**Marriage and Family Life, Part 3**

Marriage and family life, once again, flows from the very interior life of God Himself – the structure or order of the family is like the structure or order or relation of the 3 persons of the Trinity. The Trinity is characterized by a complete giving (and receiving) of one person to the other. Marriage and family life, then, is the “place” where we are meant to learn to do likewise, a school to learn sacrifice of self, even our own desires at times, for the sake of the other; a school to learn a holy forgetfulness of self. Due to original sin, we are inclined to do the opposite, which makes us unlike what we are meant to be, which then leads to suffering. Family life is meant to undo this. It is not cheap, easy, or automatic, but greatness never is.

The point of “Revelation” is to tell us who God is, what He is like, and thus what we are meant to be like. The fundamental Revelation that our Lord taught us is that: God is love and sacrifice of self – 1) for God and 2) for the true good of the other – is the language of love. The family is the premier place where we are to make that a part of our very selves. In our own times, one question we have to ask is: *is* there an other (another person) there for me to sacrifice for? After all of this discussion about the nature, perhaps we can now understand what one of our moral theology instructors in seminary once said: the best thing that parents might be able to give their son or daughter is a brother or sister, someone to sacrifice themselves for, someone to look out for. We are not talking, here, about a specific family size. We are, however, talking about a mentality – one that is either conformed to the world and thus turned *away* from Christ, or one that is turned towards the true purpose of family life and thus towards eternal life. What is the mentality that has risen in popularity today and that works contrary to the true purpose of the family, and is thus a good part of the battle that Sr Lucia referred to?

Pope St John Paul II repeatedly decried what he called practical materialism. Materialism per se is a belief that the only reality is physical, material reality; there is no such thing, according to materialism, as immaterial reality, which means there is no such thing as pure spirit – there is no God, there are no angels or demons, there is no human soul. Now John Paul said that most people still do not ascribe to actual materialism (although it is certainly growing) but that many people *live* as if that is the case – they live as if material existence and material things or the things of this life and this world are all there is to live for. This is what he called practical materialism, which has tremendous adverse effects on marriage and family life. One manifestation of this mentality can be when a parent says: well I want to give my kids all the best. The best what? Well, the best education, the best opportunities, a nice comfortable home, social standing among their peers, and so on – that is to say, all of the “best” things of this life and this world. Many of these tangible things are not intrinsically evil, that is not the problem. And parents do have an obligation to provide for the material *needs* of their family; nor is it sinful to try and better your material circumstances, *somewhat, within reason*. The problem is that the things of this life and this world all too often take first place, they and they alone are what is sacrificed for in many families; there is often imbedded within this train of thought a willingness to sacrifice self-sacrifice (genuine love) for the sake of an abundance of the things of this life and this world, which is upside down.

We cannot spend our lives being afraid of checking our own thinking. People today are practically submerged in this line of thought, so much so that it would be surprising if someone is *not* affected by it, at least to some degree. It’s not the end of the world if someone is off-course a little, we can always correct it. Furthermore, this mentality *can* stem from a genuine love, just one that hasn’t stopped to really consider what “all of the best things” *really* are. I too often wanted to shower my family with material things. But we do have to stop and say: is this the way? The Holy Family, a family imbued with happiness, peace, true love and good will, strength – all of the truly good things – shows us otherwise; God Himself shows us otherwise. This is one of the clear messages of the Nativity scene. Coming back to practical materialism, parents might say to themselves: if I have more kids, they would all would have to do without some material things. Yes, they probably will and provided they have their material *needs* met, they will be the better for it in the long run. My brothers & sisters and I had all we needed growing up – without a lot of excesses – but none of us ever thought we were deprived in some way. And if we did, then that was a problem with us, not our material circumstances. Once again, all of this could be flowing out of a genuine (albeit somewhat misguided) desire to do the best for the others in my family. In some cases, however, this mentality of practical materialism goes beyond wanting the best material things for *others* and the person says to themselves: hey, if I have more kids, ***I*** will have to go without some things I want, ***I*** will have to sacrifice, and certainly more than I want to; no, that’s not for me. This is contrary to the nature of marriage and family life, it is contrary to life. Love and life are so intimately connected in God that, in God, they are actually one thing. When the Father, for example, gives himself completely to the Son, this is at one and the same time an act of life and an act of love. A person entering marriage with a mindset contrary to this complete giving (sacrifice) of one’s self has already lost, although they can always turn around and enter into conversion. This brings us back once again to Pope John Paul II, who said repeatedly: do not be afraid; and of what should we not be afraid? The very first thing he mentioned is the truth about ourselves. Our Lord knows our weakness, He knows the effect of original sin, He knows we are tempted, He wants us to know it so that He might save us from its effects and thus bestow upon us the great reward He so desires to give us, that He won for us with His own tremendous sacrifice.

Business and economic structures all too often also encroach on marriage and family life. A simple example is the work schedules that businesses often implement today – operating 24 hours a day, all in the name of the god of efficiency or profit, shifting schedules for workers between night and day, scheduling workers on weekends in such a way that it makes it virtually impossible to get to Mass. Of course there are some services, hospitals and police for example, that do need to operate 24 hours a day. But even in these cases, it is surely possible to schedule people in a way that is considerate towards their true good, their family life, and the practice of faith. Is any consideration even given to this or is that simply set aside as superfluous? Such practices are undoubtedly part of what prompted Pope St John Paul II to insist on the following standard for all parts of public life, the question of: Is this or that practice truly good for man? It may very well be that there is little that individuals or individual families can do about this particular encroachment on marriage and family life. Correction of evil, however, begins with not accepting it as something good or simply accepting it as: that’s just the way it is, as people will often do when they grow up with it. While we often have to do the best we can in the face of things that are wrong, we also need to keep in mind what is right and good. If young people grow up thinking that this is the way it is, always has been, fit in and go along, then the encroachment on marriage and family life becomes entrenched. Only by acknowledging that efficiency is 1) not intrinsically evil itself, but also 2) is not a god to be paid homage to at any cost, can the false god be unseated. Perhaps also people can begin to effect changes in small ways by questioning whether or not accepting this or that position is really good for them or their family, even if it does entail higher pay. How often business practices, governments, those who seek to control the world, and so on, control people through their appetites – with either promises or threats to them. If people learn to control their appetites for the things of this life, it means they will not be so easily controlled or manipulated by others who seek to control them. If people controlled their appetites for the things of this world, it would make it much more difficult for the powers of this world to corrupt family life.

Careerism is another common offshoot of practical materialism that has an erosive effect on marriage and family life. Careerism is a belief, often implicit, that says something like “career” is number one; this is what makes you somebody; yes, of course, sacrifice marriage and family life for the sake of “career.” It seems to me that this is not as bad in South Dakota (thankfully) as it may be in other places, yet there is no place that is an insulated oasis. Young people are constantly confronted with this. If asked: what do you want to do, how many young women today would find it unthinkable to say something like: I want to be a wife and mother? How many young men with a vocation to marriage would respond: well first of all I want to be a good husband and father? Or most importantly, how many would respond: most of all I want to do the will of my Father?

We have to make sure that all things are tied together, that, like with Scripture, we don’t just isolate one piece. So let me reiterate that work is good, something given to us by God. None of this is an advocacy for something like socialism. I heard one person say that socialism means: you do the work, I spend the money – a belief that I should, without any or much effort of my own, simply be handed what I need or want. We not only have a God-given responsibility to work and to supply our daily needs, but to be *diligent* in our work as well, thus making it a service to God and others. Work is not something evil, it has a good purpose. What we are speaking of here are corruptions of that good. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.