

*“He ‘for a little while’ was made ‘lower than the angels’,  
that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”*

“The family [today]”, wrote Pope St. John Paul II, “as much as and perhaps more than any other institution, has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture. Many families are living this situation in *fidelity* to those values that constitute the foundation of the institution of the family. Others have become uncertain and bewildered over their role or even doubtful and almost unaware of the ultimate meaning and truth of conjugal and family life.”

In other words, there are those who are trying to be faithful to Jesus’ teaching, there are those who are confused about what it means to be faithful, and there are those who have no idea that there is anything to which they are called to be faithful.

The Scripture readings this weekend are some of the biblical foundations for our understanding of Christian Marriage and Family. If we are to understand and be faithful to God’s plan for marriage, the Biblical sources cannot be ignored. Many in our culture will call the Bible an outdated ancient document filled with error about science and anthropology. But this view is neither accurate nor reasonable. The Bible is not a scientific document it should not surprise us that the biblical authors mostly take for granted the accepted understandings of their day. And the difference between Truth and Preference/Opinion is that preferences become outdated. Truth is either true or not and is therefore never outdated. It is through Scripture that God has chosen to communicate his Holy Will to us. Faithfulness to God means faithfulness to his Word – and I might add those ancient people were not as ignorant as we sometime assume; they didn’t have an AR (augmented reality) world into which they could escape reality.

So, what does it mean, when we read, as have this weekend, from the book of Genesis, that man and woman were created “for each other”? A man and woman joined together as one this is the very basis of all of mankind. This union is willed by God, the author of creation, for the continuation of the human race. We cannot continue if families are not faithful to the call to procreate: to be fruitful and multiply : to cooperate with God ongoing and active creation.

This beautiful passage, from the very beginning of the bible, is also the basis for the Church’s prohibition of contraception, which obstructs the total self-giving (body and soul) at the heart of marriage.

Notice, in the Gospel, when Jesus is asked about divorce, which Moses had allowed, Jesus calls us back to the original plan of creation: man and woman, joined by God, cannot be separated (he had no political or private agenda in doing this – he wanted us to be who God calls us to be). He says, “What God has joined together, no human being must separate”. That line is spoken by the priest immediately following the exchange of vows at the wedding ceremony.

In fact, these beautiful readings are often chosen by couples preparing for marriage as the readings for their wedding ceremony. Because they express the couple’s desire to be faithful to God’s plan, which they know is their only hope, for a healthy, happy, holy marriage. This desire to be faithful is to be the desire of every believer.

And what about those who experience the pain of separation? Where do they fit into this story? Is this God’s will for them that they be hurt and feel rejected? Is it God’s will that two people merely go through the motions and have a loveless marriage. I think the obvious answer is no. God does not will our suffering but neither does he remove our suffering. In fact, NO WHERE in the bible does it say that Christ suffered for us so that we do not have to suffer. In fact, the Bible recounts just the opposite, 1 Peter says that Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow his steps. And in another place, take up your cross and follow

after me. Every form of suffering is a call to follow in the footsteps of Christ – we don't ask for it and neither did Jesus. We bear these burdens, but not alone. Christ shoulders those burdens with us if we are willing to walk with him to Glory. And as a people who share his name, Christians, we are called to share the burden with one another. And there is a great multitude of saints and angels who are willing to walk with us along the hard and winding road that leads to life. Call upon them and actively seek their strength and consolations.

So, let us call upon the Holy Family of Nazareth, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, as the model for families. The Holy Family, despite tremendous difficulties, the threat murder, becoming refugees in Egypt, extreme poverty, is an example to all of us, what it means to make our families places of prayer and places of faith.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendor of true love, to you we turn with trust. Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic Churches. Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division: may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing. Holy Family of Nazareth, make us once more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the family, and its beauty in God's plan. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer.”

Notice the use of the phrase “domestic church”. The Domestic Church refers to the activity of the Church in the family home. If someone asks me, “Father, what does it mean to be a Catholic?” The idea of domestic church means, I should be able to point to families in the parish, and say, go and live with them for a week, that's what it means. See how they pray together, how they are patient with one another, see their generosity towards one another, how they forgive one another when they have wronged, how they encourage each other in times of difficulty, care for each other in illness, how the Christian faith permeates their lives.

In order for God's word to permeate your family life, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, must be at the center of your family life. The domestic church can only be built up when Jesus is included in everything: in chores and vacations and business decisions and civic responsibilities. We must not practice spiritual contraception by keeping Christ and his teachings out of our lives – he must be in *every part* of our lives.

May God bless all families, helping them to live in fidelity their call to be the domestic Church. May the family be a model and support for others especially our bishops, priests, deacons, and consecrated men and women. And may they in turn be a support and challenge to all families to be faithful to their great and noble calling, for the glory of God and salvation of souls.