



The Family – A Blessing for the Church

One of the earliest memories of my childhood is kneeling by my bed at night with my parents and brothers and sisters to pray the Rosary. Dad's devotion to the Rosary underpinned all we were as a family in those early days of my life. Prayer held us together, nourished us and formed us for our future lives. Whilst there wasn't a lot of spare money around in those days and raising a large family was tough, mum and dad's devotion to the faith of our family was a witness to what they believed; that in Jesus Christ, we were all rich.

When I was raising my own family, this same faith, and the promises that we made to our five children at Baptism were always at the forefront of my mind. I raised my children with Jesus Christ at the centre of our daily lives. The daily tasks of work, education, washing, shopping, cooking, taxi-ing to sport or music and simply loving them, became my spirituality even as they frequently challenged my parental decisions. I used to call it the spirituality of the clothesline. Sometimes, prayer was done on the hop, or at the clothesline, and sometimes it was as simple as marking them with the sign of the cross at bedtime.

Christian families are places of evangelisation and catechesis as they witness to their faith in the living out of their daily lives. This witness has the capacity to spread the Good News beyond their family unit. Families provide fertile ground for evangelisation through the building of trust and friendships.

Love in families is expressed through fidelity to each other. This faithfulness of family members provides strength for the day ahead and helps to overcome challenges which families face daily. God is in the joys and sorrows, the good times, and bad times. God is in the calm and the chaos of family life. The spirituality of the home is where parents and children learn to make sacrifices for each other. It is where children first experience love, friendship, and forgiveness. These things are 'caught' not 'taught' in families. These spiritual experiences form children in the ways of love; the love which Christ has for the world.

The *domestic church* is the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Jesus promised to be where two or three are gathered in his name (*Mt 18:20*). The term *domestic church* dates to the first century AD. The early Church fathers understood that home was a holy place.

My *domestic church* now lives in several different households, with most of my children married with children of their own. When my children or grandchildren visit my home, which they do regularly, I mark their foreheads with the sign of the cross (we call it Nan's blessing) to remind them of their Baptismal call to holiness. Sometimes, if they are driving past my home, mum or dad will pull up out the front just because one of the grandchildren 'needs' a blessing. This simple practice has brought peace and hope to my children and their children. It provides a moment of the sacred in the chaos of busy lives and it is a constant reminder of the presence of Jesus Christ in the joys and challenges of relationships and life.

We know that today, many families are struggling with disability, sickness, unemployment, domestic violence, mental illness, or loneliness. Putting food on the table and paying bills is a challenge for many. Brokenness in families is a space where Christ enters to provide healing and love. The Church has much to learn from ministering to families. In their struggles, we see the sufferings of Jesus.

Families are the backbone not only of the Church, they are the foundation of society. As a community of Christian believers, let us value the dignity of all families and appreciate the blessings which families bring to our parishes and to our world.

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