therefore to avoid such a catastrophe, every effort must be made to help them to understand exactly what is the true meaning of love even before they begin to live together as man and wife. The definition that the world presents to them is that love is sex, and sex is love - underscored by the expression "making love" to describe the sexual act. The media, novels, movies etc. invariably speak of sex in this way, so that people unconsciously confuse the two. In the same way we hear the phrase "falling in love" to convey a sense of experiencing infatuation, something far different than true love; but because of this mindset of confusing love with sex, people conclude that infatuation is equivalent to love. Infatuation may or may not eventually lead to genuine love; but if it does, it is only because, as someone has said, one has first "fallen out" of infatuation, which is fleeting and not genuine.

#### What Is Love

John the Evangelist (1 John 4:8) wrote that: "God is love", meaning, of course, that Love is the very essence of God. Without God, there can be no love. Any love worthy of the name necessarily flows from God Who is the source of all love. We speak of parental love, brotherly love, and also of conjugal love; all of which are partial images of God's love. In every case it is something that is shared - both given and received. Married couples give their entire person to one another, and that, of course, includes the love in their respective hearts that flows from the Source. Therefore the greatest and truest meaning of love is that *it is a Gift from God*.

God loves us so much that He became incarnate to save us, died for each one of us, gave us the Sacrament of Baptism whereby we become His children in a special way. This is a mystery that is beyond our understanding. "God created man in His image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26-27), and since His "Image and Likeness" is Love itself, it is precisely love that best expresses the similarity we have with God. Moreover, the Scripture goes on to say that it was "male and female" that He made in His image, implying that the love of a couple is also the image of God.

In point of fact, if couples were asked why they want to marry, and if they answered honestly, the great majority would more than likely say: "To be happy". And if asked further who is it that is going to make them happy, obviously the answer would be the person one intends to marry; which is precisely why they decided to marry that person. This may indeed be the unexpressed state of mind of the vast majority of newly weds; but obviously there is a great ignorance about the true nature of marriage as envisioned by God, Who is Love and the author of marriage.

There has to be something more to marriage than a fulfillment of the natural desire to live with someone of the opposite sex in order to enjoy a sentimental mutual attraction which in any case fades in time - as any married couple that has lived together for a number of years will testify. There has to be something deeper, much deeper, than that sentimental mutual attraction that the world regards as love, and that gives one a temporary personal satisfaction. Since God is Love, and the Source of all love, then far from being a temporary fleeting feeling, this love of spouses for one another that is recognized as flowing from God is inexhaustible. If they put no obstacles in the way, their love and unity will grow indefinitely and can grow immeasurably. If love does not grow it will deteriorate and even die. Obviously God, Who is love, does not die; it is His love within them that ceases to be there because they have rejected it. It will grow, however, whenever a couple takes the necessary care to allow it to deepen.

On a number of occasions John Paul II emphasized the need to be aware of the consequences of original sin - that we were born with a fallen nature and inclined to evil. Through Baptism we were freed from the original sin passed on to every person due to the disobedience of our first parents. Baptism freed us to pursue our ultimate goal - to be with God through all eternity. But although through Baptism we were freed from original sin, we were not at the same time freed from the evil inclinations of the fallen nature that resulted from it. We are faced with a lifetime battle.

Married love was also wounded by original sin. Every couple is faced with the task of making every effort to return to the state envisioned by God before original sin. As any couple knows, this is not an easy task, but one that must be continually striven for. The reward is a degree of love and happiness that makes the struggle more than worth while. God, Who loves us beyond measure, is the One who gave us this mission - one that is suitable to the condition of our particular marriage - so that we can make our effort to carry it out with confidence.

While always respecting our complete freedom, it is He Who put this particular person into our path. Couples who truly love one another can give wonderful testimonies as to the "chance" meetings that brought them together. If God gave them the opportunity to meet one another, it is He who bound them together in marriage. Thus Jesus could say: "What God has joined, let no one separate." (Mt. 19:6).

In the beginning couples are attracted by the beauty, sympathy, kindness, strength, intelligence, character, joy etc. of this special person that has come into their lives; and in experiencing mutual love in this new phase in their lives there was this promise of happiness that they had never thought possible, and just knew that this had to continue throughout the rest of their lives. Those who sense that it is God Who brought them together, who want to do what God wants, and desire to raise a family united in the Lord, do in fact find happiness in this world, and look forward to eternal happiness with the Lord.

But there are those who come to think that marriage is not at all what they had expected and become disillusioned. They might warn newlyweds that they too will be disappointed. They say: "You may be happy now, but eventually you'll see..." These are people who may not be separated, but they have failed in their marriage, and their marriage is dead because their love has died. In 1 John 3:14 we read: "Whoever does not love remains in death." And how true this is of such people. They have failed to realize that it is God who brought them together in marriage in order to make it easier for them to find Him. St. Augustine said: "Lord, You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You". Indeed we are called to holiness, to a deep relationship with God, and it is our task to help one another to move toward Him.

When a couple feels this certain strong attraction toward one another, they believe that they are in love - and this is in fact the beginning of love, bringing about a feeling of joy and excitement to the point that they feel that they are now ready for marriage. But this feeling is not in itself sufficient, as couples may come to realize even before they get married. Since feelings come and go, some couples abandon the thought of marriage when the warm feelings disappear altogether. The problem is when the feelings disappear after marriage. At some time infatuation has to give way to true love, that is, something that lies not in feelings, but in the will. This is the kind of love that pre-supposes a commitment for life - the intention to give oneself to one's partner forever.

When God instituted marriage through Adam and Eve, He gave them to one another as suitable helpers to one another - completely different persons, each meant to help the other by supplying the qualities each had and not found in the other. In most cases in the beginning they are physically attracted to one another, and many mistake that attraction to be love; but it is when the mutual moral, intellectual and spiritual qualities are discovered through communication that they begin to experience the solid foundation of true love. Where there is a development of true love, the inevitable deterioration of physical qualities becomes unimportant. As poets remind us: "The

beauty of the face blossoms one day, and is gone the next; whereas the soul is a flower that never fades. "Not only does it not fade, but it becomes increasingly more beautiful. The more a couple discovers one another's spiritual values, the more deeply do they love one another.

When couples grow in this way the indissolubility of marriage, far from being deemed an almost impossible burden, is seen to be not only possible, but natural, rewarding, and a source of joy. The mutual aid in marriage acquires its true dimension when it is recognized to be something spiritual as well as material. We face obstacles though mutual advice, example, testimony, and most of all continually praying with and for one another.

We are often advised that we have to accept one another just as we are - weak points as well as strong points, defects as well as qualities. This is true up to a point, because no one is perfect and we all have our physical and mental limitations. But when it comes to personal defects for which we ourselves are responsible - such as anger, egotism, impatience, temper, individualism, overeating, alcoholism, imprudent use of money, etc., these are correctible, and every effort must be made to overcome them. We cannot expect our spouse to simply put up with it; nor can we allow ourselves to make little of them. People speak of crises occurring in married life after a number of years - 5 year crisis, 10 year crisis, middle age crisis; or due to circumstances like the birth of a first child, financial crisis, or crisis of feelings of incompatibility, etc. Indeed crises do arise in many different forms; but it is always good to remember that the very word "crisis", in many different languages, has the connotation of there being a chance, an opportunity, a potential wherever there is a danger. The problem is that in today's world too many married couples do not want to relinquish their own ideas and selfish lives and follow the way of life that the Lord wants from them, which for that very reason inevitably gives rise to a crisis wherein the opportunities and potential become very very elusive.

Selfishness and pride are the root causes of the loss of love and the consequent breakdown of marriages, as well the root causes of a breakdown of their relationship with the Lord, precisely because they are shortcomings that are completely opposed to love. When problems arise due to selfishness and pride, the love that couples had had between them - the only remedy to their problem - withers and dies. Therefore, we strongly advise couples to be aware of this, and at all cost fight against selfishness and pride becoming predominant in their respective lives.

As each spouse moves closer and closer to God they become more and more capable of love, and their consequent ever deepening intimacy helps them to cope with the wear and tear of daily life. No marriage is without its difficulties; so that whatever the state and condition of the married life of Christians, there will always be a need for effort, renunciation and generosity. That sense of generosity includes being open to a large family - something that in itself requires toil and hardship, often fraught with sickness. But when there is real Christian love within the family, all of this is not only enduring, but filled with the promise of a never ending joy and peace which so many couples lacking an experience of God's love can never even imagine.

Obviously married couples are raised in different families with different family environments, and therefore have a different understanding of God; so they have to make every effort to unite in forming their own new family to have its own common knowledge of God. To accomplish this they have to be humble and generously help one another, in order that God will be able to draw them to Himself and help them to better undertake their respective tasks in this world. They must ask God to help them to be constant in their love. In the Book of Revelation (2:4) the Lord said to the "angel" of the Church of Ephesus: "I have this against you. That you left your first love". When God created man and breathed His spirit into him it was a creation composed of both body and soul, signifying that man's love must include both of these aspects of his being. In the Encyclical "Humanae Vitae" we read: "It is above all a love fully human, i.e. sensitive and spiritual at the same time; not therefore a simple transport of instinct and sentiment, but it is also, and primarily, an act of free will, intended to maintain and grow through the joys and sorrows of daily life; so that

husband and wife become one heart and one soul, and together attain their human perfection."

It is not possible for a couple to have a purely spiritual love involving the soul quite independent from the body, nor is it possible to experience purely physical love (and here we are not referring to sex) quite independent of the soul. To put it another way, although in marriage there may well be an intense sense of kindness and generosity, a giving and giving that expects absolutely nothing in return, there is nonetheless a natural expectation of reciprocity. Since marriage is a community created by God in His own image and likeness, this similarity, this image of God's essence is most fully expressed in the mutual love of the spouses; for God is a community of love among the three Persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) that comprise the Godhead. Couples therefore can reflect the image of God in which they have been created only to the extent that they form a community of love which includes the two of them and their family.

Because of the limitations of our poor and fallen nature there is no way that we can ever project the complete picture of an infinite loving God. Nevertheless, in our own way we can, if only in a very small way, reflect the true nature of God's infinite love. To utilize a very weak analogy, when we gaze upon the portrait of a person we can indeed form some small idea of the person portrayed; but of course this is still a partial and very limited picture of the real and living person. In Matthew 22:37 we read: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." - because there must be a totality in loving God, involving width, length, height and depth. But it must also be the way we try to love one another. *Width* in love presumes acceptance (with kindness, understanding and generosity) of the full being of one's spouse: character, goodness, shortcomings, limitations, etc. together with an acceptance of his/her family. *Length* in love presupposes that it is for life - no interruptions, reductions, changes, until death, and even beyond. We must never forget that love is the only thing left once we get to heaven, since there is no longer any need for faith or hope. *Height* in love involves a quality that is selfless, forgiving, accommodating and understanding, always seeking the good of the other; and certainly reverential, realizing that one's spouse is a child of God. And finally there must be *Depth* in love. The union of husband and wife is so intimate that, as Pius XII, intimates, it can be imagined that they seem to share one soul. It is a love that embraces all aspects of the human person - body, character, heart, mind, will and soul. There can be no turning back when there is a love so great. There is never any thought about taking back what one has so totally given. It is a love that is not only permanent, but even eternal. This is what God wants. We read in Ecclesiastes 25:1-2 that among the things that gladden the heart of God, and man, is "harmony between a man and a woman".

We must distinguish between love and its manifestations. Love - even spiritual love - is expressed by touching, gestures, words and other means that we have. But the absence of one or the other of these does not necessarily indicate a decrease in our love; because, as we said before, love lies primarily in the will, illuminated by understanding and Faith, and not in feelings, which come and go. If love were based only on feelings we could say: "I used to love you, but I don't anymore". Or: "Now I am in love with someone else, so I am leaving you". Feelings do have their place, but they must never be allowed to rule our lives. The will should rule, even over our feelings, in which case it will not allow them to be a hindrance to real love. It is through our will that we take responsibility for our actions, and through which we become mature people able to commit ourselves for our entire lives.

We know that because of His love for us God always desires what is good for us, and in the same way the love between a husband and wife should also be concerned with the good of each other. Love that is based upon our will is a total love that generously shares all without reservation or selfish calculation (*Humanae Vitae*); and it is through the joys and difficulties of daily life that it is maintained and grows and through which a couple become one in heart and soul and finally attain human perfection.

To say that marriage is for life means that more than the fact that it must endure until the death of one of the partners; it encompasses being present to one another and being dedicated to one another, (as well as to the family) moment by moment, day by day, even during those times when physically separated because of work or in the practice of one's profession. In our striving to be witnesses of God's love for humanity, God Who is Love and created man and woman in love and for love, that is, our striving at being committed to love one another forever and at all times, a pre-requisite condition is maturity. Despite our failure to serve Him and keep His Commandments, while respecting our freedom to be unfaithful, God nevertheless never wavers in His love for us. So too must our love be - something permanent, no matter what happens. It is stability in our conjugal love that makes us a more faithful image of God.

### Finding Love

The Church has always recognized clerical/religious life and married life to be the most common ways to respond to the call of His Love. Each of these ways provides its own wonderful potential, while at the same time requiring a resignation to certain demands incurred by that way of life. It is not possible to follow both paths simultaneously. Those who choose married life by that very fact renounce individualism and everything that militates against the union of love between those two that God has joined together. Should either or both of them look for comfort, pleasure, money, prestige, a break with their family of origin, the approval of society, a capitulation to the destructive forces in society, you already have a recipe for failure; because marriage is a series of resignation to dauntlessly face up to whatever arises that might separate them. By contrast, if a couple, moved by the Holy spirit, both agree to strive for perfection, renounce everything that hinders progress, and continually deepen their love, then their happiness and progress toward the Lord will be guaranteed.

There are times when working conditions cause a rift - business trips and other undesirable lengthy periods of separation. This absence could result in a permanent state of exhaustion, which, in turn, brings about something even more damaging than separation; for the communication between a couple is affected, and this weakens the love between them. The saying: "Out of sight, out of mind" is valid only when the "love" of a couple is based on feelings; but if the love of a couple is based on the will, there may well be some natural tension due to lengthy separations, but the danger of any severe damage will be greatly lessened.

Very often what affects couples negatively is not the problem of lengthy physical separation, but over-involvement in one's work - being in the workplace for unreasonable hours, but even making the home an extension of the workplace, leaving little or no opportunity for time spent together. An answer might require looking for a different job, with less pay perhaps, and requiring a more frugal way of life, but one that would, nonetheless be more human. To have an authentic marriage a couple cannot but make time for one another.

There are different degrees of love, each of which must be adverted to and striven for. Jesus teaches that we must first of all love God above all things, and then secondly love our neighbor as ourselves. In addition we must love others as Jesus did, relying on the Mystical Body of Christ whereby we are conscious that our spouse is a child of God and "brother/sister" of Jesus. Thirdly we must love others as Jesus loved us: "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (John 13:34). Fourthly we must love with a community dimension: "Father, I pray that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:21-22). Love in marriage is always fruitful, usually made manifest in the birth of children; or in the acceptance of others on the part of those who cannot have children. In any case love in marriage and family should be a reflection of the love of the Trinity.

## Failed Marriages

Everyone is aware of the growing number of separations and divorces in our modern society. We are surrounded by failed marriages, despite the innate goodness of many of the individuals involved. For the most part, this breakdown is due to ignorance and misconceptions about the meaning of marriage and love - about the fact that marriage constitutes a total and permanent giving. Added to that is an immaturity that makes them incapable of a life-long commitment. Too many people are raised in an environment where there is little or no love, and take it for granted that they will have to live their whole lives in disappointment. For them it is as if they were bound with a yoke so that they are doomed to drag the heavy cross of marriage; whereas they should be bound by a yoke that enables them to cooperate and walk together toward the smiling face of Jesus. ("My yoke is easy and my burden light" - Mt. 11:30).

If you want to know if your love will last forever, just ask yourself whether your love is directed to the person, or to what you perceive to be a particular attribute that you associate with the person - rich, famous, attractive, humorous, etc. All of these other people also possess, and even to a much greater degree, and any of them can be lost in a heartbeat. They can also be the very things that in time make the individual repugnant, and can be the cause of separation, which is not at all helpful to them, their children or to society. Whereas the person remains the same, with or without these transient attributes; And love remains if indeed one's love is directed at the person. But this is often not the case, so that no one is surprised when people whose values are disoriented end up separated. People have lost the sense of sin, and never really knew the true meaning of love - that it is something that comes from God, and endures as long as we remain united to God. And even if it deteriorates, if we maintain our dependence on God, it can always be revitalized.

God is the source of all love, and it is a gift from Him. Therefore anything that is in opposition to God's law, even though many people may call it love, is not love at all. For example, for a married person to leave one's spouse and go to live with someone else, trying to convince that person of his/her love, is not true love precisely because it is blatantly contrary to God's command. In such a case infatuation and prohibited sex cannot be a gift from God. That would be against His very nature. All of this may seem complicated and prohibitive, but the truth is just the opposite. The total unhappiness of unnumbered couples that find themselves in situations that are (and they know it) contrary to God's law is more than ample proof of this.

## God Helps Married Couples In All Their Needs

God is pleased with a couple that commit themselves to one another in His Name by receiving the Sacrament of Marriage. Just as it is He Who shares His love with them, so too is it He Who unites them. He Himself never changes in His love. It is always there for them, and consequently His help is also always available to them unless they choose to reject it.

The Sacrament of Marriage provides an unexpected dimension to all of the situations in the life of a couple, and through it their love acquires a new value. Their human love becomes divine love as they become witnesses of the love of the union between Christ and His Church. The Sanctifying Grace received through this Sacrament is precisely that - sanctifying - and so our relationship to Jesus as a couple is continually deepened as we witness Jesus to one another in our daily lives. And the attendant Actual Graces from the Sacrament make it possible to preserve and deepen our love, as well as to resolve any difficulties that may arise.

By its very nature God's love encompasses communication, so that where there is true love there is

an automatic inclination and desire to communicate with one another, and more importantly with God. It is when our love is oriented toward God that we most fully live our Sacrament, and it is then that St. Paul's words make sense: "Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous, is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interest, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (Cor. 13:4-7). It is the help of the Sacrament that makes this kind of love possible. We have a mission from the Church to "guard, reveal and communicate love" for it is in this way that the desire for happiness that God has planted in the human heart can be fulfilled.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DIALOGUE

Dialogue is absent in many marriages simply because couples do not think it is necessary, having never experienced its value nor the joy that derives from it. Young married couples often have gaps in trust and, like everything else worthwhile, it takes time and effort to develop it - in this case it takes a whole lifetime. At no point can any couple say that they have achieved the ultimate degree of communication possible. There are constantly new events that occur in married life, producing new reactions which, if those events and circumstances are to be instrumental (and not obstacles) to deepening our relationship with one another, require communication. Furthermore, in order for our communication to be fruitful, we have to learn how to listen, which is something that goes beyond simply hearing. We "hear" whenever any sound strikes the eardrum. Whereas to listen involves not just the ears, but also the heart and the eyes. The Chinese ideogram for "hearing" is very astutely written with one ideogram that is a combination of the three characters that represent ears, eyes, and heart. What a difference in their relationship when a couple learns to "listen" to one another in a way that utilizes all three.

Dialogue should never be looked upon as a necessary burden; but rather a part of life together that is desirable, looked forward to, something that a couple cannot imagine being without in their marriage - indeed the best time of the day. Considering its importance then, the couple should find a time and a place suitable for them and, on a daily basis, communicate in a calm and relaxed atmosphere.

There are couples who have a special something about them that makes it easy for people to trust them. They may not have any special talents nor the ability to solve major problems, but one thing that makes them special is that they have are kind and patient. They have the gift of knowing how to listen and to show interest in what they are being told. These people we should seek out as couples with whom we can share one another's stories, and in this way learn the way and the importance of dialogue. We must be convinced that dialogue is a never-ending undertaking, because we ourselves are constantly changing, experiencing new things, faced with new challenges, etc., which we cannot but share with our spouses - patiently listening to one another. And the more we dialogue, the more topics for dialogue arise. As we continue to share, we grow ever closer. But the opposite is also true; if we avoid taking the time and making the effort to communicate, before we know it, we will begin to feel that we have nothing to share with one another, so that we inevitably find ourselves drifting apart.

Every effort must be made to allow communication to deepen, and included in that is to maintain a warm and grateful attitude. What our partner shares may, on occasion, not be to our liking, but whatever the content, the very desire to communicate should itself be deserving of our gratitude. It might be argued that it would be better not to share something that may at the time displease one's partner; but we have to be grateful for the decision to share everything with us, which is something valuable in itself. If such an honest sharing is met with annoyance or anger, that would close the door to future confidences; if received with kindness and understanding, however, it incites us to trust even more and deepens the sense of trust and dialogue. When pride does not get in the way of a couple having this kind of confidence between them, they begin to have a broader understanding of the meaning of communication. They find it easier to ask one another's opinion, knowing that it may differ from their own, but will nevertheless be a real and trustworthy opinion. This is a wise and prudent way to go about things. On the other hand, it is not at all wise to hold on to one's own opinion no matter what, because such people deprive themselves of opportunities to learn that there are other points of view, which could very well be closer to the truth than one's own. After all, no one has the absolute truth; moreover, it doesn't help the relationship to diminish

the value of one's partner's thoughts, thereby under-appreciating the spouse him/herself.

Pius XII wrote that: "through Sanctifying Grace a husband and wife are both children of God, and the Holy Spirit dwells in them. Therefore it is a beautiful thing for them to trust one another, share their joys, sadness, fears, hopes, ideals, household affairs, the well-being and education of their children, etc. They should be of one mind." When Christ lives in a marriage, communicating is an easy and gratifying matter. If He has no part in the marriage, there is no chance to maintain unity. To sum up what we have said so far, sharing everything openly and constantly is an extremely important part of a healthy married life. The steps needed to get there will be gradually learned along the journey.

### Difficulties

There is truth to be found in each spouse, and it is through dialogue that it is found and united. This is sometimes complex, but that is why we have intelligence. If we close our minds, and take a white vs black strategy - I refuse to lose this battle attitude - selfishness and obstinacy get in the way of intelligence and really searching for the truth. There can be no advancement on the journey to reach trust when one is constantly demanding something from one's spouse. Trust, or confidence if you will, is more a frame of mind that involves a freely and lovingly giving of oneself completely to one's spouse, more than making a judgement that one's partner is trustworthy. There must be a constant effort on the part of both to "deserve" trust by starting to be open in sharing the little incidental things of daily life, and developing from there to share everything, including those things you would prefer not to divulge. And in order to reach a complete sense of dialogue, precisely because it is a slow and gradual process, it should begin with newly weds from the very first days of marriage. Deciding on putting a limit on one's degree of confidence, i.e. I will go this far and no further in revealing myself, amounts to a continuation of individualism, and is therefore an erroneous solution that will always remain an obstacle to unity. We will treat of this later.

### Obstacles to surmounting difficulties

#### *Psychological differences:*

The masculine and feminine psyche are different, so they simply look at and perceive things differently; but this very fact serves to make them aware that they complement one another. Generally women are more concerned about details and are intuitive, whereas men observe things in a general way and are more rational. This difference can be a huge source of conflict between those who do not, or will not, understand it. On the other hand both aspects are very helpful in facing a given situation, so that when combined as something complementary, really mature decisions can be made. Opposing sprockets in a gear are completely dissimilar, but it is precisely that difference that makes them mesh and capable of performing what they are designed to do.

#### *Differences in temper:*

A problem could easily arise if one of the partners is an extrovert, desperately wanting to communicate, and the other an introvert, preferring to be alone and not share anything. These tendencies are often the result of upbringing and education. Also much has to do with the way we communicate. The problem may not at all be the matter that the partner is attempting to convey,

but the manner in which it is presented. Then there is the possibility of a lack of humility and simplicity which hinders reciprocity -a predominantly male tendency.

If secrecy is required due to one's profession, as in the case of doctors, lawyers, etc., then of course their client's secrets may not be revealed to their spouses. But on the other hand, this should not be used as excuse to make just about everything a matter that cannot be shared. Then there are those who, in their workplace, are accustomed to be authority figures who customarily impose their views on others. Very often this manner of speaking to others with a certain tone of authority is something that they carry into their home life, either by continuing to exercise authority, or rejecting any suggestions made by their partners.

#### *Shallowness and materialism:*

If we put more value on possessions than on spiritual matters then there is something very much lacking in our perspective. We fail to see the need to share on areas that, although they need special attention, simply do not occur to us as being important. We once spoke about trust with a couple engaged in agriculture. They said that they fully trusted one another, stating that they both knew full well how the crop was going, and how much money they would accrue with the sale of the crop. This was their example of sharing everything with one another. In fact, however, it seems that their trust was superficial, for it turned out that they didn't seem to have much else to talk about.

#### *Lack of intimacy:*

Intimacy is a vital need in every marriage. We are told in the very first pages of the Bible that a couple is to leave their parents and become one. If others are allowed to impose themselves into a marriage, their mere presence can be an obstacle to dialogue. We know a couple who are constantly visited by their relatives, with the good intention of wanting to help them, but which visits in fact left them with very little time for themselves alone. There were even occasions when they had to escape into the bathroom for a little time for private conversation. This is somewhat an extreme case, but the presence of others can very often be an obstacle to intimacy.

#### *Abandonment of dialogue:*

There is a serious danger in giving up on dialogue after a few conflicts, even despite the good will of both partners, either because they cannot seem to find common ground, or because they resign themselves to concluding that that is just who they are. At a meeting one time a Japanese couple asked what they could do to avoid an ordinary conversation turning into a fight. The husband explained that have two opposite mentalities. He said: "Whenever she tries to speak her mind, I get angry and start to insult her. Then she gets angry, and we start to fight". One couple in the group responded by suggesting that both be convinced that fighting never solves the problem, but only worsens the situation. They both agreed with that, but still wanted to know what to do about it. So the couple continued that they had to make the effort, calmly and with kindness, to try to find out why the other thinks that way. This will make things clear, because the mentality of men and women do differ, but in this way they complement one another. This was very simple, but good advice.

#### *Insisting on being meticulous in dialogue:*

Dialogue should be enjoyable. There is no need to be a bore in talking just for the sake of talking. It should rather be a time to look forward to every day, a peak time rather than a time looked

forward to with dread. It is not a one-sided conversation to begin with, and certainly it requires mutual effort and attention; but it is precisely the means that we have to release an energy of love within us that we are not usually aware of. An acquaintance of ours, a very pretty young woman, had this maddening habit of constantly repeating her thoughts, moreover in a monotonous and indifferent tone. She complained that her husband avoided any communication with her; but after listening to her for a few minutes, it became tedious even for us, and it was easy to understand her husband's frustration. Another couple told us: "We discuss a lot of things, and sometimes it gets so loud that we wonder what the neighbors might be thinking." What she was really saying is that they were not dialoguing, but fighting.

#### *Spirit of aggression:*

Many times meaningful dialogue fails because one or both of the partners is stubbornly convinced of the absolute truth of his/her opinion, over-valuing it, and having little patience or understanding of the other. With such an aggressive attitude it is hardly possible to maintain peace, or to come to appreciate what can be received from one's partner. It is helpful to look upon oneself as a mattress; you can punch it, but it will not punch back. Certainly we can never lose hope.

#### *Lack of time:*

One of the greatest difficulties with dialogue is a perceived lack of time. It should have such an important place in our lives that we cannot but make the time for it, to the point of curtailing or discontinuing many of the far less urgent things that take up so much time in our daily lives. A little soul-searching will help us to discover what those things are. This is a time to be treasured, without non-essential interruptions.

#### Limits To Dialogue

Although the principle that there should be no secrets between spouses remains true, nevertheless there are circumstances which would prohibit divulging the secrets of others that have become known due to one's profession - such as between clients and doctors, lawyers, etc, as we have mentioned before. Not divulging such a secret to one's spouse has nothing to do with breaking trust between them, because it is something shared in confidence by a third party and has nothing to do with the confidant and life with the respective spouse. Quite apart from the fact that professional secrets must be kept from others, if a person about to share a secret to a married person does so on condition that it be revealed to no one, it is our opinion that such a person be informed that there are no secrets between them as a couple, and therefore if one's husband or wife cannot know, then the secret should not be revealed. Since secrets between spouses have a way of dividing them, people should be aware that the couple is very much concerned with their unity, which is very much dependent on the depth of their communication. Limits are subjective, and must be determined by every couple. They might realize from experience, for example, that their mutual trust has not yet developed to a sufficient degree, and therefore it would be more prudent to wait for a more suitable time to share something that might otherwise be injurious to their relationship.

#### Characteristics Of Dialogue

We must learn to dialogue in a peaceful way. Each partner has to realize that he/she is not always right - that each may very well have part of the truth, which if united will bring them closer to the truth. This is not an easy thing to accomplish, and therefore a couple must pray for God's help. It is God who helps us in such an essential part of our marriage.

Dialogue and communication requires a certain technique. When it becomes especially difficult it might be helpful to keep in mind what Pope Paul VI had to say about constructive dialogue. Clarity of language: "We must try to make ourselves understood with clarity, being certain of what we want to say". Very often, while listening to us argue, a third party might point out that we have the same position, but are simply looking at it from different perspectives.

*Affability:* Making a conscious mutual effort to weigh one's words, speak kindly, politely, respectfully and with good humor goes a long way in making dialogue a time of joy that will bear abundant fruit.

*Good disposition:* A readiness to listen to each other with consideration and not being demanding is also fundamental in making the time for dialogue an opportunity to grow.

*Speaking with honesty and trust:* If one is in the habit of speaking objectively and with sincerity, even though what is shared may not always be entirely factual, one's partner will not at all judge it to be an intentional lie, realising that everyone makes mistakes.

*Prudence:* There are occasions when it is better to wait for the proper time to share something. Everyone has their good days and their bad days, and prudent couples become very adept at discerning one another's moods. Putting it off until a better time does not exhibit a lack of trust, but a sensible exercise of trust. There should be no taboos, but if sharing something at a particular moment could possibly cause a disruption, then simply wait for an opportune time. Avoiding whatever may, at a particular time, hurt the feelings of one's partner is a way of expressing one's love, and this becomes obvious to one another.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MUTUAL SUPPORT

"It is better if Christian couples and parents support each other in grace along their path". (2nd Vatican Council 141)

Husbands and wives must help one another in every aspect of life. To do this they need to be open to compromise, have total trust, and have an open mind, heart and soul. Without such a disposition they would not be able to help one another on their journey to God.

Their mutual help is concerned with both body and soul. The very fact of having a job to support the family is certainly a form of material help; as is the work at home of any woman who is both a mother and a housewife, for this is also done for the well-being of all. She must not be content with letting him do all of the "work", nor must he feel that the work in the home is not at all his concern. Their mutual cooperation is on the material level; but there is an intellectual aspect that requires an intention to carry out their respective roles to the best of their ability. It stands to reason that each be interested in one another's daily life to allow for the mutual advice and sharing that will not only foster an improvement in their respective activities, but also foster a spiritual dimension to their ordinary activities. Both the material and spiritual dimensions depend on each other to ensure growth.

Married couples cannot but make every effort to develop true love, something that is located in the will and presumes a deep interest in one another's well-being. And in this regard the most important desire is that one's partner grow in holiness. Christian couples must be aware that accepting and helping one another is a way to live out the Sacrament of Marriage, which involves more than something simply received in the past, but rather something that a couple continually confer on one another, precisely by consciously accepting and helping one another on a daily basis.

A serious effort to be a better person in itself is a way to help one's spouse; but then when both together make every effort to become the very best possible couple, both begin to realise that that can be accomplished only when their intimacy with God is given priority, for without Him they can do nothing; and therefore they must constantly pray for God's help. Whenever there is a deepening of mutual love, a total life of giving to one another, in this way couples inevitably help one another spiritually.

To make any progress at all both must have a spirit of humility, acknowledging one's personal limitations, defects and sins, and humbly asking for help from one's spouse. And of course it will take a lot of love to understand one another's needs and what is best for both. Mutual help involves reaching out to one another both materially and spiritually, but it also includes the children and relatives.

It is only through a willingness to help one another that a couple will be able to overcome the unavoidable difficulties in life that arise in their own relationship as a couple, the workplace, the differences in their education, etc., and it will assure them happiness that will endure even into their golden years. But where it is most important and decisive is in achieving mutual holiness and a deeper spiritual life. They must, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, share their prayer life and the gifts that they each receive from God.

### *During Courtship*

The initial step in the relationship of a young man and woman who feel called to the vocation of marriage is characterised by infatuation. In the beginning it is precisely this strong attraction that moves them to decide on marriage; but this state of infatuation cannot be called real love. During this period they tend to look on one another with rose coloured glasses, over-valuing what they judge to be the values of the partner, and minimising the defects. Indeed the expression "Love is blind" is due to this unreal opinion of one another, and they cannot yet be said to have what is really true love. Sincerely over-valuing the qualities and virtues of a loved one very often has the positive effect of contributing to a desire to grow in every way - morally, materially, intellectually, spiritually - in order to somehow live up to those expectations. We have seen this happen, and others have shared that they too have noticed it.

The impulse to exaggerate the qualities and virtues of one's intended partner may indeed arise out of infatuation, but part of it has to do with an unconscious desire on the part of fervent Christians to grow in those qualities, and this is a kind of anticipation of the mutual help that they realise can be fully obtained through the graces of the Sacrament of Marriage. Therefore as infatuation develops into true love each partner grows individually so that they become more balanced in their judgment of one another, seeing the faults, failings and defects along with the qualities, and they begin to see and value one another as they really are.

There are real defects which continually rub against the selfishness and egoism of one's partner; but there are also defects which the partner feels he or she will be able to correct along the way. It is our opinion that these can be corrected only with love and kindness.

Once the wedding has taken place mutual support is certainly enhanced by trust and communication, which are reinforced by the Sacrament. But if the two, during their courtship days, had practiced humility, we can assure you that disenchantment to the degree of constituting a crisis will not occur; because the two will already have judged one another in a mature way and there will be no big surprises.

### *In All Aspects of Life*

As we have pointed out, mutual support must embrace all aspects of life. To mention a few:

- *With regard to work:* The couple may not work at the same place, but they can still make it a point to make it easy on one another by sharing everything about it, mutually giving advice, expressing interest, understanding, and encouraging one another. It is important to put oneself in the other's shoes, as it were. The activities of one should be important to both of them.

- *With regard to household chores:* These are very often the role of the wife, but there are times when they are beyond her capacity, and especially if she also has a job. If the husband sympathises with that and does whatever he can to help out at home, she will feel understood and loved. Otherwise she will feel unappreciated and think of herself as being no more than a slave.

Collaboration as a free gift is always welcomed and appreciated. One time we visited a family of fishermen. Men and women went out to sea early in the morning and brought back a large amount of fish which the men took the whole morning to cook, while the wives sat around doing nothing. The men said: "The women make our meals every single day, so on Sundays we give them a chance to rest."

- *With regard to the intellect:* It stands to reason that couples search out a middle ground in their relationship, given that they come from different family backgrounds, different personalities, differences in education, etc. Couples cannot be, and should not be, clones, but they can nevertheless continually deepen their relationship by acknowledging their obvious differences whenever they take time to communicate. Tied in with this is to consciously support and encourage one another in their mutual efforts; for example, should one decide he/she would like to learn a new language, to be encouraged in that by one's partner would naturally lead one to want to respond in kind.

- *With regard to differences in temperament:* Everyone has weak points, as well as strong points, and it is through supporting one another with love and care in the need for formation, maturation and correction of their respective characters that the weak points can be lessened and the strong points increased.

- *With regard to the care of health:* The degree to which husbands and wives take pains to help one another will have a strong influence on their respective health. This includes caring for one another's needs such as food, rest, recreation, sexuality, exercise, healthy social life, etc.

- *With regard to intimacy in marriage:* Intimacy is a vital part of marriage, and mutual support in this area should come naturally during the time of pregnancy and childbirth of course, but also in daily life. It is not always easy to give oneself totally to one another, but there has to be a sensibility at the times when it is required.

- *With regard to the care of the children:* It goes without saying that this is not the duty of only one of the parents, but both must be equally involved in everything related to their upbringing, including their education, which has a large bearing on what kind of people they will become. They must be listened to intently and given an adequate amount of time to freely share themselves. Each child has both a mother and a father, both of whom must do everything in their power to create a loving and united family.

We will not talk about *procreation* in this chapter; but we would like to re-iterate that more than anything else a couple is called to mutual sanctity, and Christian couples especially must realise that generosity is a virtue that enhances their relationship with God - a requirement for sanctity.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ADVICE FROM THE GOSPELS

"The sanctity of the Church is also achieved in the advice the Lord gives to us in the Gospels, so the disciples may observe" (2Vatican 142)

The essence of perfection lies in charity. And therefore it is central in our spiritual formation, for there can be no holiness without charity. We perceive that there are two basic elements in the Gospels that we have to pay heed to. On the one hand we have the commandments, which must be observed under pain of sin; and on the other hand we have the admonitions to go the extra mile for God and thereby live as a response to His love. To pay no heed to the admonitions is in effect to love imperfectly and to resist His graces. When human weakness causes one to disregard both of these elements, his/her life becomes unbalanced, ending up in a very undesirable condition. This is why the Gospel exhorts us so strongly to concentrate on charity - to love in the way that God loves us.

Jesus said: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". This is fulfilled through a spirit of generosity and exactitude in observing the commandments, accepting completely this invitation of Jesus. If a couple desires to advance in the truth they have to respond to the admonitions presented by Jesus through the Gospels with a very firm "Yes"!

For those who choose Religious life the Church has always insisted on a life based upon the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Those who have not failed to keep those vows faithfully have always been a model, a source of inspiration and imitation to others, and have helped them to reach a high degree of perfection. All Christians are aware of these three vows, but in married life the spirit of the vows is carried out in a variety of ways, with different implications depending on circumstances.

#### Gospel Poverty And Austerity

"The Holy Spirit, which has been given to us, makes us lay people capable of truly expressing in our lives the spirit of the Beatitudes! (Vat II AS4) The first Beatitude that comes to mind is: "Blessed are the poor in spirit", because all of the others emanate from this. That is why we start this section with "Poverty and Austerity".

To adhere more and more firmly to the Lord we cannot but, little by little, detach ourselves from material things. That is why the spirit of poverty is so strongly emphasised in the Gospels. This way of life is not at all limited to those who have chosen Religious life. It is basic for married life too, as we are reminded in Vat II 142: "Remain vigilant, to give an order to your feelings, so the use of worldly things may not be an obstacle keeping you from perfect charity."

Many might interpret austerity as suggesting something unpleasant, cold, rigid, fearful; but we use it here to refer to a simple life lived in joy and free from all the burdens by which we become inadvertently enslaved. It ensures a joy that comes from not needing much. In the Gospel poverty is related to a simple life (austerity). This is advice directed at the laity, and not only those who profess the vows of Religious. Essentially it means a detachment from everything that can enslave us and cause us to depend on it rather than to totally depend on God in order to be liberated from an uncontrolled love of material things - which is an obstacle to the spiritual life.

There is poverty that is a result of unavoidable circumstances resulting in an austerity that is not desirable and far from ideal. But then there is poverty freely chosen as a spiritual way of life.

*-Poverty resulting from circumstances:*

The social doctrine of the Church, and in some places suitable legislation, demands a just salary and proper working conditions that respect the dignity of the individual and his and her family, providing them the possibility for appropriate education for each of the children of even large families. Unfortunately, however, there are less than ideal or desirable situations which precipitate an austerity that cannot be avoided, but are yet allowed by God and from which we can learn the need to depend on Him.

Of course everyone desires to have suitable work to ensure adequate food, clothing, and housing, as well as to be able to educate the children. But the Law of God forbids accruing money by illegal means. Trusting in Him will not guarantee an affluent life-style, but it will bring about an experience of His Providence.

Work itself is a means of sanctifying oneself and ones family, and should not be considered as a necessary evil. St. Paul says: "Whatever you do, do it for the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10:31)

To experience material need teaches that we must learn to live frugally, spend less than we might be inclined to, avoid waste, utilise things sensibly - in a word to live within our means, and not be concerned with "keeping up with the Joneses". When we learn to accept a life of privation with joy, we will find ourselves developing spiritually. Jesus Himself lived a life of poverty.

It is obvious that Religious and lay people live poverty in different ways. Because of the vow of obedience, Religious adjust their lifestyle to their superiors, at times right down to the use of insignificant items like a needle. On the one hand this may cause some inconveniences, but on the other hand in this way a Religious person can learn to completely disregard material things, freeing him rather than binding him - providing, of course, that the renunciation does not become so commonplace as to no longer be a source of real sacrifice.

Superiors in Religious Orders know how hard it is to teach their subjects to value and take care of things. One such Superior shared a trivial circumstance. One of his subjects, before setting out on a journey, was advised to keep a record of his journey, for which he was allowed to buy a pen and a clock. But as cheap things do not last long he was instructed to buy better quality items. In the same circumstances, parents would not have the money to consider poverty in that same way. When there is enough money available, it is easy to settle money issues, but when both have to act and resources are limited, there is a need to economise, and it may even require them to demand seemingly irrational things of their children. It is then that couples have to act together. A father told us that during his studies he had to draw a lot, but never had the chance to have good materials because food, clothing, fees for the children's' education etc. always came first.

But there are times when even budget cuts are insufficient, and it is then that we have to put ourselves completely in the hands of God. We don't know the solution, but He does. It is precisely through such circumstances that our Faith is tested and strengthened. One lady shared with us that when their fourth child came along they could no longer stay in the house they were renting. They found the basement of a house to rent which allowed for only one bed. At night the children slept in the bed, during the day the father used it, because he worked nights, and the wife slept in a chair. This went on for a number of years, until they were finally able to get a flat. Yet, the wife told us that all during that time they were very happy, because they never lacked love and faith in God.

The more we try to live the spirit of Gospel poverty the more we experience the fact that things are not always as comfortable as we might like them to be. Sometimes we are faced with an austerity almost impossible to cope with, and long for the relatively affluent lifestyle that could be ours. If, however, we wish to be faithful to the lifestyle that He is calling us to, we believe that the graces available to us through the Sacrament of Marriage will help us not only to cope, but to grow in our all-important relationship with the Lord. Through such graces we will be able to discern how best to relate poverty to our marriage, our children and society.

Although there are indeed differences between poverty as professed through the vow taken by Religious and the spirit of poverty aspired to by at least one of the marriage partners of a Christian marriage (an actual grace), there are also similarities that can be lived both by the couples, and their families, once they have agreed through communication what is a viable way of life for them. Children may find it especially hard to understand why anyone might voluntarily choose a poor way of life, but if the communication is done in a spiritual atmosphere they may more easily come to understand.

When Jesus prayed: "That they may be one" that unity includes mind, body, soul, thoughts, plans, desires, thoughts - every aspect of life; but it should also embrace belongings. From the start, what belongs to one partner belongs to both. Therefore, a life according the spirit of poverty must, also be something mutually agreed upon, because the family is more than a community.

Some couples are given more than enough for their own livelihood, but it should be understood that they have an obligation to, in some way, distribute their superabundance to others. Once a person marries, in addition to his/her personal life, there are also the aspects of one's spouse, the children, and society to be considered.

In the 16th. century St. Theresa wrote that married people should solve nothing that is not agreed upon. And the Church confirms this by admonishing that couples must come to an agreement in a peaceful dialogue in the Lord. With regard to the degree of "austerity" (spirit of poverty) there may indeed be some difficulty for the children to understand something that may seem to be too demanding (But Mom, everybody has a cell phone, or motor bike. I will be the only one without it). But if there is proper prudence in explaining to them that finally what is most important in life is to allow space for God, Who is the source of all happiness; and that since it is He Who desires that we live in the spirit of poverty, then He will provide much greater happiness than the temporary satisfaction from possession of any number of popular gadgets. With God's help, they will eventually get the point.

The possibilities for families to limit their expenses are numberless. For example, wives do not have to keep up with the latest (and expensive) fashions in order to be accepted by the people who count. Husbands do not have to work feverishly in order to build and furnish the very best of homes, or buy the most expensive cars. And while not neglecting the physical welfare of the children, they must be taught to avoid avarice, and the craving for things that it is just as easy to do without. Taking care of one's things and making full use of what we do have, without being addicted to superfluous things simply because everyone else seems to have them is to live as a mature family. Homes should be simple, comfortable, easy to clean and keep in order and not presumptuous, keeping in mind that true elegance can be found in sobriety. There is no need to try to "buy" love and respect from the children through giving them many gifts. A mother shared that despite all the toys their kids received for Christmas, they were fighting over an empty can. That taught the parents a lesson.

We don't have to look for real poverty - it is all around us, even close to our homes. But it is from the poor that we very often learn the meaning of sharing, for the poor seem to be more willing to

share than the affluent. A businessman friend of ours' shared that at time when his business was going through a difficult time and he found it necessary to turn to people for help - promising that he would return their gift as soon as possible - he included among those he asked, people who themselves were in financial difficulties. They were the very ones who were more patient and more willing with a smile to lend him money, and even more if he needed it later. The more wealthy would be more inquisitive and even demand interest on their loan.

The world expects that Christians be witnesses of "austerity" and live the Gospel spirit of poverty. Nobody should say that poverty is not for them, even if their social status, type of work, etc. seems ordinarily to require that they adapt themselves to the privileged. On the contrary, the harder the social demands, the more is there a need to be a witness of a frugal life.

Poverty is more an attitude towards God. Consequently the less important a relationship God is in the life of a person, the more indifferent a person becomes to the Gospel spirit of poverty. It is really a sin to be excessively concerned about material goods, because it indicates a lack of trust in God. Jesus said: "Do not worry about how you eat or dress" (Mt. 6:25). Trusting in God and believing that He will provide makes us more humble. If I say that I am free from a desire for material things, and do not in fact live as if that were the case, then I would be lying to myself. This is not what God wants. It would be a good idea to continually ask God if what we have is necessary, or superfluous. Objectively speaking, it is certainly important that we be detached from everything; but in fact we have to be detached from something. This detachment may be from material things, but also should be concerned with such things as reputation, pleasure, ambition, money, etc. Humility and simplicity enhance one's spiritual life, whereas pleasure and wealth represent real dangers to the spiritual life. Jesus said: "You cannot serve two masters, God and money" (Mt. 6:24). You cannot give precedence to professional success and the glory of God at the same time. The servant is not greater than the master; and the Master, Jesus Christ, lived a life of poverty.

Economical deprivation that is chosen to come closer to God is good for the family because it does bring us closer to Him, make us more dependent on His Providence, and helps us raise children with proper values. They become more generous and willing to help one another, even from earliest years, and even in little things. In this way they become prepared to cope with important matters, because austerity becomes second nature to them, being content with less and not constantly demanding things that their parents cannot afford. Another advantage is that the children enjoy even more the little things in life. Kids who have everything tend to appreciate nothing, even if what they have happen to be expensive items.

The same is true of food. There are many couples who never experienced deprivation in their lives and yet are able to maintain a proper balance. Their meals are simple and they never go to excess by buying the most expensive foodstuffs. This does not at all mean that they force themselves and their family to live like poor people in need of basic necessities. But they will surely have happy memories of appreciating the little things in life. To actually live a simple life helps one to find joy in it, and at the same time it teaches humility.

An attempt to live a life of austerity does not itself guarantee that one will never go to excess. Still there is no need to choose to live in a one room house. As much as possible we have to give a witness of our faithfulness, even though we cannot fully escape social conventions. Considering the atmosphere of the community in the area where we dwell, we should be careful to not take things to the extreme, while at the same time not taking the easy road that requires no sacrifice whatsoever. Our house should have a minimum of commodities so that it may be considered to be a home - and not a loft. Nevertheless a good Christian family will be willing to accept limitations like lack of space. Such privations usually make for fond memories, especially for children of large families. Of course living austere is not the equivalent to masochism. It is important always to

keep the goal in sight - detachment from the material in order to come closer to God.

In practice it is very difficult to maintain a balance between what is necessary and what is superfluous. Every family is different, and there are also variations within the same family - the number of children increase, sicknesses arise, fees for education go up. No one can give a general and overall framework to achieve a life of simplicity. We cannot expect that others live in the way that we may have chosen. Obviously things are not the same when everything is going well and when there are problems. But if a family trusts in God, and asks Him, He will reveal when, and what type of austerity is good for them.

We offer all of the above simply as a way to help you to reflect. Beyond that, every couple cannot but refer to the Lord for His guidance.

### Humility And Simplicity

This is not meant to be a book on humility, but our interest is that a couple and family advance on their way to God, and humility does strongly influence the life of a couple on that journey, and so we would like to review some of its characteristics. It is our experience that humility is a quality absolutely necessary for a happiness in marriage.

St. Theresa of Lisieux speaks of humility as being truth. Without it we cannot come to know who we really are. Through it we come to realise that who we are, what we have, what we are worth are all given to us by God. By ourselves we are sinners and are inclined to evil, and it is natural that we are treated as we deserve to be treated. Whatever comes from God are not things that we can keep for ourselves alone. Seen through the light of truth it is meaningless to be offended if we are ignored and not appreciated. If there is any good in us at all, God is its source, and we must be thankful to Him and not be full of pride as if we ourselves were the source of that goodness. The only way to acquire humility is to come to know ourselves as we truly are; and that is not easy. It is easy to think of ourselves as being better than we actually are, creating a false optimism; but it is equally easy to think of ourselves to be worse than we are, creating a false pessimism. Neither is the full truth.

In our journey toward God we are hampered by a tendency to attribute everything positive in us to our own good will and generosity, forgetting that any goodness comes from God; or on the other hand, when problems arise, to give up and feel worthless. Depending on one's personality everyone is inclined to one or the other of these mind-sets. The well off tend toward an exaggerated opinion of their personal worth.

The closer married couples come to the truth, the greater the balance in their marriage. Over time the very fact of their living together makes them more aware of their mutual defects; but continual communication between them makes them more fully aware of those times when they mutually fall into false self-sufficiency, and dogmatism in their statements and conclusions. In a way one's partner gets to know the other more fully than the individual him/her self. Couples should love one another, which involves being concerned with one another's well-being. They should desire that they both simultaneously arrive at the truth - which is to say humility, the basis for all virtues and qualities. A life of harmony is virtually impossible when both partners are proud and feel superior, and so humility in marriage is extremely important. You can always be on good terms with a humble person, which makes this virtue indispensable in a marriage. Humble people live in peace, because they have no interest in accruing things that they do not need, and calmly make do with basic necessities. For the humble, people are more important than things - a requisite for happy

family life. The high and mighty, on the other hand, are never at peace, continually want more and more and never get to the point of saying: "This is enough". Consequently they are never satisfied, and therefore never happy; and that dissatisfaction is disastrous for their marriage and their family.

Jesus said: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Mt. 22:29). Luke 1:48). And as was the case with Jesus and Mary, humility helps one to want to serve others. Jesus said: "The Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve." (Mt. 20:28).

A couple we know shared that when they got married they had every intention of living a simple life, and be content with only the necessities - possessing nothing to boast about or that would make them feel important. Nevertheless they recalled that in listing the things they would like as wedding gifts they wrote down that one item was silverware - which they did receive. Then a few years later it became clear to both of them having silver as opposed to stainless steel was not really in accord with simplicity, so they got rid of the silver.

There are hidden advantages in a life of simplicity such as less work, more time, less expenses, contentment with the same income, and overall more peace. A priest once told us about a couple so overwhelmed with the effort to keep up with the well-to-do that they had no time for one another, yet all that activity was meaningless in the long run. But they were by no means an isolated case. There are 24 hours in the day, which should not be spent to the point of exhaustion. God does not expect the impossible, and we should not expect it of ourselves. We can learn an important lesson from such couples. At first we may not know what to do, but with prayer and dialogue we can discover the easiest way to simplify our married and family life. For example wear clothing that doesn't have to be ironed, don't buy things which you know from experience will seldom be used and which would require no sacrifice to do without, etc. The comfort and beauty of a home does not depend on superfluous things. Many couples find themselves with the need to live frugally - especially young couples - but such hardships can be healthy since they foster humility and greater trust in Providence.

When couples agree generously to having a large family there will usually be a need to make many sacrifices - at times heroic sacrifices; but there are innumerable examples of how the Lord had been working in the midst of their trials, apparent in the love, peace, unity, joy in such families, and the final outcome in the lives of each of the members. It does not help to try to calculate the future down to the last detail, which only God knows. What is certain is that He is never outdone in generosity.

Just imagine the home of the Holy Family in Nazareth. We can picture a very small house, similar to that of all of the other houses in the town, very simple and not at all standing out - although it housed the King of Kings. It was said of Him: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn.1:26). When Jesus visited Mary and Martha, he chastised Martha for her being attentive with being hospitable to Him in a material way by saying: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things...but Mary has chosen the better part." (Lk. 10:4). You could say the same thing about husbands who take their work too seriously to the point of being overwhelmed by it, to the detriment of their spiritual life, which is so much more important? The solution remains the same - dialogue, prayer, and a simple life. True Christians should make it a point to meditate on and believe in the importance of these Gospel values.

Of course simplicity does not preclude cleanliness. On the contrary, it becomes easier when there are fewer things to take care of. We can and should take good care of the fewer things that we do have, rather than let the possession of many things rule over our lives, which is so easy to do when

we allow ourselves to be addicted to things. It might be helpful to meditate on how Mary's life must have been one of total disinterest in anything beyond the bare essentials, in order to concentrate on the only Essential.

We live in an age engulfed in consumerism beyond anything the world has ever known. Modern day society gives priority to whatever they feel brings comfort into their lives. People are led to believe that many possessions will make their lives easy, whereas the opposite is true; possessions enslave people, and consume a disproportionate amount of their time. Women too often spend much of their time outside of their homes, shopping if not being obsessed with the workplace, and the family loses its priority.

A simple lifestyle is close to the Gospel and affords endless advantages. Where it is joyfully lived by a family, others cannot help but be impressed and desire to live in the same way. Imagine what a happy and content society we would have if every couple and family came to recognise this!

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE FAMILY

"Make your families true centres of holiness....where the laws of God are faithfully observed, and where His Will is always carried out". (Pius XII 8.5 .58). Married couples are the first community of people, the foundation upon which the wider community of the family is based. The family community, rooted in the natural bond of flesh and blood, is called to grow and perfect itself in love. This special community does not suddenly appear as a perfected entity, but rather one that grows daily through cooperation, dedication, generosity and sacrifice. As was previously pointed out, the family born of marriage has a clear and specific mission to preserve, reveal and communicate love, witnessing to the world the kind of love that exists between Christ and His Church.

In the same way, in order for children to develop as persons, they need parents who are united as persons; but for them to develop spiritually, they need parents who are united in their relationship with God. Couples who communicate often with one another about spiritual things will naturally find it easier to communicate with their children also about spiritual things. If parents fail to share on spiritual matters with one another, how can they do so with their children? They may believe and practice their Faith on an individual basis, but they would not be able to help one another in this regard; so that any spiritual progress would be made not through their marriage, but in spite of their marriage. This places a limitation on their spiritual growth. But it also has repercussions in the family because it produces an obstacle to the spiritual growth of the children. When children see their parents praying together, they are open to praying together as a family - at meal times, family Rosary, attendance at Sunday Mass and receiving Holy Communion together. Even should one or the other of the children stray from the Faith (not uncommon in this day and age), the continued trusting prayers of the parents will help them to return to the Lord. We will speak more about this in the chapter on prayer.

The witness of a Christian family is important for evangelisation; but the family itself must be evangelised, as is emphasised in "Familiaris Consortio" 50: "The Christian family is called to take part actively and responsibly in the mission of the Church, prioritising service to the Church and society by being fully engaged in terms of intimate community and love".

#### Authority In The Family

The very term "authority" in the world today conjures a sense of rebellion. It is a taboo subject, and especially within marriage and family life. And yet people cannot function without authority - within and between nations, in companies, schools, parishes, every aspect of society, and therefore within the family too. People don't like to talk about the admonition of St: Paul: "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord". Who then will admonish the children to obey their parents. So if people are reluctant to accept having to respect authority, it is safer to not even bring up the subject.

You don't very often hear people talk about hell these days. But it still exists. Children and young people are getting a watered down religious education. No wonder then that authority in the family is being disparaged, and young couples preparing for marriage start off with this mind set, having no idea about their obligations, about who has authority, about what is the meaning of a mature authority, because they have not had the opportunity to experience it. For centuries women had been (and in many places still are) treated as subordinates, leaving men with the

impression that they are superior and therefore have absolute authority.

I, Mercedes, remember one time going to a notary to sign something, and I was told that I needed my husband to co-sign: "With the permission of her spouse", otherwise my signature alone would be invalid. Another time we had decided to ask my sister to be named as guardian of our children, in case something happened to us. She was told that that would not be possible because she was a woman. Thank God those days are behind us. Now women, at least in our part of the world, have the same rights as men, as it should be. But a negative result can sometimes be seen in that there can be a loss of the sense of authority, a loss of understanding its meaning and value, even when it is centered in God. Some women may conclude that, since we are all equal, there is no reason why I have to obey my husband. Of course the children too are equal, and by the same token there is no reason why they should have to obey their parents. In such a marriage and family there is no authority at all, which is itself a source of discord and malfunction; as would result from any husband or father who exercises authority in a repressive way. Where you have mature couples who are mature parents, authority does not present any problems - rather an atmosphere of security and harmony.

When a husband thinks that he has absolute authority and things must always be done in the way that he decides, even though, to a certain extent, he might be in good faith, and even if his wife should agree, the Gospel sense of authority collapses. He is not an authority figure as desired by God, he is an authoritarian. This solves nothing. But the solution presented in the Gospel is that the husband and father is to be recognized as the head of the family. If he exercise that authority in a mature way, no wife could ever feel that her dignity as a woman is being undermined, nor should she ever consider herself to be inferior. Couples are in fact equal partners, but very different.

Men and women have different aptitudes by which they complement one another. Generally speaking women pay attention to details, whereas men overlook the details and look at the whole picture. Neither view is complete. And perhaps that is why, in God's plan, the husband is more suited to be the "head" of the household - the entire family. But there is no doubt that women are more suited to love both her husband and the children in a special way, making her the "heart" of the family. Again, both are vital for wholeness, and in this there is no place for inferiority. They are different but equal; equal but different. Today more than ever it is necessary to recognise the dignity of women as wives and mothers. To recognise and esteem their value in the family is a pre-requisite for the very survival of society

Think about the Holy Family. It was St. Joseph who received from God the task of governing the family. We read about this on three successive occasions in Matthew's Gospel (2:13, 19, 22.) Certainly Joseph was a great saint, but he could not begin to compare in distinction with Jesus, the God man, nor with Mary, his immaculate spouse. But he was still given the role to watch over them. And in the same way, apart from any comparison with the relative stature of his wife or children, every husband and father is entrusted with the task of watching over his family which, of course, he is bound to perform in accord with the law of God.

Considering that marriage symbolises the union between Christ and His Church, and Christ is the head of the Church, it is clear that the Church must obey Christ, and not the other way around. In the same way the woman must obey her husband, and not the other way around. But if this "obedience" is lived out in the same way that the Church lives out its "submission" to Christ, then there is no possibility of disagreeable quarrels or disruption, because the union of the two precludes division.

If there should be conflicts in families because of authority or obedience, the solution can be found

in the Gospels. Jesus said of Himself: "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10:45); and: "Whoever would be great among you shall be your servant, and whoever would be first among you shall be your servant" (Mt 20:26-27). In other words, authority, in order to be authority, must be one of service. The same must be said of husbands and fathers.

Couples who are united in God and well-matched have no problem with this admonition, because they are open to one another and seek to solve everything together. They make it a point to share calmly and lovingly what each is thinking. And they generally agree. If it comes to the need for one to decide, then the wife can, for the most part, consider that to be the will of God - confident that her husband is not the kind of person that is obsessed with always getting his way.

### Family And Social Relations

Man is by nature a social being, and as such is made to live in society. Here we confine ourselves to how this is lived out in the context of the family. Starting with the couples, when they marry they usually live separate from their respective families. But they do carry with them the influence from the relationship they respectively had with their parents, siblings, grandparents, relatives, friends, etc.

*Relationship with parents:* This should be given special attention. The wedding of a son or daughter is a delicate time for both of the parents of the bride and groom. The relationship with their child is necessarily going to take on a new dimension - no more of this total obedience to one's parents. For one thing, there are two more parents involved, as well as an additional family. Love and affection takes on a new demeanour. And this will require understanding and prudence in modifying their relationships. Sometimes, despite having all the good will in the world. Mistakes are made that cause no little suffering. We would like to share some examples of what we have observed.

*A tendency to meddle:* One or both parents would like to see things go on just as before. Often the mother, without even realising it, assumes the role of organising the new home, trying to be helpful of course, but ending up intruding, offering all kinds of advice, and even commanding. This causes the child to get angry, demand that the meddling parent leave, or the child reluctantly submits; and at times she may get into an argument with her spouse who thinks she should compromise, etc.

The newly weds should agree from the outset how they should handle such parents, should such a situation arise. We remember the case of an only child who had been spoiled. When she married the parents continued to consider the daughter as "theirs" and not his. One day her father told her something and said: "Remember, don't tell anyone. Not even your husband." Well, she did reveal it to her husband, who forthwith got very angry. The daughter was right in telling her husband, because the father had no right to prevent communication between a husband and wife. The father was wrong, and he learned his lesson not to repeat such a thing. He may also have learned that you do not interfere with communication between a husband and wife.

Parents have to be perceptive with their married children, giving them the total freedom to make their own decisions, showing them understanding and forgiveness should those decisions be contrary to the will of the parents - providing, of course, that their actions are not obviously destructive,. Circumstances, such as to being unable to cope financially, or the need to take care of sick parents, may require living in with parents even after marrying. This situation should be avoided as much as possible, because too often it gives rise to distress for both parents and children.

When it comes to relationships with siblings on both sides there is usually less friction, perhaps because siblings do not have the same tendency to interfere in the lives of their married brothers and sisters.

Relationships with former friends can sometimes be a delicate matter for newly weds. Depending on the degree of closeness, whether or not both had had the same friends, how much time might be expected from them, it might be an asset to continue to cultivate their friendship; or for the good of the couple it might be better to terminate some relationships. This is one more matter that the couple should take the time to talk about. We heard a husband advise his wife that he did not want a certain frivolous friend of hers to visit their home. And he was right. Some people are clearly detrimental to harmony in a family, and it is better to cut off the relationship. At the same time, it is important to develop new friends, which is only natural for most couples anyway, because it is always beneficial for couples and their families to associate with other good couples. It enables them to live in a good atmosphere amidst the less than favorable atmosphere that permeates society in general.

### Proper Attitudes Within A Family

It is good for families to be open to others. But not to the extent, as sometimes happens, of having outsiders continually coming and going to the point of the family losing its privacy. More often, however, the problem is rather being a selfish family closed in on itself. We have often heard and seen the message from such families: "Let us alone! Don't bother us! Keep out of our lives!" Such selfish, isolated families become lifeless and without values. Toward others there should be good-will, kindness, generosity, sincerity, transparency, naturalness, sympathy, a willingness to listen, a desire to help and be of service. Within the family there should be a climate of peace, humility and joy. A sunny disposition is a gift from God. All of these qualities are to be nurtured by husbands and wives; in which case there would be little need for sermons to try to get the children to acquire these attitudes, because they will learn them naturally by example.

It isn't always easy for a couple and a family to determine what specific qualities are required to provide a good atmosphere. To welcome everyone, friends of both parents and children, it's important to start off with the home being clean, simple and comfortable. But we can be sure we are doing something right if people would spontaneously say: "This is nice. I like it here!" If we are given the impression that people feel uncomfortable when with us, then we have to determine what is wrong with us.

The first school of love is the family. It is educational for the children to observe how to treat others with love, because in this way they learn in a practical way how to be to be generous, and what it means to love one's neighbor. It is within the atmosphere of a loving family that children learn to love God and others. They learn the true meaning of things, and how to be integrated in society. Of course the opposite is also true. Children can learn by example how to be selfish.

The elderly too find a place of security within the family. When they are marginalised, older people suffer acutely. What a difference for them to live in an atmosphere of acceptance, peace and harmony, as contrasted with an atmosphere of imminent marital breakdown, conflicts between parents and their children, relatives or friends of their children suffering because their parents are divorced, etc.

In the family love is a living thing. It is experienced by receiving and giving day in and day out, sharing with others, showing compassion and forgiveness, generosity, and a spirit of sacrifice. Every couple must strive for these values.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WORK

Being engaged in work that is concerned not only with a means of making a living, but also at the same time in some way being of service to society in compliance with God's plans for people, is to cooperate in the Work of the Creator (Vatican Council II, IM 34). Work is an essential part of being human. St Paul says: "Whoever does not work does not eat." But as with other subjects, our concern here is how this relates to marriage and family.

#### Material Goods

Married couples necessarily live in this secular world, and the Vatican Council enjoins that we have a mission, insofar as possible, to stabilise the structures and environments of the world. (VCII, 1 36), expressing in our lives the reality of the spirit of the Beatitudes (CV II; AS 4). We begin with poverty (the subject of the first Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor") because it is especially significant in today's world and there is a greater worldwide awareness than ever before. The Gospels were written 2,000 years ago, but they were not at all meant only for believers of that day. They are no less relevant today. We have to ask ourselves what we are doing to reach out to the poor, or where we might be remiss.

Jesus used a number of parables to help us to understand the importance of a right sense of poverty. He spoke of a rich man planning to build bigger barns after a plentiful harvest to assure himself of a comfortable future, and died before he could enjoy any of it (Lk 12:20). And another rich person who did not share his goods to help the poor man Lazarus. He ended up in hell, begging for help himself (Lk 16:19). Then the example of the rich young man who preferred his riches to an invitation from Jesus to follow Him (Mt. 19:16). He reminds us that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven (Mt. 19:24).

When Jesus said: "You cannot serve God and mammon (riches) (Mt. 6:24) he is speaking to each one of us. We may not be tempted to build bigger barns, or to have lavish parties while ignoring the destitute in the neighborhood, but those are still lessons that we must apply to our own particular situations. What does God want from us in those cases? We must strive to maintain a balance between need and overabundance, comfort and austerity, however difficult that endeavour might be.

#### Husbands And Wives Working

It has often been said that the woman's place is in the home, and it is the father's duty to bring home the bacon. More and more women feel that there is an inequality in this, and it often becomes a great source of tension between couples. Quite apart from an economic condition that requires both to be in the workplace in order to make ends meet, many women, especially those formally educated, feel that they have a right to make use of their talents, and not be tied down to housework. So what is the ideal situation? In Genesis it is Adam who is told that the punishment for his sin would be that he would "earn bread by the sweat of his brow" (Genesis 3:19), so that work has always been tiresome and painful. Whereas Eve is told that her punishment would not be the same as that of man, but that she would have to endure the pains of childbirth. We can assume that included in the pain of delivery would also be sufferings in bad times, trouble, anxiety, fears and disappointments that are part and parcel of being a mother who is dedicated to the upbringing and education of their children - day after day, year after year.

The work in the home, ordinarily required of women - cleaning, cooking, shopping, caring for the children, doing the laundry, etc. - is very time consuming and painful, and when it takes up the entire day, she ends up having time for nothing else. In time she may lose interest and not understand what is going on in the outside world, which could affect the manner in which she educates her children. This could well turn into a type of slavery rather than maternity. So what is the ideal? The answer certainly is not working outside the home morning and night, like her husband, leaving no one to take care of the household chores. This is an important issue that requires couples to carefully consider in their own particular case.

### Typical Cases For Reference

For not a few couples both of whom work outside the home, limiting the number of children is their answer. They may already have two children, and see no way that they can adequately raise any more. Other women believe in good faith that they have to work to supplement their husband's salary, which they feel is not enough to make things meet. They want the best for their children, like sending them to the best schools, the nicest toys and clothing, generally the best of the best, which is a very expensive proposition. An inspector of education in a certain European country once said: "In my country children has everything - except mothers."

Some women try the middle ground, which they feel is least harmful to their children. They take on part-time work, or seek to be home when the kids return from school. Ask them which is more important to them, family or work, and without hesitation their answer would be family. And so, at least in theory they favor the family; but the practical situation may differ somewhat, because in fact they are split in that their jobs require quite a bit of responsibility that in the course of the day requires them to give priority to their jobs. Their minds are not free to give priority to the children.

Still other women would much prefer to be in the office with nice heating in the winter and air-conditioning in the summer. They also feel a certain satisfaction in being looked up to for their intellectual capacity, as well as the personal satisfaction that comes from doing a job for which they are capable and enjoy. They judge that it is far more meaningful than to be tied down to cooking or washing pots and pans, which almost anyone can do. We have heard women ask of other women: "Do you work?" And the answers are diverse. Some respond: "Yes! Well, at home", as if they had to apologize for the fact that that's the only thing they are capable of. And this is one of our modern day evils - to believe that if a woman is dedicated to the family, without having a job, then she is to be pitied for her lack of expertise. With this terribly wrong criterion, some women are led to believe that work in the family is degrading, and that it is a pity that they are unable to do something more productive. One woman said: "I have the right to be myself, and neither my husband nor anyone else can stop me". Another said: "I have the ability to do something, and so I do it." Still another: "This poor woman doesn't have a job because she was never allowed to learn how to do anything. Women have the same rights as men, and we are capable of doing any of the jobs that men do". We do not pretend to judge anyone. We are merely sharing on what we see around us, and readers are, of course, free to reflect and draw their own conclusions. It's hard to buck against this tide!

Both men and women are capable of many things, but they are not capable of doing all of them. At some point in time we have to make a choice, and in doing so must necessarily waive other options that we did not in fact choose. One who chooses to marry therefore automatically waives any number of the other possibilities. I, James, once said (jokingly): "I gave up being a Bishop in order to get married". A woman who chooses marriage and family by that very fact gives up anything that might be in opposition to that choice.

A young mother was advised to put off working while the children were still young, and return to work once she has raised them. Her response was that she did not want to do that and miss the train of opportunity. So she did not quit work and did not miss the train of opportunity out there in the workplace; but she did lose the train of creating a close and loving family atmosphere. The marriage ended up in divorce. You cannot board several trains at once. In this case the woman had originally chosen marriage and family, but then refused to relinquish other choices that militate against that first choice. It proved to be impossible to carry out both.

So is a newly married wife expected never to have a job? Women have intelligence as well as hearts. She need not be a slave of the house. This is a matter that every couple has to seriously consider, and resolve between them. The solution will not be the same for every couple, nor even always the same for the same couple, because circumstances change, children grow up, economic conditions change, etc. Therefore there are no hard and fast recipes.

We have already stated that couples should do many things together. This unites them, and helps them to get to know one another better. This is true of work also, in the sense that they collaborate by sharing the nature of their respective work, its joys as well as difficulties. A husband involved in a particular profession often shared the nature of his work with his relatively uneducated and non-professional wife, because she showed an avid interest in it. She thereby came to understand many things, such as labor problems, successes, abuses, fears, etc - something common to all businesses. This served to weld their relationship. Similarly studying something together (a language for example) can do much to deepen the relationship of a couple. And we do see more and more husbands being willing to help out with the household chores - another aid in deepening relationships.

In many families children see very little of their fathers, many of whom leave home early in the morning and come back home late at night - exhausted. Some do try as much as possible to make up for that on weekends. The wife of one such father shared how on weekends she and her husband bathe the children before bedtime...but the best thing was to see him joyfully talking with them, joking and giving them riddles, then praying with each of them according to their age as he went from bed to bed. They had a large family. He also told his wife: "You take care of them the rest of the week. Today you can rest and I will take over."

We also met several instances where the husband was a medical doctor. In one case his wife was a nurse, and his assistant. She was always able to help him when he made visitations and, although not a doctor herself, in this way learned much about medicine from him. They did many things together. When he died, in order to keep up on the latest advances and discoveries, she continued to read the medical journals that they had both read together. Since this was an extension of what they had done together, she felt his closeness, even after his death.

There is another example of a single woman who, for several years before getting married, worked in a company, but on getting married she told her boss that she would be leaving the company. He suggested that she continue to work for the company by doing translations, which she was able to do at home. She was happy to do that, and it worked out very well. In that way she was able to have a large family, and at the same time have a job that did not interfere in being with her children. In addition she was able to do some translating for her husband's business.

There are small jobs that can be done at home, like private lessons for students, which provide some income through intellectual work rather than excessive physical labor. Both of us do some painting as a hobby, but it is also a means of income. It is wonderful that art is another way that unites us. We teach one another and ask advice from one another, and even occasionally have some exhibitions; and it is all something that we are able to do at home.

But for us it is even more satisfying to work with charitable and religious associations, especially those that have to do with the family - like the Christian Family Movement. We have seen many cases of couples who work together, and cooperate in reaching out to other couples and families. This brings them closer to one another, and also closer to God. Sharing ideas, coming to an agreement on important issues, recalling events that have been meaningful, but forgotten over time until times of communication have brought them to light, etc., help couples to appreciate the beauty of trying to live out married life in accordance with the Will of God.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SEXUALITY AND FERTILITY

Sexuality in marriage has two functions - expression of love and procreation. These functions are inseparable from the Will of God, notwithstanding the modern day proclivity to separate the two functions and concentrate solely on physical union, while rejecting the possibility of having children. To ignore the creative aspect of sexuality is to defy God's plan and invite unforeseen consequences which people invariably come to regret.

But just as it is not allowed to engage in sex to the exclusion of being open to procreation, so it is also forbidden to consider procreation without sex - namely fertilization in vitro. It is not permitted to separate the two purposes of sexuality as intended by God - the biological from the emotional.

#### Sexuality In The Plan Of God

Sex, being a gift from God, is good. (Genesis 1:28). In Genesis we read that, when God finished the work of creation, He saw that everything that He had made was good, "very good" with the creation of man (Genesis 1:31). That "everything" includes sexuality. When a man and a woman have a child, they share in the creative power of God. They bring forth a creature that has an eternal destiny. In their marriage they are given both the capacity and the obligation to transmit life. After creating them "male" and "female" he commanded them to: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth." In analysing this text we can discern some aspects of the Will of God.

*Be Fruitful:* From the very beginning, married men and women were given the mandate to procreate. This is a serious obligation for the good not only of the marriage, but also for humanity, and therefore. Since it is a mandate imposed by God Himself, it cannot be ignored without a viable reason that is in line with God's Plan. Christian marriage, renewed and raised by Christ to the dignity of a Sacrament, is obviously also subject to this law which is divine and universal. Procreation is normal and natural in marriage, and does not require a reason. But there are many reasons given for not having children.

*Multiply:* Considering that there are many countries in this modern world where the number of children born are less than two for a couple (they do not reproduce their own number), it is clear that the commandment of the Lord to "multiply" is being violated. Although we can never point to a specific couple as being guilty because they may have no children, or less than two, nevertheless this phenomenon is so widespread that it indicates a serious collective flouting of God's command. Each couple will have to consider whether their conduct is or is not consistent with God's command.

*Fill the earth:* We are often given warnings of over-population which could cause apocalyptic repercussions. But there are regions, in fact entire countries which are almost entirely uninhabited, but which, with today's technology, could be inhabited by a great many more people. Moreover there is now a deep concern about the ageing populations of many countries and, the difficulties in the future of relatively few younger people to support them

#### Chastity Within Marriage

In the Book of Tobit read! Now Lord, You know that I take this wife of mine not because of lust, but for a noble purpose. Call down your mercy on me and her, and allow us to live together to a happy old age." (Tobit 8:7). Husbands and wives must respect the sanctity of marriage, with purity of intention and honesty in their dealings.

By no means does "spotless purity" refer only to virgins. Married life too, established by God for the common good, can and should have its own "spotless purity" (Pius XII 6/12/1939). Maintaining and progressing in chastity must constantly be striven for. In marriage also there is always the possibility of disorder in sex, different than that among single people, but there nevertheless. Some people think that once they are married the problem of chastity will disappear, but in fact the necessity of remaining pure may be even more difficult for married couples than for singles. In this the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage is very helpful in bettering ourselves and overcoming difficulties.

#### *Trust in God:*

We were never afraid of receiving the children that God wanted to give us. Jesus said\* "Do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing ..... instead seek His kingdom, and these other things will be given you besides." (Lk 12:22~31). Indeed, life is more important than food.

God is our Father Who can do everything and loves us, and will always provide whatever we need. He just wants our complete confidence, without fear: "Fear not little flock...." (Lk.12:32). If we do have hysterical fear, it is because we lack trust in God.

#### Difficulties

##### *Fallen nature:*

Sex in itself is good. What is not good is to allow oneself to be driven by sexual desires. Before the fall Adam and Eve, already joined by God as husband and wife, had no problem with regard to sexuality. Although they were naked, they were not ashamed. But once they sinned, they were presented with the disorder of sexuality. These are problems resulting from original sin. If we do not keep that in mind, it would be impossible to understand, let alone solve those problems. Original sin throws everything out of balance. John Paul II said that in the study of humanity nothing can be understood if we do not take into account that we have a fallen nature. And this condition of man, this fallen nature, is clearly seen in everything related to sex. Married couples do fight about many different problems, but it is our view that among the many couples that we have known, sex is one of the most outstanding things that sparks off their arguments.

##### *Contraceptive mentality:*

A contraceptive mentality is rampant all over the world. It is a mentality that causes unnumbered couples to ignore the procreative aspect of married life. We are in an environment whereby we are inundated with anti-life propaganda, constantly bombarded with the "values" of contraception and abortion, and how "up to date" it is to adopt this attitude. This is an "anti family" environment, engendering legislation that militates against the family. The world is yet to experience the tragic results of this evil.

## Responsible Parenthood

Responsible parenthood is to have the number of children that God wants for that couple. His Will in that regard can be discerned through circumstances, events, limitations that may occur for a number of reasons: biology, education, economics, health, etc. In his Encyclical "Humanae Vitae" Pope Paul VI points out that the reasons (and they must be serious reasons) for not having children are always circumstantial. They sometimes prevail permanently. Pope Pius XII said the same thing in an address to the Italian catholic Union of Midwives. He mentioned, for example eugenics (the risk of malformation of the fetus). But whether there might be reasons for avoiding having children that are temporary or permanent, they must always be grave reasons, and not simply those dictated by convenience, and they must be fully discussed by the couple.

When there are real reasons to determine not to have more children, the possible methods to utilise to avoid that possibility are threefold:

- Total abstinence
- Artificial means (forbidden by the Church)
- Natural means (allowed because they respect the nature of the person)

Humanae Vitae condemns everything that is done in anticipation, during development, or after the event to prevent fertilisation and pregnancy. The act must always be open to procreation, even though for natural reasons pregnancy does not result. A lack of openness to pregnancy is to ignore God's law that requires openness. For animals reproduction is a purely biological act, and therefore there are no moral restrictions as those present in the case of humans - such as artificial insemination, embryo manipulation, etc. As opposed to animals, human actions are governed by morals, ethics, mutual respect, and therefore the aforesaid practices are forbidden to them.

Some might argue that for various reasons there is a limit to the number of children certain couples can raise, and shouldn't they be allowed to use available artificial means to prevent having any more. The answer is that it is never permitted to directly choose an intrinsic evil for its own sake. There are circumstances which indirectly result in an undesirable effect, but the purpose of the act may never be directly desired. For example for reasons of health, a certain medicine may be required, but the side effect of taking the medicine may result in a temporary sterility. That could be allowed, as long as the purpose of taking the medicine is not to cause sterility.

## Natural Means

Natural methods of birth control are based on the nature of a woman's period - alternating periods of fertility and infertility. A couple is free to ascertain the cycle of infertile periods and, after mutual agreement which respects one another's freedom, for good reasons to utilise those periods to avoid pregnancy. It is understood that this will require a maturity and a deep respect for conjugal chastity.

Some people wonder if in both cases the intention is to avoid pregnancy, what is the difference between natural methods and artificial means. There is an expression: "The end does not justify the means". The meaning is that the "end" may itself be entirely acceptable, but it may not be achieved through unacceptable means. The intention to avoid pregnancy is not bad in itself. It is

the means that are used that make the difference. Artificial means to avoid pregnancy do not respect the human person, and manipulate nature. The reason for their use is selfishness. Given that attitude, any reason or circumstance whatsoever serves as a pretext to utilise artificial methods.

The use of natural methods does require a sacrifice, but as such leads the couple to holiness. It is a sign of deep love when a couple respects one another's nature. As an example, when there is no moderation in food and one is addicted to gluttony and an excessive appetite the long term effects are disastrous. We may choose to deal with that in a natural way, by curtailing our eating habits; or utilise the unnatural way by inducing vomiting, or taking substances that alter changes in our bodies to prevent the correct assimilation of food. In the first case, if we do so with caution, we respect the nature of our body; but in the second case, we are acting against nature, which can cause serious damage to our bodies. There is a parallel here with regard to having children. We have to ask ourselves: "Which is preferable for the mature person"?

The principle to keep in mind is that, whatever our own personal desires and circumstances, choosing what God wants rather than making our own decisions (in this regard how many children we will have) is obviously to choose the better path. If it is His Plan that we have a large family, we have to have the confidence that He will be there for us, and not leave us "orphans".

## CHAPTER NINE

### HOLINESS

"All the Christian faithful are called to sanctify each day in every condition of life, duties and circumstances" (VC II 1:41). Holiness is the same for everyone - priests, religious and laity - whether married or not. When Jesus said: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) He was addressing everyone precisely because everyone is called to holiness; and therefore it is attainable by everyone. If a person does not progress, it is not because God put a limit on that person's ability. We limit ourselves by a misuse of our freedom. Not reaching the summit is not the fault of the way, but the one who is walking the way.

Speaking of holiness for married couples Vatican II admonishes (VC II I:52): "They must live together with mutual care, thinking, and holiness." When referring to holiness in marriage the word mutual is used, indicating that spouses are to achieve this together.

In His great love for us God, Who is the source of love and holiness, calls each person to holiness, precisely because it is in that way that our reciprocal love for Him is perfected. That makes the statement from Vatican II, 1:11 more easily understandable: "All Christians in any state or condition are called by God, each in His own way, to holiness". A person's holiness may not at all be apparent to others, so that we can assume that the number of Saints is very high. On one occasion we were travelling with our children and a priest friend of ours through a very poor region of Spain. It was a poor land for farming and grazing and both the men and the women worked very hard in the field. We visited one of the families that we knew who lived in a cave. The priest said: "These people have Faith. If they only knew how pleased God is with all that they do and suffer! They did not know much about the Faith, but they went to Church and kept the commandments. Jesus said: "The last shall be first" (Mt. 20:16). Surely they, and millions more like them will find glory in heaven.

When John Paul II spoke to the bishops of Kinshasa in 1980 he noted the need to train married people together, and not separately. In his Encyclical "Familiaris Consortio" He observes: "There are many signs of a disturbing degradation of some fundamental values. Spouses are becoming more and more independent of one another."

Whatever the state of an individual, holiness is not possible without a climate of intense prayer, a spirit of sacrifice, and renunciation - a life rooted in the Beatitudes. There is no shortage of occasions whereby we can live the virtues to a heroic degree; but this must always be balanced with prudence. This is not the same as passivity or lack of action, but a moral and supernatural virtue by which we seek the most appropriate ways to achieve the goals we set, subordinating everything to the final objective of our sanctification. Prudence implies that we act uncompromisingly with the utmost courage.

In this modern world not only is there little interest in holiness, there is even a certain prejudice against it. It is confused with "quirks" that are seen to be very much disconnected from "normal" life. Many Saints had to face this antagonistic attitude. In fact, however, holiness is an attempt to fulfill the Will of God. The initiative is always from Him, because He wants us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

A priest once shared with us that when he was a boy he often went from his village to the mountains with his flock, and there enjoyed the company of an elderly shepherd, because he was always cheerful. One day he said to the boy: "I'm very happy because I am so much loved by God".

More than likely the man probably could not even read, but what he had to say marked the priest for life. In his simplicity that old shepherd was a saint. So to be a saint you do not have to be a learned theologian, or to do things beyond your capacity. You can be a shepherd who spends the whole day in the mountains with his sheep, or ordinary people like us with our children. God's call to holiness occurs when and in the way that He wants.

### What Holiness Is

God's love is eternal and we, who were given the great gift of existence, are asked to freely respond to that love within our own particular situation; which for us is the marriage state. That free response is what holiness is all about. Every saint, every marriage, has a unique and unrepeatable path through which they go to God. But despite the wide range of paths, there are areas that they have in common to a less or greater degree.

To aspire to holiness does not at all mean that one must aspire to canonization. The Church does indeed single out some to be officially recognised as saints, proposing them as models. But the saintly people who are never canonized far outnumber those who are. These are the ones who do not necessarily live heroic lives of holiness, but do enhance the holiness of the Church by living ordinary lives in extraordinary ways. What stands out is that they love God above all things; and because they love God so deeply, they also exhibit love of their neighbours - the people they encounter on a regular daily basis. Because of their love of God, very often the attitudes they adopt are opposed to the social mores of their time. In short, they respond generously to God's infinite love.

Canonized saints are proposed as models for imitating their virtues, and who provide the path that leads to God. They can certainly be imitated; but since every saint is different there can be no set of rules that can be applied to everyone to imitate any saint. People tend to think that genuine spirituality is that presented by monks and nuns, so that the spirituality of married people is somewhat less authentic. In fact, however, married people have their own spirituality, aided and reinforced by a Sacrament, by which we are to love God with all our souls and being. The Sacrament of Marriage affects the whole spiritual life, enabling married couples to live their life to the fullest.

The Popes in recent decades (Pius XI, Pius XII, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, as well as the Vatican Council) have focussed attention on sanctification through marriage. In this time when marriage and family are being so harshly attacked, it seems that the Holy Spirit is more and more making His Will known through them. Considering that unnumbered couples have been sanctified throughout the ages precisely through living their lives in the Lord, it is mystifying that no couple has ever been canonised for no other reason than because they were holy a couple (although there have been cases of married couples canonised separately because they were saints in and of themselves (like St. Isidoro and Saint Maria de la Cabeza). There is hope now, because Pope Benedict did beatify the couple Luigi Beltrame Quattrocce and Maria Corsini simply for being a holy couple.

### How To Achieve Holiness

Holiness requires more than the desire not to go to hell and to be saved, good things in themselves, but too much centred on self. It is one thing to say: "I don't want to sin", and quite another to say: "I want always to be near Jesus". In this regard John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* 4 wrote: "The Church can be guided by the Holy Spirit to a deeper understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of

marriage and the family". There has been progress in understanding the spirituality of marriage, but there is still a long way to go.

Any couple seeking holiness must do it in their own way, but what is basic is that they advance by carrying out the purpose of marriage - procreation and care for the children in addition to expressing love and affection for one another. The ultimate goal for every marriage, however, must be to sanctify their life together precisely through their marriage and family. Love requires us to seek the good of another, and the greatest gift a married person can wish for is the holiness of the spouse. Couples do help one another along this path of course, but nothing is possible without God's help. Therefore a holy marriage is made up of two people united by God, Whom they are to love with all their souls, hearts and minds. And because of their love for God, they must love their neighbour also. When they help each other, they can progress further than they might if they had to go it alone. The point is to keep holy by loving one another as God wants; and loving God together every day - being more and more joined to one another and coming closer and closer to God.

It's a mistake for married couples, with their particular way to holiness, to imitate unmarried people (like priests or religious), who have their own ways to holiness. When we were dating, we really did not understand what St. Paul meant when he said: "A married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided." (i.e. divided as to how to please both God and his wife?). (1 Cor. 7:33). So is the role of the wife to pull her husband in the opposite direction - away from God? What a terrible thing that would be! But in our marriage the solution would be obvious - both walking in the same direction toward God, in which case there would be no division.

At the time we were not aware that the Church was offering any specific plan for couples to walk together in holiness, so we were attempting on our own to formulate some kind of conjugal spirituality. After getting married, in order to know something about marriage, we decided on reading the lives of the saints. We bought a big book containing the lives of many saints, and from time to time read together. But it occurred to us that these lives were depicted with what we discerned was a mistaken notion of piety - that those saints seemed to be more concerned with doing extraordinary things than with the truth. Sometimes we had to laugh at the naiveté of the authors recounting the lives of those saints. Finally we realised that many of the stories were beyond belief and nothing more than legends and exaggerations, and relating them probably did more harm than good. We thought that to be holy you just have to be normal, simple, happy people who love God and others without doing anything out of the ordinary.

We can find holiness within the family, among the children that God has given us. There is a lot of work required in raising a family - the never ending household chores all done with great love without lapsing into mediocrity and sharing the light and good impulses that we have received. We also pray and meditate together, and study the same subjects peacefully and joyfully. Each day there are the little attentions, the little subtleties, with the knowledge that we are a son and daughter of the same heavenly Father Whom we constantly love, thank and worship.

Throughout the world there are Religious Orders dedicated to hospital work, thus carrying on the healing power of Jesus; while others are dedicated to teaching, thereby carrying on the teaching ministry of Jesus; still others live a life of prayer in contemplative Orders, imitating Jesus in His constant prayer to the Father. And then there are those who are married, following Jesus in his 30 years of family life. The vocation of marriage is all-inclusive, showing the love with which Jesus loves the Church.

If there is a marriage that is divided, as alluded to by St. Paul, and somewhat mediocre, then that

marriage is in trouble. On the other hand, when you have a marriage that lives out the Sacrament of Marriage, thus representing the love of Christ for His Church, then far from any division, you have a wonderful unity. Such a couple is on the road to holiness that leads to the highest peak of sanctification.

Included in this is the family, which is the "little church" and "cell of society" - the starting point for the couple whose mission is to renew the world; because the world is made up of families. As John Paul II said: "As the family goes, so goes the world." So what are some attributes of a holy marriage, that will allow couples to live happily in this world and the world to come?

### *Suffering and joy:*

Suffering is a part of everyone's life - illness, misfortune, economic hardship, etc. - that can completely change our lives. At such times we suffer together. Naturally this helps us to feel loved, understood, supported, encouraged by our spouses, which alone is a source of great relief. There seems to be a contradiction between suffering and joy, but when faced with the right attitude, joy can and does flow from suffering. Like Job, if we accept the good things that God gives us, we must also accept the bad things that God allows to come into our lives. We prayerfully offer them up to the Lord together, without rebelling, but rather trusting in Him Who can do anything. Suffering then unites us to God and increases our holiness and produces the joy He has prepared for those accepting trials (crosses). St. Paul makes it clear that God wants us to be cheerful: "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4), so we should not be overly disturbed, fearful or anxious when sorrow comes our way, with periods of being in a bad mood, or when things do not go well. Fear and anxiety are signs of not trusting in the Lord - something displeasing to Him. But for those who love God, and are convinced of His love for them, there is no reason to fear anything or anyone. Why should any couple fear when they know that Jesus and His Mother are right there living with them in their own home.?

### *Children:*

Children contribute to the sanctification of marriage. Parents work for them and raise them with love every day. At times it takes a lot of strength to rebuke them, but even this is done out of love. This love is especially manifest when parents suffer because of handicaps, deficiencies, illnesses, even the death of a child; not being able to care for their basic needs because of the economic conditions of the family; hostility of one or the other towards his/her parents, or toward their values, such as God or prayer. Even the sufferings arising from such difficulties with their children contribute to the sanctification of the parents. Their love for their children does not change no matter what. They continue to pray for them and make sacrifices for them, trusting totally in God, and believing that He will take care of them. They know that God loves their children even more than they do, and this is a comfort to them.

But in marriage the abundant happiness and peace that the Lord provides, which the couple enjoys together, and for which they together give thanks, outweigh any sorrow and pain that they might have to endure. And one of the purposes of prayer is thanksgiving - something that greatly pleases the Lord. Cheerfulness is an earmark of the saints; and the reason for their joy and peace of heart is the assurance that they are living in conformity with their conscience.

### *Regarding the Holy Family as a model*

It is important to keep in mind that the Holy Family is in their midst, and is not only a model for the family but the best support for each couple and for each child. When there is a consciousness that Jesus, Mary and Joseph is in their midst, the whole family spontaneously asks for help and

advice when in doubt, help when they cannot fix something, protection when threatened, relief when they are overwhelmed. They feel secure and speak with simplicity and matter of factly to each member of the Holy Family. They know that if they put their needs into the hands of the Holy Family, what they receive will far exceed what they may have asked for.

Jesus and Mary performed their missions perfectly, but the rest of us are greatly limited; and with the awareness of our many faults, we can only carry on to the best of our ability. But it is senseless to give up in discouragement. We just have to start all over again. We just have to continue the fight. The Lord effects the victory. If we invite Jesus into the marriage, He will come; and just as at Cana, His Mother will be there too, to intercede for us when things go wrong.

#### *Difference of opinion between the spouses*

What happens when there is a difference of opinion between a husband and wife regarding holiness: when one is not interested, or has a different view as to how to achieve it? First of all, in order to help each other, humility and charity on the part of both are required. Failure is rarely the fault of only of the spouses. Starting with the premise that God has a solution for the problems of any married couple, and that through the Sacrament of Marriage He gives them the insight to come to an understanding, they must turn to Him in prayer and trust. The graces of the Sacrament are all those aids which God gives couples to maintain and deepen their love.

## CHAPTER TEN

### MARRIAGE SPIRITUALITY

We understand "spirituality" to be a relationship of the soul with God, deepened by prayer, the Sacraments, anything that makes the soul respond to the call of God to join Him and be holy. Marriage spirituality has to do with every aspect of what it means to be married, which obviously entails not just an interest in what one receives from one's spouse, but also a deep concern for one's spouse, reaching out and helping - realising that this is a very important aspect of the life of both partners. There should be no question of each having a completely separate and personal spirituality to the point of even ignoring the spirituality of one's spouse. When two people get married they give themselves over completely to one another in a love that is permanent. Being united by God, they should no longer look upon themselves as completely separate individuals. This makes them responsible for one another in their relationship with God, as they are in other aspects of their life together.

One of the main causes of failure in marriage is that many couples do not give themselves over completely and permanently to one another. Still others, while agreeing with good will that they should give themselves to their spouse with regard to material things - human and natural - do not even consider giving themselves spiritually, concluding that the soul belongs to God. This is true, but so does the body. And it is God Himself Who unites the two (soul and body) in a Sacrament. Thankfully recent Popes have clarified this by emphasising the need to discontinue the tendency of religious associations to separate couples in Church activities into those for men and those for women respectively. "What God has joined, let no one put asunder", but the Church was doing just that. We had spent nine years looking for a solution to this, without finding one. So we decided to do everything together, as we moved forward on our spiritual journey.

Including spirituality in the total union of marriage, does not preclude the human and natural aspects of marriage. In marriage everything in the life of a couple must be included. Just as you cannot separate Christ from His Church, neither can you separate a couple, who are a symbol of that union. We will now briefly discuss the Sacraments, which are the main source from which we receive the grace to grow spiritually. We will treat of Prayer in another Chapter.

#### The Sacraments

We assume that, for the most part, those who read these lines will be practicing Catholics, baptised, confirmed, attend Mass regularly, frequently receive the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion, and have received the Sacrament of Marriage (or will shortly do so). If not, since you cannot build a house starting with the roof, we will have to start off by putting things in order.

*Baptism and Confirmation* are Sacraments that we receive even before there is any thought of marriage, so in that regard no changes have to be made after marriage. However, after getting married, there is a change in receiving the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, because now couples can help one another in their reception. First of all, they remind one another that the time to receive those Sacraments has come, because they had already agreed that they would do that. They realise that there should never be long intervals between the times that they do receive them. Spiritual directors caution that the spiritual life begins to decline if the interval exceeds two or three weeks - and we have found this to be the case.

To confess well requires preparing well, and in order to do this what is to stop a couple from making it a practice to do this preparation together? There would be no need to explain anything, but they might agree to make comments both before and after receiving the Sacrament. They can also, after receiving the Sacrament, together thank the Lord for His forgiveness, the graces and helps they receive from the Sacrament to overcome temptations, and the joy and peace that always accompany the reception of this Sacrament. They can also ask one another to help in persevering in their respective good intentions so as not to fall back into the same sins. When such mutual aid is done with love, any advice to rid oneself of defects, to avoid chances of repeating habitual faults and grow in virtue will be listened to and will be effective. Each couple and each person knows what their particular weaknesses are, so with that knowledge they can offer one another good advice.

*The Eucharist* is of vital importance for Catholic couples, because they receive the Lord Himself, the author of all of the Sacraments. So how can they help one another receive the Eucharist more fittingly? Whenever possible they should go to church together, and receive the Eucharist together. Every communicant is thereby united to God in a special way, so that when a husband and wife receive together they are joined not only to Jesus, but also more firmly joined to one another - even more so than when they dialogue. Jesus said: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20). A prayer of thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion is said privately; but then together they can ask for the same things - for the children and other intentions that they have in common. This will give further strength to their prayer.

### The Sacrament Of Marriage

This is a Sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ, and like all the Sacraments, substantiated on a pre-existing reality - the natural marriage ordained by God by the very creation of Adam and Eve and admonishing them to "leave your father and mother and become one". This remained in force until Jesus sanctified the union of a couple in a special way by instituting the Sacrament of Marriage. The natural marriage prevailed throughout the entire period of the Old Testament, and is still that on which the marriage of non-Christians is built. For them it is a true and valid marriage as demanded by the very nature of marriage, and as such it is indissoluble and ordered to be fruitful. But it is not a Sacrament.

"By matrimony, therefore, the souls of the contracting parties are joined and knit together more directly and more intimately than are their bodies, and that not by any passing affection of sense of spirit, but by a deliberate and firm act of the will; and from this union of souls by God's decree, a sacred and inviolable bond arises (Causa Conubii 7). The Sacrament effects a rising from the natural to the supernatural order, and is a sign to the Church of God's love. The grace of this Sacrament does not eradicate what is inherent in human nature, but transforms and elevates it. God said to Adam and Eve: "The two shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The Sacrament in a special way makes them "two in one spirit" - a good definition for marriage spirituality.

It is God Who unites a man and a woman, who are composed of both body and soul, and: "What God has joined, let no man put asunder" (Mt. 19:6). God does not retract what He has done, so that this union is for life. At the time of our marriage we said "Yes!" to each other; and in agreement with us Jesus, Who is faithful and never fails in His commitment, also said "Yes!". It is we who can fail by ignoring the many actual graces He offers to help us throughout our lives. We have the "right" to ask for help in any difficulties that might occur, because He promised to be with those who live the Sacrament. Should a Christian marriage deteriorate, it can at any time be restored by simply putting Jesus back into His proper place in the marriage.

The Sacrament of Marriage is not something that is received once on the day of the wedding, but rather something that couples continually "confer" to one another throughout their lifetime. It was God, and not men, who instituted marriage as a community of love among Christians - a Sacrament which is a Covenant of love between a couple and God. He is present in this Covenant, sanctifying that human community and the great reality of love between them. Those who receive this Sacrament form a sacred community, because they represent the love of Christ for His Church. God Who is in their midst sanctifies them; and this sanctification is not limited to this world, but looks toward a relationship that is eternal.

Through the Sacrament there is a spiritual dimension in our ordinary lives that makes the natural supernatural, so that we must always ask the Lord: "What is your will for us in this particular situation"? And He, who said: "Seek and you shall find", will always answer. In the case of married couple God's answer very often comes through one's spouse. We may ask the Lord for light, a solution, a grace, etc., but instead of giving a direct answer, He may answer through one's spouse. Realizing this, there is all the more reason to give priority to dialogue, for without dialogue the answer may not be forthcoming. This could very well be a way that the Lord instructs us about the need for communication between couples.

We are all called to holiness, to live out heroically our role within the Mystical Body; and as we have pointed out, it is the Sacrament that unites Christian couples so that they can fulfill their mission in the world. But if their spiritual communication is poor there will certainly be problems and concerns that arise from a lack of understanding the soul of one's partner. It would not be possible then, to ask, give, offer or receive spiritual help. If there happens to be some degree of growth in holiness, it would not be through their marriage, but rather in spite of their marriage. Since Marriage Spirituality is the fruit of the Sacrament of Marriage itself, when there is a failure to develop good communication, then the spiritual treasures that Jesus Christ has bestowed on marriage to be received through the Sacrament remain untapped. This in a sense reduces their state to be similar to marriages in the time of the Old Testament.

If the only purpose of marriage is bodily pleasure, marriage would not be a vocation or a way to holiness. Similarly if souls remain "single" with no connection to the Sacrament, then the spiritual life of each spouse would be on the same level as it was before marriage, and there would be no question of helping one another to come closer to God. In short, there would be no progress in the spiritual life. When we ourselves were still a young couple, we met a very old couple who were individually very religious and individually very much committed to their private prayer. When they first heard about the spirituality of marriage they neither understood it nor accepted it. But then they decided to give it a try "just in case this young couple might be right". They did put it into practice in a very simple and admirable way; and despite being at an age when people find it very difficult to change, they continued to pray together with determination and joy.

Since the will and the intellect are faculties of the soul, even though a couple's sharing might generally be on an intellectual level, they are nevertheless to a certain extent communicating their souls. This can happen without their realising it, and they may not speak of their relationship with God at all. We hear much about how important dialogue is in marriage, but how limited that is when it remains on an intellectual level with the sharing of ideas only and omitting the much more important area of the soul and its relationship with God. How barren, empty, isolated a marriage is when spouses do not join their souls.

In order for a church to grow into a community of Christ-like members, a few have to live their Faith in a radical way, so as to become the leaven that ferments the dough (Mt. 13:33). And the same can be said for married life. It takes only a few couples who witness their spiritual communion correctly to influence others to consider this fundamental aspect of their lives.

Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, God's initial plan intended for the sanctification of all humanity, including married couples of course, was thwarted. But when Jesus Christ came to restore fallen humanity through His Redemption, marriage was also restored - allowing the possibility of not only regaining its original splendour, but even surpassing it. This, however, depends on our cooperation. By instituting the Sacrament of Marriage He did indeed restore marriage to its original purity. Consequently marriage now became an effective sign of the union of Christ and His Church - something that was not a part of the marriage of Adam and Eve even before the fall. This is an effective sign, because Sacraments not only signify something, they actually produce what they signify. This makes a Christian marriage an astonishing reality. St. Paul refers to it as "a great mystery" (Eph. 5:31).

### Graces From The Sacrament

The Sacrament of Marriage is a continual source of grace. It produces Sanctifying Grace through which the couple is indeed sanctified; but it also produces Actual Graces by which the couple is helped in concrete ways to act in accordance with God's Will: to overcome selfishness, to stick together through difficult times, to make prudent decisions with regard to their children, to reach out to others, to live in such a way as to deepen their mutual love, etc. Such graces can be categorised in the following way:

#### *Grace of Healing:*

One wound that needs healing, because of original sin, is the continual wound of selfishness that is part and parcel of every marriage. Selfishness, along with pride, is a great enemy of marriage, because it is the opposite of the love that a couple should have for one another, and as such is the root of all of the problems that arise in marriage.

#### *Grace of Unity:*

In this present day world couples are faced with an unprecedented environment hostile to marriage, and they need a strong bond of unity in order to cope with it. Marriage is contested in new and destructive ways, so that what might have sufficed to keep couples together in previous generations is no longer adequate.

#### *Grace of Parenthood:*

Included are all the graces needed to be open to have the children that God wants to give, and then to educate them to be the kind of Christians desired by God. Through this grace the children can boast that they have the best parents in the world.

#### *Grace of Irradiation:*

Other couples and families can be greatly influenced by a certain glow radiating from a truly Christian couple, which they themselves may not be aware of, but which are a natural result of their attempt to live the Sacrament.

## Spiritual Direction

Most married couples at some time will discover that, in order to continue to progress on the road to holiness, they will at some time need the help of a spiritual director. This is not an absolute requirement for sanctification, but it is a normal and very helpful tool. The Vatican Council has confirmed the importance and value of this traditional practice. It is a fact, however, that there is a lack of well-trained spiritual directors. Be that as it may, although they are hard to find, couples should make every effort to find someone suitable for them, believing that "he who seeks, finds". Whomever they might find, the couple must work with complete docility, because ultimately it is the Holy Spirit that leads us to holiness. Spiritual directors are not like tractors meant to drag us along, or people who are meant to govern our spiritual lives in an absolute way. But when we are in a state of doubt, they can certainly help us as a resource to discern what is the will of God for us.

One means of choosing a spiritual director is through the Sacrament of Confession. If we confess regularly (ideally twice a month) we are likely to find a confessor that we find suitable for us and that we can comfortably request to be our spiritual director. Then he can guide us outside of the relative seclusion of the confessional and get to know us as a couple. It is important that he have a good understanding of marriage.

When both husband and wife have a real desire to be close to God, they should have a common spiritual director who will direct them as a couple, and not on an individual basis. Otherwise the couple will find it hard to help one another. While it is true that having a common director is not absolutely necessary, when they are advised as a couple they will advance much more easily. Then too, their common spiritual director can be a different person than their separate confessors; but it is advantageous for them if their confessor and spiritual direction were the same person.

It is desirable that both husband and wife authorise the spiritual director to ask them anything at all, other than what had been spoken of within the Sacrament of Confession. In practice this authorisation will not ordinarily be utilised, but it does free the priest from facing the possibility of violating the secrecy of confession. The important thing is that there should be no secrets between husbands and wives. They should have total trust so that they can talk about anything at all that has to do with the two of them (no professional secrets may be revealed). They surrender minds and hearts to one another, opening up their respective souls before God, Who receives both of them.

Marriage involves togetherness - quite naturally talking about God; for the most part going to the same meetings; making retreats together; performing the same tasks; and always helping one another. It is God Who united them to begin with, so He will always be there to help them to do things together. St. Theresa in the sixteenth century summarised much of what we have been saying: "Marriage is an event of salvation, but even more importantly it is a way of sanctification and perfection. Once the marriage state is embraced, the spiritual life of the couple must be organised in accordance with that vocation." In other words:

1. Married people are called to perfection and holiness.
2. They must follow their own path, suitable to them and their status.
3. Marriage is a true vocation, a call from God.
4. There must be deep communication between the two.

Now we will turn to prayer, which is really a continuation of this Chapter X.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### PRAYER

We begin this topic by going back to St. Theresa de Liseux. For her prayer is: "A conversation with Him Whom we know loves us the most". She used to say: "Give me 15 minutes of prayer, and I will give you salvation", for whoever prays is saved. She says: "Prayer is an impulse of the heart, a single glance at heaven, a scream of recognition and love - both in trial and in joy." Prayer is the breath of the soul, as simple as it is necessary. Through it good things come; reasoning, memory and the will are strengthened. It has greater value when it takes control of the will, but of course the mind also has a vital part in prayer. It is not a monologue, but rather a dialogue with a loving God. He responds to our petitions through the ideas that come to us as we pray.

When good friends come to our home, we have a lively conversation during which we listen and share about many things. The closer we feel to such friends the deeper the dialogue. We feel comfortable with them, knowing that we are understood, and joy and trust are established. Once they leave we recall and comment on the things we discussed, how enjoyable the visit was, and what an impression it made on us. Now if that friend happens to be Jesus Christ, imagine the encouragement, fulfillment and renewed sense of strength that we experience.

In prayer it is precisely this great friend who communicates with us individually, and as a couple. This conversation with Jesus is immensely profound, limited only by our indifference and lack of good will. But the possibilities in communicating with God extend far beyond any other friends. Should we then give less attention to God than to any of those close friends? In the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself is among us, even within us, and deeper than we can ever imagine. He dwells in our souls and rejoices with us; but too many relegate Him to a deserted place in their hearts. Prayer is an obligation of every Christian, but it is even more necessary, indispensable, for those who wish to evangelise others. It is especially required in the case of Christian couples who wish to work with other married couples or those engaged to be married, as well as those engaged in other apostolates of the Church. We must always keep in mind what Jesus said: "Without me, you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5).

The Apostles asked Jesus to teach them to pray, as John the Baptist taught his disciples (Lk. 11:1-4), and we should imitate the Apostles in this: "Lord, how should we pray?" We find His response in the Gospels: "Pray so that you may not fall into temptation (Mt. 21:22) and "All that you ask for in prayer with faith, you shall receive" (Mt. 21:22). God always listens and waits for our prayers. He always has something new to say to us, so in silence we have to be ready to listen, for then we can discover the solution to any problem. We have to trust in Him fully, and not doubt His Power. Jesus said: "Ask and it will be given to you." (Mt. 7:7-11), so we can ask Him for anything at all; but since He knows what is best for us, He sometimes answers in ways that differ from what we had prayed for, but would certainly have prayed for if we knew the entire situation as He does. And of course He wants us to be thankful. When He cured the 10 lepers, and only one came back to give thanks, He said: "Where are the other nine?" (Lk. 17:17)

#### Characteristics of Prayer:

##### *Trust*

We are all loved by God as his own children; and so when we pray, we place ourselves in His

Presence with humility, trust, gratitude, perseverance, just as we would in the presence of our own parents whom we love so much, and who love us so much. And just as loving parents would want to be trusted by their own children, so God wants us to trust Him, talk to Him about anything, ask for anything, and always ask forgiveness for our inevitable faults - because He loves to forgive those who wish to be forgiven - and all of this while being fully aware that He is indeed our heavenly Father.

### *Simplicity*

"When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret....do not babble like the pagans who think they will be heard because of their many words...your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Mt.6:7-8). When we communicate with God we should pray with the simplicity of children. Then our contact with God will be spontaneous.

We wanted help in praying as a couple and asked a priest about it. He gave us a book which may indeed be helpful to priests and religious, but we found that it did not help us as a married couple. We did try using the book which suggested a remote preparation, then a proximate, then a choosing of a suitable place etc, so that by the time we got down to actually praying the limited time we had was soon over. We needed a simpler, more childlike approach - something like what we had often seen in our own children, something natural and uncomplicated. Married couples with children find it hard to find time to pray together, and it is a lot harder when it is complicated. If it is not simple, they get discouraged and give up on it. One of our daughters prayed: "Jesus and Mary, cure my auntie". It was during the month of the Blessed Mother, and we happened to have a very sick aunt. We were giving advice on how to pray to one of our sons and he stopped us by saying: "I ask God for everything and everyone" - matter of factly, and that is enough. Another daughter was sitting on the floor, suddenly looked up and gave a kiss to the air. We asked what she was doing, and she answered "Kissing my Guardian Angel."

### *Perseverance*

We must pray frequently and perseveringly. God is always accessible, always listens, and always responds. His response may differ from what we had in mind, but always better, because He knows the whole story; although for a time it may be hard to understand precisely because it differs from our immediate desire. But it is certain that no prayer is ever wasted. The parents of St. Theresa wanted a boy - to become a priest and a missionary; and they prayed for a boy. All of their children were girls. So did God not answer their prayers? He had a different, and of course, a far better plan. He answered in a way beyond their wildest dreams; for although she never set foot on any missionary country, or outside of her own convent, along with her becoming a great saint, Theresa became the patroness of the missions.

### *Agree on a time*

Whenever any one of our children wanted something from us, each one of them knew that if they got together with their brothers and sisters to waylay us as a group, they would more than likely get what they wanted - because we did find that irresistible. You might say that something similar happens in our relationship with our heavenly Father. He wants all of His children to agree on something, and it pleases Him when they do. Jesus said: "If two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Mt.18:19).

### Difficulties During Prayer

During prayer we have to avoid anything that will disturb our inner peace, so that we can listen intently to the Lord. Remember that Mary "kept all these things reflecting on them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). It doesn't have to be a general rule, but for us it is sometimes helpful to write down what we want from the Lord. During prayer we have always had the problem of what to do with distractions of the imagination gone wild and the mind being taken up with temporal things. We can only make an effort to forget them. Prayer must be a crucial part of our lives, so we cannot but make the time for it, and utilise that time in the best possible way. People have no trouble making time for just about everything comparatively unimportant - watching TV, reading the newspaper, checking emails, social activities, etc.; so Christian couples should never allow these things to supersede time for prayer; which could include praying the Rosary as a family.

Many people feel that living a good life and doing ordinary activities for the Lord is itself a form of prayer, and these things do have redemptive value; but prayer is a conversation with God, and requires that we fully concentrate on Him as we speak to Him and listen to Him, something not possible in the rat race of daily life if we do not consciously take the time and make the effort to devote ourselves only to Him. True, our normal everyday lives can be offered to the Lord as prayer, but this does not excuse us from making special time for God within our normal everyday lives.

It is common to first think about what we would like to have in order to live happily, and then to ask God for the things we have decided on. Whereas it should be the other way around, giving God the initiative. He has plans for what will make us happy, and simply wants our collaboration. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still not my will, but your's be done." (Lk. 22:42). What is important for our happiness is what He wants.

Our prayers, whether individually or as a couple, will bear fruit. But of course common sense tells us that it must be something achievable and that will result in spiritual growth, however small. And we must advert to the fruit of our prayer, the graces we receive - such as an inspiration to do something good. It is so easy to get lost in our own ambitious plans which somehow never come true.

Much of what we have concentrated on so far has had to do with individual prayer, which of course is important if we are to engage in conjugal prayer. By definition this implies the couple praying together - uniting, as it were, the prayers hitherto offered separately.

### The Prayer Of A Married Couple

Pope Pius XII and John Paul II have both given us the key as to what "Couple Prayer" should look like - the conversation of both with God. Pius XII said: "It is clear that prayer should not separate you, as if you were hermits. Nor should individual reflection be a source of distress for you. You should find yourselves frequently together in front of the altar of God". And Blessed John Paul in Kinshasa 1980 said: "Grow every day in a union which becomes richer and richer at every level: in body, in heart, in will and in souls". Married couples have a mission to love and work together, and it is through prayer that they receive the help to accomplish this. As we have pointed out, when a couple prays together in the Spirit, in the Name of Jesus Christ, their prayer is much more powerful and efficacious than that offered up individually. We have Jesus Christ with us, and He will grant us whatever we ask. This book is not meant to be a treatise on prayer, but we would like to point out some characteristics of prayer that husbands and wives should be aware of.

### *Conjugal vs. communitarian prayer*

In communitarian prayer voices and intentions may unite, but matrimonial prayer involves feelings, thoughts, a whole life together. In addition, since Marriage is a Sacrament, it provides new opportunities to have Jesus in our married lives.

Prayer is a must for every Christian, but married people should not pray as if they were still single. Every person and every soul is different and unique, and God relates to each individual; but relationship with Him is somewhat different when it comes to couples. An individual may be moved by various aspects of the spiritual life - the Liturgy, reading the Scriptures, devotion to the Saints, etc., all good in themselves; but when they are shared the impact on both is that much greater, because the Lord uses each as an instrument to help the other. Just as no two individuals are the same, so too no two couples are the same, so each couple must find their own particular path within the characteristics of a good marriage. This is another reason why the help of a prudent spiritual director is recommended.

Precisely because no two people are alike, it is practically impossible at any one time for a couple to be on exactly the same level of prayer and piety. But they can help one another. We presume that this will be read by Catholic couples, but St. Paul points out that Christians married to unbelievers are to retain them as their partners, because the Faith of the one can make the other holy (1.Cor. 7:12-14). But of course when both are Christian they can help one another in trying and difficult times such as the loss of piety on the part of one or the other, etc. Rarely will both have the same troubles simultaneously, so they become a team in trying to climb the mountain to the Lord.

Prayer is one of the most important areas where couples can help one another. Women tend to have an easier time with prayer, but at the same time may be more prone to exaggerations and deviations. The husband, on the other hand, may not spend as much time in prayer, but he may be more solid in his beliefs. Both have intelligence and feelings, but a man's prayer may be more centered on intelligence and the woman's on feelings. There should be no attempt then, to try to impose one's own style of prayer on the other, because each will have their own characteristic way to pray - and that's the way it should be. Because they are different, even in prayer, they complement each other. The wife may be the one to remind her husband that it is time to pray - lest he forget - and he can be a source of serenity and peace for her.

Vocal prayer, like morning and evening prayer, prayers before and after meals, reciting the Rosary, offering up common intentions, and other established forms of prayer are easier to perform together, and therefore a good place to start. But mental prayer, or meditation, is another story. We will speak later about ways to facilitate this, but in this section we would like to treat of a "practical method to pray".

Conjugal spirituality pre-supposes a personal prayer life - a dialogue that each has with God. Through it we receive inspirations and graces which can then be shared with one's spouse. This kind of communication of ideas and suggestions is very beneficial in that the suggestions received from God in individual prayer allows one's mate to share in them. One or the other may at a particular time not feel the urge to pray; but when inspirations as discovered through individual prayer are shared, this can stimulate the partner. Therefore before sharing in a conjugal prayer, time should be taken, in silence, to communicate just with the Lord; and then afterwards share with one's spouse what has taken place, what each has learned and felt, and what each would like to do, etc.

Very often we ask God for something or other, and the response comes through our spouse, at least providing the necessary elements that provide us with a solution - one more reason that motivates

us to make a practice of communicating with our partner. From our prayer we will experience joy and peace, because God is a God of peace. Christians who pray together, then, put a smile on the face of the Church.

### Daily Prayer A Must

In order to deepen our prayer we must dedicate to it an exclusive time every day. This is how we find and contact an infinitely loving God. If we do unfailingly make this time it becomes easier, even in the midst of our everyday busy schedule, to turn our thoughts to God. For consecrated men and women, since time for prayer is a determined part of their daily schedule, praying in tranquility is obviously easier than for couples; but God knows our circumstances, and is pleased with our efforts. Life in this over-busy world can sometimes enslave us to the point of failing to feel the need for God, succumbing to the common belief that "obligations take precedence over devotion". How many have ended up in despair because of such misplaced values! It is huge mistake to forget that our first and foremost obligation is to find God Who loves us so deeply. No amount of the promises of worldly pursuits should turn us from this obligation.

Additional activities increase in proportion to the busyness of our lives, making it all the more difficult to find the time to dedicate to prayer - to listen to God. We should never allow ourselves to get to the point of saying: "We have tried, and failed"! Keep trying! Ask the Lord, and He may say: "Wake up earlier"; "Don't eliminate the time for prayer. Shorten it if you must. You can find peace and quiet even in brevity"; etc.

There is no question that intimacy with God is gratifying, while it is also demanding. But for that very reason it will become the basis of happiness in our marriage, and the sanctification of our marriage and that of our family. To repeat what we have been stressing: It is God Who acts through us and in us. Without Him we can do nothing. The depth of our conjugal prayer develops in relation to the depth of our individual prayer, and the depth of our family prayer develops in relation to our conjugal prayer. Prayer itself is compromised when there is a failure in any one of these areas.

### A Practical Method To Pray

Every couple should find their own way of prayer which no one else can decide for them. We hereby simply suggest a simple way that has been helpful to us, as well as to some other couples that we know. Finding time to pray is a problem common to all couples. But, however short, even a few minutes a day, prayer must have a priority in the daily lives of any couple.

#### *Individual prayer*

Choose a short Scripture passage - from the Mass readings of the day, a book with spiritual reflections, a meditation on events in daily life, etc., but with the purpose of taking time to meditate on it. Both should agree beforehand on a good time for that individual meditation in silence. It should be neither too short nor too long; and certainly it may not always be possible for both to be together in the same place at the same time, but there is no need to be concerned about that.

Ask the Lord for enlightenment to discern His will - what He expects - with trust that He will make it known. The objective of this time is not simply to create a time for study (which would not really be a type of mental prayer), but to receive a light, whether just a spark or one shining brilliantly that will allow us to see something from a different perspective and make us want to change and move toward what is good.

### *Conjugal prayer*

This is a sharing with one's spouse of the results of one's individual prayer - what had occurred in one's heart through some form of inspiration, what had been learned, or more fully understood. It can take place immediately after each one's individual prayer, or at a later time. Mutual support is necessary in ordinary circumstances, but it is especially important when it comes to helping one another in prayer. The sharing of received graces and their results helps couples to realise that in prayer too they complement one another, affording them gratitude and joy, and a greater willingness to praise God Who loves us so much. This description of one's mind can be related in a very natural way without concern for possible periods of silence or how articulately one's thoughts are presented; but it should end up with a joint pledge or promise to do something concrete which can be recalled in the course of the day, or the rest of the evening.

Any commitments should be clear, doable, and for the most part just for that day. This is to avoid the possibility of an accumulation of unfulfilled pledges which could be discouraging - although such commitments are entirely free and are not at all meant to be observed under pain of sin. Should any remain unfulfilled, simply apologise to the Lord and move on. He understands full well what it means to be tired and exhausted and how we can be very much pre-occupied or distracted. Conjugal prayer involves including the Lord, so it is a prayer made up of three persons, which makes it a bit more complicated, but still possible and desirable. It is always efficacious precisely because the two are united in the name of Jesus Christ. He has already inspired each one in private prayer and very often will speak to the spouse through their subsequent sharing. Some might argue that a longer time spent in private prayer would be more beneficial in the long run; but in fact mutual communication of the fruits - the lights, inspirations, suggestions etc. - of prayer is much more rewarding for the couple.

### The Example Of Jesus And Mary

How often we find in the Gospels the example of Jesus regarding prayer. The crowds were such that He and His disciples did not even have time to eat, but he invited them to make the time for rest (prayer) (Mk.6:312); He would stay awake all night in order to have the time for prayer (Lk. 6:12, Mt. 14:23). We too must make the time for prayer, never letting work take precedence; in fact never letting even the care of the family, vitally important as it is (and even with numerous children, some of whom may be unruly) distract us from our contact with God. On the contrary, it is precisely because of these distractions that we are in greater need of contact with Him.

Jesus said: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my Name, I am there amidst them", so as promised He is with us always since we are "gathered" in His name having received the Sacrament of Marriage. He is always present in our family, and no activity can separate us from Him - even though we may not be conscious of His Presence. He doesn't want us to be overwhelmed by our daily chores, but, as He said, He would make our burdens light (Mt. 11:28).

We cannot speak of prayer without considering Mary's role in our prayer life. She is both a mother and a teacher, and her role is indispensable if we want to deepen our prayer. She who gave a

human form to God Himself anticipates and precedes every approach we make to her Son. Asking for her intercession and offering our prayers to her Son in and through her makes the prayer of any Christian couple efficacious beyond our imagination. And in this regard, praying the Rosary as a family is a powerful way of keeping the family together.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### EVANGELIZATION AND TESTIMONY

By reason of Baptism all Christians are mandated by the Lord to evangelise. This task is for all of us, and not just for priests, missionaries, and Religious. Many Popes, the Vatican Council, and in a special way John Paul II have confirmed this mandate. The only "evangelisation" that is unfruitful is that which has never been undertaken. And we married couples, as part of the laity, are not exempt from this commission; in fact we have a vital role, each couple according to their own capacities, but in ways not open to the clergy or religious: the formation and education of citizens; politics; within the workplace and neighbourhood. It encompasses the good example that arises from avoiding the idolatry of money, power, work, politics, illicit pleasures, possessions - the false gods which enslave the hearts and minds of so many people in the world. How many marriages have deteriorated and even died because of this "idolatry". How many children lack the roles of real fathers and mothers for that same reason.

The formation of children to become mature adults is a task that goes beyond the family itself. They must be educated in schools where they also acquire social skills, develop close relationships beyond their relatives to include others like their classmates, and later with fellow workers. All of this is related to maturity, and of course spiritual maturity is developed by parents, grandparents, teachers of catechism, professors, priests and religious, etc. We ourselves have benefitted by such people, so it is only natural that we now do our part in helping those who will follow us - the next generation.

Christian couples, being the domestic side of the Church, have a specific duty in the apostolate to show the union of Christ with His Church by their being a true Christian couple, thus contributing to the evangelisation which Christ entrusted to His Church.

#### The Environment

We are affected by the surrounding environment, but we also have an effect upon it, whether that impact be good or bad. The Lord tells us: "You are the salt of the earth...and the light of the world" (Mt. 5:13-14). Moreover the family is the cell that constitutes society, and for that reason influences society. Is it possible, however, for us, the minority, to change a society that has forsaken God? The Book of Exodus says: "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generations; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:5-6). This means that we are stronger than the forces of evil, with more power than we can imagine.

A Christian family should not be like flowers in a greenhouse oblivious to the reality of other flowers around them. We have to be open to others, putting into practice the most important tenet of Christianity, which is love. They must be the yeast, the leaven that produces changes in society (Mt. 13:33, Lkl 13:20). Of course, the first priority and foremost obligation of the couple is their own family - their closest "neighbour". But while paying suitable heed to their children, love demands that their interest must not be limited to their own family, but must extend itself to other families also. In this way the entire family becomes active members of the apostolate, advancing from receiving to giving. That is why we need a living union with Christ, the source of the apostolate of the Church. The whole family must live in love, which is the soul of every apostolate.

## Giving Witness

Witness is an interaction of the family itself, so that very often it is present without any of the members being conscious of it. But what is certain is that there can be no evangelisation if there is no sharing and no witness given. A young couple visited another young couple who were related to them. They saw that this couple were always full of joy which made them stand out from other couples; and they wanted to know what was the secret. The answer was that there was no secret beyond the fact that God had a place in their marriage - that it was God Who united them and gave them joy. And that was certainly the case. They had not given witness with words, and had not even been aware that anyone considered them to be different. It is not unusual that young couples look up to couples with whom they are acquainted and see in them what they themselves would like to have, perhaps without realizing what that something is. Inevitably it is because the couples they admire are giving witness of the fact that God lives in them. And it is possible for any Christian couple to be such witnesses. The marriage of a couple who fail to be witnesses of anything lacks a condition that would make theirs a real marriage.

Unity in the family is continually being challenged. So it is up to parents and children to show the world what unity is all about. Marriage is expressed in its indissolubility and holiness, and when the children see those qualities in their parents, they realise that it is a way to solve problems and will want to make it a part of their lives in the next generation. It is vital that a family be good, and that there be harmony among its members making their home a place of peace. This is the kind of witness that is needed for the new generation; but that alone is not enough. Christ wants more from us, so we must go out and spread the Gospel to other families who do not know it, have mis-interpreted it, or forgotten it. Especially in this day of such turmoil in family life, being good is not enough. We must evangelise.

Since marriage involves two people, it is a very apt instrument for starting any quest, and trying any sort of apostolate. A couple is so natural. They can get into many places that a single person would find it hard to enter. When the two act together it is beneficial to them, as well as to those who receive their help.

## Evangelization

The fruitfulness of the apostolate depends on the vital union with Christ Who is the origin of the apostolate of the Church. It is the role of the Church to be missionary, and so it must be the role of the family which is the domestic Church. So through prayer, sacrifice, the Sacraments (especially the Sacrament of Marriage through which the couple and the whole family is sanctified), union with the Mystical Body etc. we have to discover what God wants from us - taking into consideration our possibilities and availability. For evangelisation to be fruitful the witness of life and love is essential. We must believe Jesus when He said that He would be with two or three who are gathered in his name. This togetherness with us started with our receiving the Sacrament of Marriage, so we are assured of its constancy.

It may be that for a time, and for a particular reason, only one of the spouses can act. In such a case the support and prayer of the other will assure the good fruit of the apostolate. Should, however, one of the partners object to the apostolate (for example being so time-consuming as to negatively affect the marriage and the family), then it should be re-considered, because the damage caused may outweigh any good that is done. And while it is true that each couple has to discover their own way to evangelise, working with others called by the Lord to a similar apostolate will be all the more fruitful.

Some couples are called to an apostolate meant for just the two of them, such as reaching out to couples having a problem between themselves, or in their relationship with God - an activity finally oriented to the ultimate goal of salvation. Some forms of evangelisation are visible actions such as giving talks, teaching catechism, etc.; whereas others are not easily perceived, like faithful and persevering prayer, welcoming new members, making phone calls, printing information, clerical work, etc. - small but necessary activities. Obviously the range of action within a group are very diverse, as are those even between husbands and wives. No group should insist that everyone be engaged in the very same thing at the very same time. They should prudently decide on when, where, why, how, and by whom actions should be taken. Just be convinced that the activity is worth while.

To coordinate things meetings are inescapable, but they should be limited only to those that are necessary and to those for whom they are relevant, not requiring the presence of others. They should be short, well-prepared, start and end on time, and run smoothly without wasting time. If it is convenient to have a priest present to orient and advise the group, one can be invited. The members of a Catholic group concerned with evangelisation should adhere\_ to the teachings of the Church as known through the Holy Father and the local Bishop. All should be willing to pray and to sacrifice, perhaps choosing a leader to facilitate this.

### Potential Conflicts

There can be no successful evangelisation without proper prayer and attention paid to external elements that will have spiritual benefits. Responsibilities in the home, and the activities of the apostolate often collide. Times and possibilities are limited resulting in unavoidable struggles whenever we try to find a balance among our chores at home, our duties in the workplace, the apostolate, charitable activities, etc. It's not easy. But here are some suggestions that can help with the family, the group, the team, to find a solution to this conflict of interests.

Our number one community is the family, so any activity that does damage to the family must be avoided. Should discrepancies occur in the marriage or the family due to endeavouring to evangelise, we have to analyse the situation with care, quietly dialogue on it to discover all of the aspects of the situation, and then act accordingly. Not infrequently there are accusations of abandoning care of the children in favour of apostolic activities, as well as the nature of one's job, social and other activities - a situation that must be seriously considered. This may be due to poor planning skills. But there should never be any neglect of responsibilities toward the children - to provide a good education, feed them properly, give them time for socialisation and recreation, and very importantly spiritual formation. Parents must become role models for their children, especially in what it means to be a good Christian. If the situation persists, then the couple must either curtail, or completely stop any apostolic activity until such time that doing so would no longer be an obstacle. It is important to keep a proper balance between our interior and exterior life. Finally, what is God's will? The solution lies in His hands.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### AGING TOGETHER

Somehow old age is looked upon as a necessary evil, an unfortunate time of deterioration, and a time of waiting for death without hope or joy. If that were truly the case old couples should be sad and joyless as they look forward to nothing but death. What a mistaken notion! Every stage in a person's life has its own characteristics of difficulties, sickness, unfortunate events, but also wonderful times of joy and positive expectations; and in this old age is no different than any other stage of life. We just have to learn to accept whatever comes our way, knowing that whatever occurs, God will use it for our benefit.

#### Happiness In Old Age

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippian 4:4) That "always" refers not only to every circumstance, but also to every stage of life. What differentiates an old person from a young person is not so much the number of years that have elapsed as their respective mood. For a couple with Faith who have spent their whole life together loving God, proximity to death is nothing to be afraid of. For them death is in reality an entrance to life. Before the moment comes for them to leave this world they may be very happy, provided that they have lived according to the will of God. Their love for one another has grown in time, and they believe that that love will not cease with the death of one or the other, but will go on. Despite his advanced age Pope John XXIII, to express how young he felt, used to say that his soul was the grandchild of his body. We have all met senior citizens who were great examples that it is possible to be cheerful and kind at any age - people who are young at heart. If we make an effort to live like that, everyone around us will feel happy. The generosity, spirit of service, and most of all the love that they learned to express throughout their lives has a great influence on society. Therefore an older couple should continue to associate with their children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces etc. Even when living separately they can still give good advice to those close to them, supporting them, warning them of pitfalls, and praying for each of them. Without being intrusive in the life of their children who have begun to live their own lives, they can still keep each one close to their hearts.

When old people spend time with their children, grandchildren, etc., share good times with them, tell them anecdotes and stories and teach them many things, these things are never forgotten, and become very helpful in their future lives. Yet they must be careful to allow their children and grandchildren to make their own choices, and give advice prudently, kindly and politely, even if they find their choices and lifestyle to be unacceptable, a cause of worry and suffering. A case in point would be when they abandon God and His Commandments. In some way, they should be admonished of course, when we cannot agree with their behaviour, but yet in such a way as to avoid hurting their feelings.

## Impairments From Old Age

### *Deteriorating faculties*

Much is said about the defects and sins of the young, but older people are not without their faults. Couples can help one another by praying for one another of course, but also by gently bringing them to one another's attention in order to correct them. If not attended to they can, before you know it, be great obstacles to spiritual growth. In the long run what makes old age trying is not the limitations we have, but the defects. And there are limitations. As one grows old the faculties begin to deteriorate - sight, hearing, mobility, - physical strength, beauty, diseases, various limitations that come with age, and we can do little or nothing about that. Trying to live a healthy life by abstaining from smoking and drinking, over-eating and other abuses, regular exercise etc. are ways to ameliorate the situation. People can put up with our limitations, knowing that they are a part of life. But our defects make it hard for them to accept us.

### *Sadness*

Sadness is a common defect among seniors. It makes them lonely even when surrounded by a number of people. One reason for sadness is a general disinterest in things around them, which may be a carry-over from their youth. And just as joy is contagious, so also is sadness. People tend to gather around joyful people because they feel comfortable in their presence; whereas the opposite is true of sad people. We remember a particularly joyful lady in her eighties who very often had groups of young people stop to chat with her as they were on their way to town, precisely because she was easy to talk to and they somehow were able to share in her joy.

### *Pessimism*

Pessimistic seniors can be old fossils. Nothing satisfies them, nothing is worthwhile or good or worth striving for. They tend to discourage others, damage relationships, and sadden everyone around them. They are empty and bitter people. It may be that they had experienced some disappointment or disillusionment in their lives. But that is why everyone should make an effort to encounter themselves - to make one aware of one's personality, but of the possibilities that exist to begin to "live", at any age.

### *Disinterest in everything and everyone*

Such people are dead on the inside. Nothing in their surroundings interest such old people. Everything is a waste of time. Nothing is good or beautiful. There is never any good news. If there is an interest in anything, it is what happened a long time ago. These people are boring to children and young people alike. Tragedies that happen to others mean nothing to them. They have no interest in people.

### *Selfishness and lack of love*

Some old people feel that they have all sorts of rights, and no obligations. They do not care about others, and have no desire to do anything for themselves. Such seniors are not nice to, nor do they show gratitude to, those who are kind to them, or are in charge of them. They complain about

everything, and think everyone is against them. They are suspicious of everyone, and are always in a bad mood. They do not help others, and will not allow others to help them; but they do demand obedience. They blame everyone for everything.

### *Greed*

We see the tendency to greed in many old people, even among people who have not had, and do not have, any particular financial difficulties to deal with. Even people who may have been generous when they were younger seem to have the feeling, irrational as it is, that they may not have enough money to get by on in the future, and therefore hoard what they do have. This is often a problem for their families.

### *Obsessions*

These people are often obsessed with food, medicine, time, health and what not. They demand the most absurd things. Their obsession may have been with them for many many years, and not necessarily suddenly come upon them with old age, but if they are not sorted out they could get more and more intense with age.

It may well be that the senior citizens who are greatly influenced by the aforesaid debilitating characteristics may be in the minority, but the first question that must be asked is what is the main reason why they exist. Could it be that most of them had been deprived of an environment of love from their earliest years. It is certainly true that the family environment in our early years has a great influence on our entire lives.

Therefore there must be a constant lifelong effort to rid ourselves of defects, realising that no one is perfect. Everyone has a fair amount of weak points, as well as good points. When there is a concerted effort to overcome defects, before and after marriage, we will reach old age with a positive balance in our favour. For a husband and wife to make progress in this regard they need to exercise their reason and will, but more than that a rich and profound spiritual life. And in making this endeavour together they will advance faster and steadier. In Ecclesiastes 4:110 we read: "Two are better than one...If one falls, the other will lift up his companion. Woe to the solitary man. For if he should fall, he has no one to lift him up." Couples are safe from this danger when they daily experience mutual true love, support and trust between them. Then the defects of old age will be ameliorated - or completely disappear.

But these defects can be almost entirely avoided. Even though the dangers are always present, falling into them is not a foregone conclusion. There are many old people who do not have them. Being vigilant, and helping one another, taking care of one another, correcting one another, making good suggestions, dialoguing about these very faults and what good things should be maintained, changed or sacrificed - these are all obvious ways to guarantee an almost defect free (not sin free) old age.

## The Use Of Time

When one reaches a certain age job offers and responsibilities (even within the family) diminish. This usually allows for a more relaxed and simple way of living. The couple started off with just the two of them and now they return to just the two of them. Children stop coming as regularly as they had, and retirement brings professional life to an end. So what to do with the resulting free time? A good answer is God and neighbour. Of course the closest neighbour is one's spouse. Now more than ever is the time to share about projects, joys, sadness, etc.; to help and cheer up one another. Now there is more time to pray together, to talk about God and spirituality. But it is not a time to say that their job is done, and now they can allow others to do everything for them. As long as they are alive, they still have plenty to do. Their mission on earth is not finished. God still wants more from them; and whatever it is, He will provide the means to do it. So they should ask the Lord how to proceed, what is it that He wants them to do.

With a higher life expectancy people in their sixties, for example, who had been considered "old" in the past and were more or less marginalised from society, are now very active. In the past they may have thought of themselves as finished, but that is no longer the case. Their children may have taken their own place in life, but they themselves find themselves with a beautiful new stage - a second chance for romance - which can have a significant impact on their life together. This is a new gift from the Lord with many new opportunities. Resting does not mean wasting time, so it is important that a retired couple come up with new days to spend their time - things that the busyness of the past did not allow, and these are limitless.

We know a wonderful man who had been so devoted to his job that he could find little time for anything else. Both he and his wife dreaded his retirement, fearing that having nothing to do would kill him (as sometimes happens). However they came up with a plan. She suggested that he take up painting - because he had that talent. He did take it up with great joy, and this gave them an opportunity for sharing, which at the same time became a new opportunity to deepen their love. There are many things one can do after retirement: reading, studying, researching, learning a new language, helping others at one's leisure, doing favours, minding the grandchildren, and of course taking more time for prayer once that time is more available.

Another friend of ours decided, with his wife, to utilise his pension for not only living a comfortable life, but they decided, as long as it was not something too demanding or too time-consuming, to give their time to anyone who needed it, or asked for it. They had a beautiful happy attitude. The husband said this decision brought a lot of joy into his life. Another woman who received a good pension said: Now I get paid without working, so I decided to work without pay. And she did that by working and teaching at the local church. Any choice is fine, as long as it is not the choice of sitting down on a couch all day and saying that there is nothing left to do. Old age is an opportunity to begin a new spiritual journey together, growing in love and service to the Lord.

### Sufferings Endured By The aged

With regard to suffering there are three things to keep in mind: Accept with love whatever problems God allows to come into our lives; ask for the strength to endure suffering with joy and love; and offer up any pain for the redemption of mankind.

Sometimes a spouse becomes incapacitated - sometimes temporarily, sometimes something progressive ending up in a total loss of a faculty, requiring total care without any compensation. The strength to bear up under such circumstances comes only from the Lord. It is He Who united the couple, and because of His love the couple has been able to stay together throughout the years. It is hard and ostensibly beyond human strength, but He will never abandon them and will support them with His strength.

A couple close to us had many children and a very happy family. As they grew old the wife suffered an illness through which, throughout a number of years, she slowly lost her ability to speak, to comprehend what people were saying, and she ended up losing her mental faculties altogether. In the last years of her life she became like a little child, incapable of doing anything by herself. She spent her last years unconscious and in a vegetable state. Throughout all of this her husband took care of her day and night showing no sign of exhaustion, even when he himself began to walk only with difficulty. It was evident how much he loved her; and when she died, far from feeling relieved, he mourned for her as if he had lost the greatest wife on earth. Some people may wonder how this was possible; but their marriage stayed with God and with each other. They practiced couple spirituality, lived in a very simple and joyful manner. They had had many good times together, and with their large family, as well as grief. Now they are both in heaven - no more suffering.

In conclusion, if a couple does not waver in their love of God, their love of one another, and their love of others, they will never grow "old", because for them old age is only a concept. St. John, at about the age of 90, wrote: "Whoever does not love, remains in death." (1 Jn. 3:14). Contrariwise, whoever loves is truly alive. A couple steeped in love for one another will be very much alive until the last moment.

### Widowhood

What happens to a marriage once both are in heaven? It is generally thought that once a spouse dies, that is the end of the marriage; and this is certainly the viewpoint of civil law. But does the death of a spouse put an end to the bond of their spirituality and the love that existed between them? We recently heard a priest remark that, in his opinion, wherever there had been true love it would continue in the next life. The Church has not taken a stand on this matter, but St. Paul did say that love will last forever (1 Cor. 13:1-13).

Pope Pius XII explained this with remarkable clarity: "Even though the Church does not condemn those who marry after the death of a spouse, it applauds those who through their own will decide

to remain faithful to their lost husband and wife, and to the perfect symbol of the Holy Sacrament of Marriage. The Church rejoices in the sight of her members cultivating the spiritual riches of those who stay in the latter state. We must have in mind, above all, according to our own judgment, the firm conviction that instead of destroying the bonds of human and supernatural love, death may perfect them and make them stronger."

It is true that, juridically speaking, the marriage does not subsist. But it is the soul that had given vigour and beauty to their conjugal love in all its splendour and desire to remain forever - something that the couple had promised to each another - so why couldn't that continue to exist as spiritual and free persons? When one of the spouses is freed from the strings of the body and enters the Divine intimacy, he/she is released by Him from earthly weaknesses and constraints of selfishness. He also invites the other spouse to adopt a pure and spiritual disposition in life. And we can presume that the spouse now in the Presence of God wishes that the one he/she loved most in this world be selfless, hopeful, and unattached to earthly things.

In speaking to widows Pope Pius XII said: "If the Sacrament of Marriage, the symbol of the redemptive love of Christ for His Church, applies to husbands and wives the reality of this love, it will transfigure them. It will make them similar on the one hand to Christ, Who gave Himself for the salvation of mankind, and on the other hand similar to the Triumphant Church. Then widowhood becomes, in its own way, the perfection of that mutual consecration. It represents the current life of the Militant Church. The spiritual spouse cannot be seen, but you must remain attached as you march toward Him through faith and hope, living this love that sustains us in all our trials, ever hoping for the definitive fulfillment of the initial promises."

It would appear that most widows and widowers do not consciously strive to further deepen the spiritual relationship they had had with their deceased spouse, but in light of the above we would like to invite all (especially widows who outnumber widowers) to remain in a contact with their consort who is in the next life - the really true life - where both shall be together again for all eternity. We cannot imagine what form that relationship will take, but it is unimaginable that what had been such a deep relationship in this world would have no meaning in the next. We are convinced that a couple that had intensely lived a joint spirituality and helped one another on the path to God, as well as in the development of their family, would receive help from the partner in heaven. They can help even more than they were able to do on earth, although in vastly different ways. One does not ever become alienated from the problems of one's loved ones. A family can still stay together through prayer to their deceased husband or parent, and count on them for their help and protection. Just as we ask for the intercession of saints who are canonised, so too can we ask for the intercession of saints who are not canonised, since anyone in the presence of God is a saint. The Christian understanding of love is the only one that is unaffected by death.

A widow with no children reached the age of 98. Despite having many complications and illnesses, she never lost interest in her relatives and friends. Whenever anyone got sick she would always ask about them. If a person was going through a hard time or facing important matters she would

offer her help. Following St. Paul's admonition she would rejoice with those who rejoice, and suffer with those who suffer (Romans 12:15). She was always a peace-maker. She didn't talk much about herself, but would always listen to others. She had studied several languages and, to keep her mind sharp made it a point to read something in those languages. When she noticed herself getting weak in mathematics, she taught herself to learn more about it. She was always kind and polite, and tried not to be a burden to others. She was a very pious woman and close to God. In short, she was a saint.

This woman was one example that, despite old age, despite many different problems, it is possible to make one's life worthwhile. Losing a spouse does not have to be looked upon as a catastrophe. Love is stronger than death, and can grow immeasurably beyond death. Why can't relationships deepen even after death; indeed why can they not deepen throughout eternity - an eternal journey, since God is infinite, and we are made in His image? Love can be transformed into Divine Love.

"What God has joined, let no one separate" (Mt. 19:6) - and neither will God. If the two wish to remain spiritually united throughout all eternity, their love can enter into eternity. There are three theological virtues - faith, hope and love -but only love is forever (1 Cor. 13:13).

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### HAPPINESS, JOY AND PEACE

These three states are closely inter-related, although both happiness and joy are included in the broader meaning of "peace". As a consequence of sin, throughout one's entire life no one is entirely free from suffering, pain and sorrow. And yet throughout all kinds of troubles it is possible for a couple to remain in peace. This is a gift from God that provides them with the happiness and joy of knowing and experiencing that they are loved and cared for by a loving God.

#### Happiness In Marriage

Everyone naturally desires to be happy, since it is God Himself Who has placed that desire into our hearts as a way of making us aware that finally it is He Himself Who is the object of our desire. And we can have a taste of that happiness while still in this world. Nothing that God does is in vain, so that if He has given us this desire for true happiness, He obviously will make it possible to obtain it (although we are free to choose a way of life that would be a hindrance to experiencing it). We can be assured that if we accept our marriage as a vocation from God, He will provide the happiness that is reserved for that way of life. He does not go back on His word (I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (John 15:11). He gave us this desire for happiness, but if it is not forthcoming the fault is our's. A way to ensure that it will be forthcoming is to live the Beatitudes, for He has told us that such people will be "Blessed" (happy).

Couples are so united that when there are times when one or the other is not happy, the other too is not happy. In marriage either both are joyful, or both are sad. That is why if both join together in a path of happiness and love according to God's will, they will see that every effort to bring happiness to one's spouse will bring happiness for both. So the enduring question for each to ask is: "What can I do to make my spouse happier?" This will result in making both happier, because God made the two into one. When we follow God's plan, His will for marriage, happiness is a given.

We have seen that it is God who instituted marriage and determined a very concrete plan for us to realise that plan. A couple should be sure that they are walking the path that God wants them to: that they raise their children in the way that God wants them to; that they utilise the means that He has given them to grow; that they trust in Him to help them overcome any difficulties. They have to live without fear, knowing that God is their final goal. They will thereby be sure that they are moving toward true and lasting happiness and joy. Despite the numberless deceptive promises of the world, God is the only source of the happiness and joy that everyone, not just married people, is seeking.

We once met a young couple who had been married for some years and had a small son. They were intelligent, attractive, had no financial worries, but nevertheless came to us for help because they

were on the verge of separating. We presumed that they had encountered some big problem, but we discovered that there was no outstanding problem. They hadn't even had an argument. They were simply disappointed. So they came to us for some human help, leaving God out of the picture. We told them that there are indeed human means that can be helpful, but that you simply cannot leave God out of the equation. There comes a time when you either hold onto God, or you sink. But God is always there to help.

This is not an isolated case. There are numberless couples out there who have everything, but really have nothing; because God means nothing to them. They are unhappy because they believed that all the "things" that He gave them (although they never advert to the fact that these were actually gifts from God) were the things that should have made them happy, but on the contrary bring nothing but disappointment. Yet they ignore the very gifts that He wants to give them and which will really make them happy. They are living in boredom, frustration, and emptiness. They do not believe Jesus when He said: "Without me you can do nothing." (John 15:5). The worldwide number of separations, divorces and broken families make it very clear that the number of unhappy people is vast. Seeing this tragedy, how many marry in doubt and fear and ask themselves: "Are we next?" People should utilise every means to be as sure as possible in making the decision to marry, primary among them being a trust in God - His guidance and help.

### Suffering

More and more we meet people who do not at all understand the reason for suffering in the world. Many become alienated from God, because they argue that a loving God would not allow this. Even pious and well-meaning people can tie themselves up in this and it makes them incapable of understanding the meaning and value of suffering. Certainly the world is full of suffering. It is disconcerting, and people might naturally ask why all this disease, sickness, hunger, misery, etc. Why are there so many natural disasters - hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, wars and famine? Why so much death and suffering, children being mutilated or starved to death? Why do good people contract cancer and life-threatening sicknesses, etc.? Why does God allow injustices - kidnappings, abuses, terrorist acts? Why is God so unfair, allowing good people to suffer and letting bad people go scot free.? Why are some bad people so rich, and other good people so poor? Then there are those who dare not say anything against God for fear that He will punish them. And the list goes on and on. So in a word: "Why all this suffering"?

*[NB The following paragraphs in brackets [     ] for the most part have additions that are not found in the original and the authors are not to be held responsible for them.]*

[Scripture tells us, and we believe, that from the beginning, utilising the wonderful gift of free will that God had given them, "Adam and Eve" freely chose to disobey God, which resulted in their losing their special relationship with Him, and all that that entailed. This first (original) sin was passed on to their progeny, just as that special relationship with God would have been passed on if

they had not sinned. With that sin mankind has been subject to a fallen nature, and a tendency to evil has been our lot right up to the present. Therefore the real reason for suffering is the "original sin" combined with all of the personal sins of people throughout history. God is good and loving, but He must also necessarily be just. Free will is an astounding manifestation of God's love, but it would be meaningless if the possibility to exercise it did not exist. It was Satan that tempted "Adam and Eve", but he too had been given the opportunity either to choose God's will, or to spurn it. We can say then that evil and its consequences of sufferings and misfortunes really began with Satan's free choice of evil over God. The punishment for him, and all of the devils that were in accord with him, was to be banished forever from the presence of God, whom they choose to make their eternal enemy. If there were no punishment for evil, then the justice of God would be meaningless. The built-in punishment for the evil of mankind is the suffering, misfortunes, tragedies that all of us have to endure. When a person had a misfortune the Jews of old concluded that it was a punishment from God for that very person's sins. When Jesus cured a blind man, His disciples asked was he blind because of his sins or the sins of His parents. Jesus' answer was that it was not due to either himself or his parents (Jn 9:2), but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. This teaches us that misfortunes do not come from God. They are the inevitable result of the sins of mankind. Just as natural laws are good and helpful to people until they are ignored, in which case injuries naturally result (fire is good for warming and cooking, but naturally harmful if a person chooses to keep a finger over a burning flame; the value of the natural law of gravity is obvious, but try jumping from the roof of a 50 story building); so too the supernatural laws are good and amazingly rewarding until they are freely ignored. We see the results all around us, but we are the ones to blame, not God. No normal person would ever want God to eradicate the natural laws because of all the good that they bring when not ignored. This is all the more true of God's supernatural laws.

But in the Divine plan suffering has been transformed into something of value and salvific. The justice of God demands a recompense for the injustices against Him caused by the sins of mankind; and so God Himself became one of us and took our sins upon His own shoulders. His sufferings, having infinite merit since they were offered by God Himself, fulfilled that required recompense which mankind was incapable of doing. In this way He redeemed the world. And He gave us the possibility to unite our sufferings to His so that they become not just something to endure, but a wonderful means to deepen our relationship with Him.]

Consequently, by the grace of God, in suffering there is a potential for good. Through joining our sufferings with the sufferings of Christ, the God-man, many good things happen: evils are circumvented; souls are saved; people who did not know God get to know Him; people who have abandoned God return to Him; people are sanctified.

When we accept sufferings and offer them up in prayer, the merits of the Redemption of Christ can be applied to others. True, His Redemption has infinite value that will continue throughout eternity, but it is His will that we unite our input to His Redemptive work, making our sufferings redemptive. In this way, we ourselves can help others precisely through our sufferings. St. Paul

wrote: "I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His body, the Church." (Col.1:24). "Lacking" does not refer to His insufficiency but, that He wanted us to have our share in the Redemption - and that would be lacking until such time as we offer them.

This is what is confirmed in the Doctrine of the Mystical Body - a doctrine proclaimed in the Creed: "I believe in the Communion of Saints". This means that all Catholics are one body, with Christ as the head, so that we can help one another with the merits of our sufferings. But of course, we can also help ourselves to reach Christ and obtain salvation through Him. That is why it is important with holy joy to accept and offer up sufferings when they come our way - because they can be for our own good and the good of others

"God loves a joyful giver" (2. Cor 9:7). Sufferings can include voluntary sacrifices - presents to God precisely because they are voluntary and done out of love for Him.

Because of His love for us God would never allow sufferings to come our way that would be completely beyond our ability to endure them. But as has been said, he allows them for our own good and the good of mankind; for without them His justice could not be satisfied from the point of view of what is required of us, and then how could we share in His Redemption. Anyway, the temporary sufferings we endure in this world are as nothing compared to the complete and eternal joy that awaits us in heaven.

### Suffering In Marriage

Suffering is a part of everyone's life - single or married, religious or lay, Christian or non-Christian; and of course married couples have their share. One difference would be that when they are united with one another and with God, sufferings are somewhat easier to bear, sometimes to the point of making them disappear, because they are shared with someone with whom there is mutual love, understanding and support. When they put their trust in Jesus and in His Mother Mary, who are with them in a way that they cannot fully imagine, there is a special strength. When they are convinced that this is so, they will indeed be supported during difficult times, they can live without fear, and feel absolutely secure in the fact that they are in God's hands and he will not abandon them.

### Joy Is Always At Hand

"Do not be surprised that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as if something strange were happening to you. But rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ" (1 Peter 4:12-13). Peter goes on to know all about the joy in suffering. And Paul echoes the same sentiment: "I rejoice in all tribulations" (2 Cor. 7:4). Jesus too said: "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you.... be glad and rejoice, for your reward in heaven is great." (Mt.5:11-12). The sufferings of this world should not impede us from being happy, since God wants us to be happy,

and therefore will provide joy even in the midst of our sufferings. It is this kind of joy that accompanies the sufferings offered up for Christ that moves peoples' hearts and convinces them to want to turn to Christ when we try to evangelise them.

Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit descended upon Mary she proclaimed: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Lk.1:46-47). Joy is not noisy laughter sometimes simulated. It is something deep and affects the entire person - body and soul - and it is from the Holy Spirit. Joys become deeper when they are shared. When we trust God completely and are in complete communication with Him we can feel our bad moods disappear. At times difficult situations engender a greater trust and intimacy with God, and that brings about a renewal of the joy of being in such good and powerful hands. Even should times of sadness and trials continue over a considerable period of time, every effort should be made not to dwell on those times, but be grateful for all the good times.

We ask for many things from the Lord, so we should also ask for joy. "Ask and you will receive so that your joy will be full." (Jn. 16:24). "Whatever you ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you" (Jn 15:16). Ask through Mary who is the "cause of our joy".

### Peace And Well-being

The Hebrew word shalom means "peace", but in the Biblical sense, with a much deeper significance than the English word. It is that which brings well-being, which includes everything that brings real joy into our lives: love, unity, acceptance, forgiveness, understanding, health, abundance, security, contentment, satisfaction, as well as peace as it is ordinarily interpreted. Seen from this perspective, it is a great gift from God. The dictionary defines peace as a state of tranquility and relaxation, but a full definition of "Shalom" would include a great deal more. It is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

### Peace In The Bible

When Jesus said He would leave His Peace (Shalom) He stressed that it was beyond what the world gives. "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you" (Jn. 14:27). The "peace" given by the world is unstable - as unstable as the circumstances on which it depends. There may be a temporary relaxation and tranquility, but since it is a peace dependent on changeable insecure circumstances, it is fragile and precarious. But when Jesus promised His peace He said: "Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." (Jn 14:27). This peace is motivated by the presence of God so that no matter what might occur to disturb that peace, it remains. God's presence does not change, and He will never disappoint us. After all, we are children of an everlasting loving God Whose resources are inexhaustible, available to us as long as we do not reject them. The foundation of true peace relies on this knowledge and conviction. Just

as it was Jesus' customary salutation, even now the Jews and Mideast people greet one another throughout the day with the greeting of peace,

We find peace as a major message of the Gospel. When Jesus sent out the twelve in groups to announce the coming of the Kingdom, He said to them: "As you enter a house wish it peace. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; if not, let your peace return to you" (Mt 10:12-13). During the Last Supper, on the eve of His Passion, as a form of testament, Jesus said to His disciples: "Peace I leave, my peace I give you" (Jn 14:27). And appearing to those same disciples after the Resurrection His greeting was: "Peace be with you!" (Lk 24:36).

Responding to the love of God, living as His children, always produces peace in our hearts, so that when we communicate His peace to others, it reaches their hearts precisely because we have it to give. Jesus said: "Whoever loves me, will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him." (Jn 14:23). When God dwells in us the Holy Spirit is necessarily there and we therefore are blessed with His fruits, which St. Paul enumerates: Charity, joy, peace, patience, tolerance, benignity, goodness, fidelity, meekness, modesty, continence and chastity (Gal 5:22-23).

### Oriental Methods Of Relaxation

Some people seek peace in oriental methods of relaxation like yoga and transcendental meditation, which they feel to be somewhat helpful. Such tranquility, however, is a sort of peace of this world and is not at all the kind of peace promised and given by Jesus. People who get attached to this worldly peace, far removed from the peace of Christ, can easily find themselves getting lost. Fr. Rene Laurentin believes this to be so, and has corroborated it by his own experience.

### Climate Of Peace

The peace generated by people in the state of grace is effective in their own lives and in the atmosphere surrounding them. They exude the fruits of the Holy Spirit and people want to be near them and stay with them. Without even realising it, they communicate this peace that includes well-being, joy and happiness, to their spouses, their children, their friends and others. Where there is no such peace in families, it is obvious that there is something vital missing.

Where it does exist, however, the children will feel more secure, and they will respond more readily to any advice or corrections that are given, because they sense that they are given with love. Real Christianity can be lived in this kind of an atmosphere because it is founded in God, and as such is one of the greatest gifts possible - really beyond description. When this peace promised by Jesus is a living part of the life of a couple, it is naturally communicated to the children without the parents even being aware of it.

Any worthwhile gift is worth asking for, and therefore we should ask Mary, the "Queen of Peace" and of the family to intercede with her Son to give us a deeper and deeper share in His Peace. This, in turn, is a way to ask for an understanding and ability to live out all of the principles and virtues we have touched upon in this book.

May God bless you all - and give you His "Peace". Shalom!!