**Marriage and Family Life, Part 2**

Prompted by the Feast of the Holy Family, last week’s bulletin article took up the topic of Marriage and Family Life. Last week’s article centered on Sr Lucia’s statement to Italian Cardinal Caffarra that the final battle between the Kingdom of God (here on earth) and the kingdom of hell will be over marriage and family life. Cardinal Caffarra, in turn, said that this battle is already underway. What is the nature of this battle? As mentioned last week, it is true that a significant part of this battle today is the defense and promotion of true marriage between one man and one woman (who are free to marry), and that this defense has to be taken out into all aspects of life – politics, business, entertainment and media, education, and so on. This is indeed the God-given role of the laity. However, last week’s article also noted that even if all of the popular contemporary corruptions of marriage, sexuality, and family life were to disappear, marriage and family life would still have a purpose to be lived out. It’s that purpose that I really want to come to.

Marriage and family, once again, didn’t just appear out of thin air or happen to evolve or come about over time. No, they were created directly by God. To understand marriage and family life, then, we have to go to the source – the Trinity – because marriage and family life are a direct reflection of the interior life of God. Let us ponder this point for a moment. If a plant or animal reproduces, what do they reproduce? Does a cow, for example, give birth to a cactus or a turtle or a pup? Of course not, she has a calf. Now you might think that that is so blatantly obvious that it’s stupid or ridiculous to even say it! Perhaps so but this little observation helps to realize one thing – nothing produces or reproduces something that is completely unlike itself; geneticists have an old saying: like begets like. The same is true for God; in fact, this blatantly obvious reality (like begets like) is actually reflecting this truth about God – the material world *is* this way (like begets like) because *God* is that way: God does not create anything that is completely unlike Himself. All of creation reflects God to *some* degree. Even a big boulder, for example, can be a reminder that God is immovable (He does not change); a severe storm can be a reminder of His power, outer space a reminder of His vastness. But let us now come to man. When God created man He said: let us make man in our own image and likeness, which included His own interior life. Last week’s article concluded with a look at that interior life. Of particular interest to us here is this: the Father gives Himself completely to the Son and the Son receives the Father completely, and from the bond of love between the Father and Son proceeds a third person. To embody this *likeness* in man, God created man and woman, brought them together in marriage (an enduring bond – like between the Father & Son) and made it so that a “third person” can proceed from that bond of love between the husband and wife. It is probably helpful to pause here and say that this is *like* the interior life of God but not *exactly* the same as it. From the beginning, the Church has always understood that marriage and family life reflect the interior life of God. At times, then, this led even some of the great thinkers of the Church to pose the question of: which person of the Trinity is the mother, which is the child, assuming the Father is the Father? We can perhaps say that it was Pope St John Paul II who resolved this…simply by setting aside the question. There is not an *exact* one-to-one correspondence of father-mother-child to the persons of the Trinity. It is rather that there are (bear with this cumbersomeness of language here) 2 persons in the Trinity with a 3rd person proceeding from the bond of love between them. For bodily creatures (man), this is reflected with: a father, a mother, and children.

Some time has been spent bringing out the point that marriage and family life reflect the interior life of God Himself, but rightly and necessarily so because it is only by understanding this that we can really understand marriage and family life. Let us come back now to an important part of that interior life: the Father gives Himself completely to the Son and the Son receives the Father completely, and so on. As mentioned last week, the word completely is a very key word. What does it mean for us to give ourselves completely? To live it out, we have to understand it. We might be tempted to say this: here’s what God should do, He Himself should become man and show us Himself, firsthand, what this really means. And of course that’s exactly what He did do. What does it mean to give ourselves completely? Our Lord showed us this in a premier way in His Passion – a complete, total sacrifice of Himself for the good of the other. **Sacrifice of self is the language of love**.

Ladies and gentlemen, what is the purpose of marriage and family life? It is precisely this: marriage and family life are meant to be “a place” where we learn to do exactly that: give myself completely to the other. This is what Pope St John Paul II meant when he said: Family, become what you are meant to be – a school of charity.

Let us take a very simple example to illustrate. Suppose the oldest brother gets some special treat – say a candy bar – and his first thought is of his brothers & sisters, to make sure they get some too. So he divides it up amongst them all, making sure everybody gets some, even if he himself has to do without. His own joy is not so much in the candy bar but rather the enjoyment of his brothers & sisters. Is this trivial? Small perhaps, but not trivial. The family is precisely the “place” where we are to learn virtue, starting even at a young age. This is the design of God, the very purpose of marriage and family life – where we first learn to become like God.

“Learning virtue” is not merely an intellectual exercise. It is true that I *do* have to know (learn) what is real virtue (“intellectual learning,” you will) first so that I can know *what* to practice, how to act, how to be, what to aim for; I can’t hit a target that I don’t even know about. But at the same time, “learning virtue” is something like learning to drive a car. We can watch someone else, even very closely, do it for a long time, we can take all kinds of driver’s ed classes, and we can even memorize all the rules of the road. But we still won’t be able to drive, we won’t have the *habit* of driving, until we actually get behind the wheel and do it. And, when we first start, we’ll jerk the wheel, hit the brakes too hard, take off too fast, and on and on. So we need a “safe” place to practice driving. The same is true for virtue – we do need to learn *about* it, but then we need a place to really practice it in order for it to become a part of us, in order for it to become a habit, a habitual way of being. We also need a “safe” place to learn it, someplace where I will get corrected but not ostracized when I fail, because I am going to fail. That “place” for learning virtue, ladies and gentlemen, for learning the language of love, is the family. The family is meant to be a place where I also learn forgiveness and reconciliation, where I learn not to bear grudges or hard feelings, because I will fail. And when I fail, I also learn to get to Confession, get a new start, and then commit myself to doing better.

**Family, become what you are meant to be – a school of charity (PJPII).**

To help complete our understanding of the purpose of marriage and family life, its God-given role, let us back up a little and ask why we need this school of charity? Even without original sin, God made Adam realize that he needed someone to “lay down his life” for, he needed some tangible way to do this. This is when He created Eve. But now, after original sin, we need it even more. Prior to original sin, Adam and Eve’s first thought was always towards: 1) true good (God) and 2) towards the other person. They had a “holy forgetfulness” of self. That’s how we’re meant to be – that’s being like the persons of the Trinity, giving myself completely to the other. But after original sin, the state that we are born into now, this got corrupted. Our inclination now is to do the exact opposite – to think of the consequences (of this, that, and the other) for ourselves first. This is not just what is often called “selfishness.” You have probably known people that would be called selfish. But this is something deeper than that; even people who might be considered very generous are afflicted with this tendency to think first of the consequences for themselves. Take fear for example, and any time we are controlled by it. I might refrain, or at least hesitate, from saying or doing what is right because…why?...because of what might happen to me. This tendency to think first of myself is now ingrained in us, and…it has to be overcome because it makes us unlike God, unlike our Lord, unlike what we are meant to be. The family is the first place where I am meant to learn to undo this self-destructive inclination that we are now born with (Mary, and of course our Lord, were the only exceptions). Let us take another example – something that happens frequently in families – the flaring of tempers. Although anger is not always a sin (its good purpose is to drive back evil), it often is sinful, it often controls the person, and so on. So, what happens in families? Well you put people together like that, their wills (what they want) get encroached on and the person gets grumpy or even flies into a bitter rampage; the anger got the upper hand. I stop, I realize it, I realize it wasn’t just to drive back evil but because what I wanted was encroached on, I repent, and I start over with renewed commitment not to do it again.

Hopefully there is now a fairly good idea, of what marriage and family life is meant to be. It might be beneficial, though, to continue along these lines considering, for example, other ways in which marriage and life can get corrupted. So maybe we will take up this important topic again next week. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.