

Marriage and Family Life, Part 5

As noted in a previous article, much of what God has revealed is embodied in the topic of marriage and family life. This is perhaps not surprising given that marriage and family life reflect the interior life of God, and Revelation is about God. The last several articles have focused on the nature of the “final battle between good and evil” which will be over marriage and family life, as indicated by Sr Lucia of Fatima. This battle entails much more than defense of marriage as between one man and one woman who are free to marry – although that is certainly part of it as well. There are many encroachments on marriage and family life today. When we are surrounded by, bombarded with, or submerged in certain mentalities or common practices, it’s almost “natural” to fall in with them. This happens to me in priesthood as well, especially in the area of “administration.” Then, in talking to other priests or maybe reading something – having something outside of myself – I might become aware that I need to do something differently. The same thing is true with marriage and family life and that’s the purpose of these articles. In order to restore real family life we have to become cognizant of those things that are destructive to it; this has been the subject of the bulletin articles for the last several weeks. We don’t want to take these things, what God has revealed to us about marriage and family life, as some sort of harsh chastisement but rather as good “information,” so to speak, that I can use to live out true family life. There’s a bombardment of messages saying “hey this is the way” and then I find out that’s not the way, that way is leading me down a bad path, let me now correct it. This is always the mindset – maybe I’ve taken a wrong turn somewhat, now let me get back on the right path.

Perhaps this is a good place to take up another issue – what seems to be an increasing anxiety amongst young people. It will be helpful, here, to begin with some precautions. If it’s one useful thing that might be drawn from the God-awful discipline of statistics (!) it’s that many things that happen have multiple causes or factors contributing to them rather than just one, with some factors having bigger effects than others; not only that but the effect of one factor might depend on another factor. In short, there can be complex relationships amongst various causes of anything, including anxiety. Furthermore, we have to acknowledge that each stage of life has always had its own stresses or anxieties, including childhood and adolescence – i.e., this is not something entirely new. Nonetheless, there does seem to be either more anxiety among young people today, or (perhaps equivalently) an impaired ability to handle the “stresses” of life. Sometimes this can be observed even among good young priests who are seriously committed to the Lord; perhaps it is that those who are “sensitive to God” – to right and wrong, good and evil – experience this elevated stress the most. The reason for talking about this here, is because, to the extent that there is more anxiety among people today, corruptions of true family life can be, and undoubtedly is in some cases, a significant factor contributing to this elevated stress. The core of it is this: when I have a “place” where it is truly “all for one and one for all,” a “place” where I can go and know that everyone there will lay down their life for me, even their own desires, and I know I will do the same... then that “place” is a place of great peace, security, and safety. Marriage and family life is meant to be that “place.” A child or adolescent has little direct control over their circumstances and is highly dependent on their family. If the family, then, is not a place of sacrifice of one’s self, then it is not a place of safety and security, and it’s bound to result in stress. The child, then, may spend the rest of their lives living in fear, seeking some sort of refuge, which might be peers who are trouble-makers, sexual sins, drugs, alcohol, wealth, power – anything in order to escape the fear. Fear is a powerful force. The more blatant cases of this might be when one or both of the parents fall into drugs or alcohol or there is some sort of real abuse. But that is by no means the only breakdown. Suppose the kids see mom & dad sacrificing mainly for the things of this life and this world, maybe even without much sacrifice of dad for mom and mom for dad. What they are being taught then (and perhaps this is why the most sensitive or most perceptive might be affected the most) is: try to cling to something, as if it is life itself, that you know will pass away. It is an impossible command. So the child learns: do the impossible (cling to dust that will, with certainty, blow away) or you will die. This is an obvious recipe for fear – I’m going to “die” because I cannot do the impossible. It is imperative, then, that parents train themselves to sacrifice first and foremost for what is right and good and true, for virtue – that which will never pass away, that which even death itself cannot take away. Husbands and wives, encourage one another in this way. Family, become what you are meant to be.

Parents: following along these same lines, kids do need their mom and dad to tell them yes & no – yes to what is right and good and true, and no to what is wrong. This is a *need* they have, not something optional, it's not an imposition, it's not just the right of parent – it is a *need* for a child and a God-given duty for the parent. To fail to do so is placing on them a responsibility that they are not yet equipped to handle, which then ultimately creates stress and all of the vagaries of trying to compensate for it. Of course, as they get older parents also have to allow their kids to take more and more responsibility for themselves, allowing them also to make mistakes and correcting them when they do. Depriving parents of the right and duty to tell their kids yes & no is yet another increasing encroachment on marriage and family life today. Stand up in public life and say no.

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

Charity – love of God first and foremost, and love of neighbor for the sake of God – is the highest virtue. For charity to be true, however, all of the other virtues have to be in place; if I have a “hole” in any other virtue, then there is a hole in my charity. Pope St John Paul II's exhortation for the family to be a school of charity, then, could be generalized (or perhaps more fully explained) by saying: be a school of virtue – all virtue. Now the most fundamental of all virtues is humility, without it there can be no other genuine virtue, not even faith – the most basic of the *theological* virtues; faith requires an act of humility. To practice a virtue we have to know what it is and what it's not but that is too much to take up here (at some point I would like to develop and offer a little class on the virtues). Nonetheless, we can at least mention perhaps the most important aspect of the virtue of humility, namely humility before God, our Lord, and His Church. When, for example, the Church teaches us something definitively – moral or dogmatic – and/or the Church prescribes a certain discipline (practice), be careful not to place judgement on it, as so many do today. Faith, hope, and charity – the virtues that relate us directly to God, depend on this humility. Take care to ensure this understanding and practice in your family. Pride before God cuts us off from God.

This might be a good place to remind ourselves of the good of putting into practice true marriage and family life. In 1949, author George Orwell published a futuristic book called 1984. As with any “philosopher” or “pundit” or literary author we have to be cautious and not treat what they say as Gospel truth. Nonetheless, such authors can, at times, articulate well the nature of man or the wrong directions that the world is headed in. The book 1984 is where Orwell coined the terms Big Brother and thought police – denoting an intrusive government that watches and seeks to regulate every single action of man, even his thoughts. The slightest raise of an eyebrow, in Orwell's novel, can be taken as an indication of a thought contrary to the reigning powers and thus reason for “re-education” of the “culprit.” In this book, a man was arrested and brought in for “re-education,” which consisted of various tortures and threats. They placed another person “in front of” the man who was arrested, someone he liked, and the only way the threats and tortures would stop is if the man said: do it to that other person. Eventually the man broke down and did it. Orwell's conclusion seems to be, or at least a question he raises, is that this will always work – torture a person enough and they will beg you to do it to someone else, even someone they hold dear; the conclusion would be that evil is more powerful than good, self-interest more powerful than self-sacrifice. Is that true? Anyone who believes the answer is yes is not familiar with the lives of the saints, who, by the power of God, withstood the strongest of temptations and tortures in real life, choosing even to die rather than betray. They loved “the other” more than themselves. Do we not hold such a thing in the *highest* regard? If not, why not? This is what marriage and family life are meant to be – a school of charity where I am instilled with a habit of deep love of the other (first and foremost our Lord) that it would be a greater torture to betray another than it is to endure the torture myself. God is love, and God is infinitely powerful – there is no force that can equal that of purified love. It is interesting to note that in the book 1984, parents were not the primary educators of their children – the government was; there were even groups of “child spies” who were trained to report on other children. Perhaps it is that Orwell intuitively linked breakdown of the family with breakdown of genuine love and all of the misery that leads to. The breakdown of real marriage and family life opens the door to the dystopian state described by Orwell. It leads to misery and lack of fulfillment in this life and, infinitely worse, to the deprivation of eternal life, to never-ending suffering, to eternal separation from true Good. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.