

Marriage and Family Life, Part 7

I would like to conclude this presentation on marriage and family life by returning briefly to the readings for the Feast of the Holy Family, and especially the second reading from St Paul's letter to the Colossians where our Lord, through His servant Paul, addresses each member of the family. To the husband-father, he says: love your wife. This is not such an easy command. Remember that love does not mean "have pleasing feelings" – it means sacrificing yourself, including your own desires, in tangible, everyday ways. To the wife he says: be subordinate to your husband. What do these things mean? I think an illustration/example might be the best instruction. Think about the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. Notice who it was that the angel told to go to Egypt – it wasn't Mary, God's greatest creature, it was her husband Joseph. And what did he do? He laid down everything – his work, culture, language, home, everything he had – and took them to Egypt. And what did Mary do? Did she throw a fit, grumble and complain against her husband? No, she trusted him and went with him. In order for marriage and family life to be what it is meant to be and for it to be fulfilling, husband and wife have to both carry out their part. Let the example of Joseph and Mary resound in your mind, ponder it, think it over, and it will lead you in the right way. Husbands-fathers it is your God-given responsibility to lead your family in the way of truth. Get up and do it. Wives-mothers, do not oppose him when he does so. The command for kids is: obey your parents, which is coupled with a command for parents not to provoke your kids. They need yes & no, they need to be given responsibility as they get older, but they also need room to make mistakes and to be kids. How much pressure is put on kids today to be "successful" in worldly terms? Kids, obey your parents, parents do not provoke your children.

Marriage and family life are serious business and it is something that won't just happen. We have to stop and think about it and then consciously and intentionally develop it. The following is a little **summary** of some points touched on in these articles to help parents do just that. Please spend some time on it.

- Recall Sr Lucia's prophetic statement to Cardinal Caffarra that the final battle between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of hell – of never-ending suffering – will be over marriage and the family. True marriage and family life will not just happen, *especially* in our own times – we have to choose it and work at it.
- The family is the basic cell of society, as Pope St John Paul II stated. Degradation of family life leads to degradation of society, and all that that entails – the workplace, rudeness, dishonesty, and the dominance of every form of self-interest. There is no point in trying to change society from the outside in with all kinds of programs or policies if the basic unit of society continues to degrade. Either live out family life or let the society degenerate – it's one or the other, those are the only two options. It is that plain and simple.
- Decide, choose – to stop letting the world, what everybody else is doing, the media, and the entertainment industry determine your beliefs and thus practices about marriage and family life. God created marriage and family life, not man, not society, not evolution, not any other such thing. Turn your attention, then, to what the Creator has revealed about them if you want truly good marriage and family life.
- Marriage is between one man and one woman who are free to marry. Period. It can't be otherwise. There is no argument about it. What God has set forth cannot be changed by man. Teach, promote, and defend this in your own family and in public life.
- Families: become what you are meant to be – a school of charity (PJPII), which means: a school of agape, of self-sacrificing love. This is God's design, the God-given purpose of family life.
- Create family life. One of the things this means is actually spending time together, having meals together, for example, or working together. Do not go through life blindly following the god of busyness, you will only end up empty-handed. We learn how to build relation with God, in part, by learning how to build relation with one another. If this is not learned at home at a young age, it will not likely ever be learned.
- Exemplify forgiveness and reconciliation. This needs to be practiced in home life.
- Learn and exemplify the virtue of humility.

- Parents be parents. It is not just your God given duty to tell kids yes & no – yes to what is right and good and true and no to what is wrong, but this is a *need* we have as kids. Leaving that aside places upon them a responsibility they are not yet ready to carry and thus causes them stress. As they get older, allow them to have more and more responsibility.
- Parents are the primary educators of their children. Parents: do not lay down parenthood to anyone else – including the Church or the parish or CCD programs. To do so is to surrender the battle over marriage and family life to the kingdom of hell, to destruction and misery.
- One thing that “parent as the primary educator of their children” means is that they learn to sacrifice for the faith. This does entail everyday life but it also includes religious and devotional practices in the Church. If kids never see their parents do anything extra for the faith, the message is clear: this is not something important. Get your family to Confession roughly once a month. Get them to Stations of the Cross on Fridays during Lent at least several times, if not every week. See if you can’t make it to weekday Mass on some regular basis. Stop by, with your kids if possible, to pay a little visit to the Blessed Sacrament. You yourself study the faith some and let the faith, right and wrong, good and evil, be at least occasional topics of conversation in your family. Have at least some common prayer time at home. Are these things inconvenient, a sacrifice? Yes, of course, that’s the very point. You only sacrifice for what’s important. If you don’t sacrifice for something, the teaching is clear: this is not important. It’s not complicated.
- Of course kids can certainly have all kinds of various play things – balls, tractors, dolls, and so on. But have some age-appropriate things related to the faith for kids as well – (picture) bibles or lives of the saints, for example, or maybe you can find some good Catholic videos. Someone from the chancery just sent out a message telling about a “pray & play set” for younger kids. The St Joseph booklet set is excellent for younger kids. Teenagers are interested in philosophy (although they may not speak in those terms) – a “philosophy of life,” for example. Are there good materials in your home that they can use to at least help them think about the big questions of life? There are even novels – like the Chronicles of Narnia – that convey the true faith and goodness in very engaging ways. Seek these sort of things out.
- When you travel, see if you can’t find a nice church or pilgrimage site to stop and see. It doesn’t have to be the whole trip or even a long time – just one stop. All of these things reinforce the primacy of our Lord.
- Are there religious items in your home? Is there a crucifix in each room? Some saint statues or pictures? Things that say: in this house, the Lord is number one? Has your house been blessed?
- Kids need attention but like most things, in moderation. The scourge today is that kids are too often brought up to believe that they are to be the center of everything, that they are to be paid homage. Although this might be sweet in the mouth (pleasing at first), it is sour in the stomach (causes misery) – as the Book of Revelation says. It is the exact opposite of how we are meant to be, which is to have a holy forgetfulness of self (my desires) and to be thinking always first and foremost about serving the Lord, and then the true good of others. This is the only way to true happiness. This focus on self creates all kinds of corruptions – in personal relation with others, in the workplace, in society. Use your own thinking of how to counter this. One thing is that kids, as they get older, need some way to serve the family. Even simple things like helping with the dishes or doing the mowing helps. Do not teach your kids that work is just self-serving.
- This last point reminds us of the question posed by our moral theology instructor in seminary: is there another there in the family for the kids to sacrifice for? Perhaps the best gift you can give to your son or daughter is a brother or sister.
- Be aware of what your kids are getting at school and the various forms of media.
- Cohabitation and contraception are mortal sins, insidious corruptors of marriage and family life, and they need to stop. Don’t complain about the world or the closure of parishes or loss of faith or corruption in society and yet still support and participate in the very things that leads to this death.

Go forward with all your strength! It is a great adventure.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.