

## Marriage and Family Life, Part 4

The very first article in this series on marriage and family life started out with a quote from Sr Lucia of Fatima: the final battle between the Kingdom of God (here on earth – the Church militant) and the kingdom of hell will be over marriage and family life. For those who accept what God has revealed and teaches definitively through His Church, namely that marriage is between one man and one woman who are free to marry, their first thought when they hear this is probably that it refers to the many blatant corruptions of marriage in the world today. It would then follow that the main battle is not within my own self or my own family, but “out there,” in the arena of politics, news and entertainment industries, educational systems, and so on. And indeed there is truth in that and that does need to be done. But to believe that that is the only front is a trick of the devil – who was the most *subtle* of the creatures that the Lord God had made. The battle over marriage and family life that Sr Lucia referred to is much deeper than that, it applies to all families. Remember that subtle does not mean small – it means hard to notice, which makes the attacks even more deadly. Last week’s article began to take up the topic of these more subtle attacks, which constitute an even larger part of this battle. It is only when these are faced that this essential battle can really be engaged and won. We close our eyes to it only at our own demise.

For those who are familiar with the writings of Pope St John Paul II, or at least the topics that he repeatedly emphasized, it is obvious that he was indeed a Pope for our times, one raised up by God Himself to call man back to his senses and back to Him. One topic that John Paul repeatedly came back to is what he called practical materialism – living first and foremost for the material world, the things of this life and this world, as if that’s all there is. Last week’s article began the topic of how this mentality has so badly affected contemporary family life. This week’s article will begin by continuing with this topic.

No discussion of marriage and family life would be complete without taking up the contemporary encroachment on family life of that badge of “honor” known as...busyness. Is there any family that is not infected with this today? Now to be sure, many of the things discussed in this series of articles do tie together, and this issue of busyness can be one of them. To *some* extent, this scourge of busyness is created by contemporary economic and business structures, things that are, to a degree, beyond our *immediate* control. One example might be the almost unbearably high cost of medical treatment; this adds to the almost desperate need for salary and benefits, which leads to work adding more and more to this burden of: a constant state of busyness. How much irritation and frustration arises in families because of just too many demands and this constant, never-ending state of busyness? What seems to be demands from every direction – from the world and the worldly, from work, from government, from each other – finally build up to a point where the person boils over. So many people go to bed at night, after having run all day, one thing after another, with the knowledge that there are yet a dozen more loud & perhaps threatening demands waiting for them as soon as they get up. Is there ever an end of the day?

How often do kid’s sports contribute to this constant running as well? To be sure, sports are not by any means intrinsically evil. In fact, they can be a means for building character, taking responsibility for one’s self, for building real virtue like fortitude. If they are interested in them, a few sports can be good for kids to be involved in. But when they become predominate they lose their capacity to be a virtue builder and easily become a source of family breakdown and even a source of self-centeredness.

Kids are not the slaves of their parents but yet at the same time the family is the place for them to learn to sacrifice themselves for the other. Do the kids do things to help their family (i.e., sacrifice themselves), or is their “family life” almost exclusively focused on their desires? Are they learning: “all for one and one for all” or just: “all for me?” The essence of getting to Heaven is forging real relation with the Lord, and to build relation with anyone we have to spend time with them. How can we even know what that means without real family life? How often do families have meals together, and just with their family – a time to stop, to be together, to set everything else aside (including phones), and to listen to each other even if it’s just jibber-jabber? Is this too sacrificed at the altar of busyness? If so, it is to our detriment. How often do families pray together? Is there ever a family Rosary? If not, why not? Is it because other things are more important?

To some extent, this burden of busyness (it is not a badge of honor but a scourge) is foisted upon us by forces that are beyond our immediate control – to *some* extent, not entirely. But I cannot just throw up my hands and say that’s the way it is. I have to stop and take stock and then figure out what to do. This new structure in our

diocese has forced me to do the same. Priests are now all too often consumed with an ever-increasing “administrative” demand, bordering on a rat race from one day to the next, with loud and demanding voices demanding more and more. So I have to stop and say: this will cost me real priesthood and eternal life and the true good of parishioners. That is not acceptable, it has to change, and then I have to figure out how. Families need to do the same. One thing to do is to train ourselves to listen to the right “voices.” This demand for constant busyness is not coming from God. It might be coming from “the world,” from self-righteous, spoiled and worldly people, or even the devil himself but it is not from God. So one thing to do is to bear in mind that the voice of God is the one true voice that I need to listen to. Stop and make time to do exactly that and do not be afraid to do so. If there are threats in doing so – so be it. God warns but He does not threaten. Threats are always a sign of the tempter. Train yourself to look past it and to see what is truly good...then live it out.

We have already been talking about parenting, but let us now turn our attention more directly towards that. Our Lord, through His Church, tells us that parents are the primary educators of their children – *parents*, not schools, not the government, not the media or entertainment industry, not social media, not even CCD – parents. To understand what “primary educator” means we have to recall the purpose of this life, which coincides with the purpose of the family. To help see the purpose of this life, it is helpful to recall the creation of the angels. When God created the angels, He did not place them directly in Heaven – they did not immediately see God face-to-face. They had a trial period first. They were given knowledge of God and then, during this trial period, they had to choose (basically) whether or not to accept Him; they had an intellect with which to know God and a free-will with which they could choose Him. Of course some chose yes and they became the good angels and some chose against Him and they became the demons, suffering now without end. The same is true for us and our trial period is this life and this world. Like the angels, we only get one shot, one lifetime, and that determines our never-ending fate: either ecstatic, unimaginable happiness or terrible, never-ending suffering. When the Lord tells us through His Church, then, that parents are the primary educators of their children, He is not really talking about things like the physical sciences, or economics, or learning a trade. Those can also be ok things to learn but the parent as the primary educator of their children is referring to the highest of things, that which pertains to fulfilling the very purpose of this life – the things of God. There is no substitute for the parent in carrying out this Divine mission.

To carry out this mission, the family, as a family, must be doing some extra things for the faith – the kids need their parents insist on this. If the kids never see their parents do anything extra for the faith, if they never see them make it non-negotiable that the family does extra things for the faith, if it’s just: show up for an hour (preferably less of course) on Sunday and that’s it – and yet at the same time see their parents and family sacrifice for all kinds of other things – the message is clear: religion, faith, God, all that is secondary and in fact, of no real importance at all. You only sacrifice for what’s important. How about getting the family to Stations on Fridays during Lent? Do you get your family to Confession once a month? How about stopping by the church and paying a little visit to the Blessed Sacrament when you come to town or are out running errands, especially when you have your kids with you – even if just for 10 minutes. This carries a message and one that kids will remember. How about trying to make it to a weekday Mass sometimes, especially as a family, or really commit to it once a week? Do your kids ever see you studying the faith or reading the lives of the saints? Is this ever a topic of discussion in the family – faith, saints, the Church, or even right and wrong, good and evil? Or is it only worldly topics that kids hear discussed? All too often people try to use religious education programs for kids (CCD, CRE, whatever name is used) as a substitute for parents. Parents don’t bring kids to Confession or go themselves so CCD has to provide Confession times. Parents don’t bring the kids to Stations or other devotions, so these have to be done in CCD. Kids don’t come to Mass so let’s have Mass during CCD. And what do kids learn – these things are just for kids not for adults so of course drop them once you get old enough, of course. All of these are, of course, good things – good things that the parents should be doing. Religious education programs are not a substitute for parents. There is no substitute for parents.

Ladies and gentlemen, make no mistake, this *is* the battle over marriage and family life that Sr Lucia spoke of. The most important part of this battle that we can fight and win is the part pertaining to our own family life.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.