

Marriage and Family Life, Part 1

This past Sunday the Church celebrated the Feast of the Holy Family. This feast is a reminder that our Lord has much to say about marriage and family, and He does so in Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and in and through His Church. There is so much, in fact, that it is difficult to know where to start. In a certain sense, we could even say that what God has revealed about the family ties together all that He has revealed. Where to begin? I will begin by first repeating a few of the things I mentioned this past weekend.

In the very early 1980's, shortly after his election as Pope, Pope St John Paul II decided to establish a pontifical institute for the (theological) study of marriage and family life. He entrusted this job to Italian Cardinal Carlo Caffarra. Now many of you probably know of the events that occurred in Fatima, Portugal in 1917 – our Holy Mother appeared to 3 young children, once a month, for 6 straight months, with a magnificent miracle of the sun for all to see at the last apparition in October. You might also recall that two of the children – Jacinta & Francisco, brother & sister – both died very young, within several years after the last apparition. Lucia, the older one and their cousin, however, lived to be 98 years old and died relatively recently in 2005. Lucia went on to become a cloistered Carmelite nun, like the Sisters in Alexandria, but in spite of being a cloistered nun she did still carry on some correspondence, with the permission of her bishop and superior. Coming back now to Cardinal Caffarra, when he was asked to take on the job of establishing the Pontifical Institute for Marriage and Family Life, he wrote to Sr Lucia asking her to pray for this. In a later interview, Cardinal Caffarra said he did not expect a response because he didn't ask her any questions, only to pray for him. But she did respond to him, and with a lengthy letter at that. In her encouragement for this work, Sr Lucia said the following:

“The final battle between the Lord and the kingdom of Satan will be about marriage and the family.”

In this same interview, Cardinal Caffarra went on to say the following:

“Speaking again with John Paul II, you could feel that the family was the core, since it has to do with the supporting pillar of creation, the truth of the relationship between man and woman, between the generations. If the foundational pillar is damaged, the entire building collapses and we're seeing this now, because we are right at this point and we know it.”

What is the nature of this “*battle*” over marriage and family life that both Sr Lucia and Cardinal Caffarra referred to? And why does Cardinal Caffarra refer to marriage and family life as the supporting pillar of Creation? To take up these questions we have to turn our attention to what God has revealed about marriage and family life, starting with the very simple and basic point that:

Marriage, sexuality, and family life were created directly by God alone.
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They are not man-made, they are not a social construct, they are not a product of evolution, they are not just some civil legality or arrangement, or any other such thing. They were created by God. Who, then, gets to say what constitutes real marriage and/or the purpose and right use of each? It is God alone. What God has created and ordained cannot be changed by man. To try to do so is just “kicking the goad,” as our Lord said to Saul (the future St Paul) while he was on the road to the Damascus. In other words, it only does harm to one's self and to others; regardless of how “sweet in the mouth” it is, any corruption or attempt at redefinition of any of these will be “sour in the stomach,” as the Book of Revelation says. Marriage, as created and revealed by God, is between one man and one woman who are free to marry – and it cannot be otherwise. This He teaches definitively and irrevocably in His One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

When this simple, basic reality is put forth today, it is often met with accusations of hatred. The claim is that there is a hatred of those who want to say otherwise about marriage and sexuality, that it can be defined however we like – love is love, and so on. Is that true? Well of course, individually, we do always have to examine ourselves and our interior dispositions. But the question here is whether or not that accusation is *necessarily* true, is it automatically true, is the very act of proclaiming the truths of the faith, the truths revealed by God, an act of hatred? Obviously if it is, then we have to accuse God of hatred, because this is, beyond doubt, what He has revealed. Perhaps a little analogy will help. Suppose a young child is about ready to eat rat

poison and the parent grabs it away from them. Now the child might cry and throw a fit. Should we say that the parent has a hatred of the child because they impeded their desire? If someone answers yes to that question, then we have simply stepped into the twilight zone, so to speak, and there is really nothing to talk about. Of course the answer is no. The parent, in fact, loves the child and wants to prevent harm from coming to them. It would be negligence on the part of the parent to just let the child eat the rat poison, regardless of how much the child wants it or throws a fit about it. The same thing is true for our Lord and His Church. The Church simply proclaims the truth revealed by God. It would be negligent not to do so, an act of hatred, because there are clearly serious consequences for not following what He has told us.

It is perhaps helpful here to speak of compassion. We should have real compassion for others, including their struggles with sinful inclinations, given that they do struggle. Alcoholics, for example, often find it extremely difficult to break free of that vice. We should be sympathetic to their struggle, but yet at the same time encourage them to engage the struggle and even be willing to suffer with them (com = together or with; passion = suffering; compassion = sharing in another's suffering). It would actually be an act of hatred to just let them yield to the vice, much less encourage them in it. And yet this is exactly what happens so often today. Sin, that which causes separation from God and thus never-ending suffering if not repented of, is all too often glorified as good; what is evil (a privation) is called good and often what is good is called evil. This is especially true today in the area of sexuality – sexual sin, which is always grave matter, is glorified as right and good and true. Should we also glorify pride, greed, infidelity in marriage, and all other sins? To fall into sin out of human weakness, out of the disorder caused by original sin, is one thing; the Lord always stands ready to extend His mercy and give us a new start. But to glorify sin is another thing. It cuts us off from the mercy of God; it is malice. This is true for those with same-sex attraction as well. No one is condemned because of that; if they were, we'd all have to be condemned (except Mary) since original sin has left us all with an inclination to one sin or another. God does not condemn us because of an inclination to sin but He does expect us to: 1) know and accept what is right and good and true, and 2) to strive towards it, engage the struggle. The inclination to sin or time of temptation is a time of encouragement to *engage the struggle*; if you fall, go to Confession and restart, victory goes to the one who perseveres to the end. To tell someone: don't struggle against it, glorify it – *that is hatred*, just as much as it would be to tell the alcoholic to give into their desire for alcohol. Is it hard? Of course it's hard, self-denial is always hard, nothing good is cheap, easy, or automatic. Genuine love is not cheap. Bear in mind, though, that once we break through, it is a great unburdening and source of joy.

With this in mind, let us come back to the question of: what is the nature of the battle over marriage and family life. When people hear this, they will often think of the battle against this contemporary glorification of sin, against so-called same-sex marriage and the glorification of all the various forms of sexual sin that are glorified today. With that comes a focus on political action, media, entertainment, educational systems, and so on. And that *is* true. That is a good part of this battle – to promote and defend what God has revealed in all aspects of life. Indeed, this is the God-given role of the faithful – to take the faith out into every aspect of life. *However*, that is not the end of it. If all of the contemporary corruptions of marriage and family life were to go away, there would still be the issue of living out marriage and family life as intended by God, and it would still be a battle, a struggle. This is actually what I would like to focus on the most, because it is often neglected.

In order to begin to talk about the purpose of marriage and living that out, we have to first talk about where marriage, sexuality, and family life come from. They are, in fact, a direct reflection of the interior life of God: the Father (who generates the Son) gives Himself completely to the Son and the Son receives the Father completely. Completely is a keyword. If the Father holds anything back, the Son would not be God. If the Son refuses any part of the Father, the Son would not be God. Then, from the bond of love between the Father and Son flows a third person – the Holy Spirit. This is the interior life of God, of the Trinity, that He Himself has revealed to us. There are a lot of implications of this but let us begin with a simple observation: this interior life of God sounds a lot like marriage and family life. We will have to pick this topic again in next week's article.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.