

MARCH – FAMILY DIFFICULTIES

All families face difficulties. At such critical moments, it is important to learn how to suffer well and to suffer together with Christ. Suffering, if given to the Lord, can bring families closer together and strengthen their love.

Breaking Open the Theme

Catholic families today face many challenges in the very real and normal frustrations of marriage and family life. The world tells families that they can simply walk away from such situations and choose whatever lifestyle or solution makes them feel happy as individuals. However, this escapism is not the Christian way.

As St. John Paul II often reminded people, the Christian way of suffering begins with hope and the firm conviction that “God’s strength is always far more powerful than your difficulties.”⁵³ Relying on God’s strength, families should not be fearful to recognize their struggles together and bring them before the Lord in prayer. Although they may not experience instant relief or be given a solution to fix the problem they are facing, the Lord will help them carry their crosses to the very end, providing comfort and healing along the way.

After taking these first steps, families need to remember that they must constantly undergo conversion and healing. They cannot stop talking about their daily concerns or problems; by doing so they run the risk of weakening their relationships. Open conversation unites family members and may lead them to discover the source of their pain and struggles. In particular, it may bring up issues that the family is struggling to express or even unbury deep concerns. It may be painful to face problems, especially those that have no easy solution, but families must do so with honesty and love.

If families start with these first few steps, their wounds can be transformed into points of intimacy with God. Suffering need not be only negative; through faith it can be transformed into great love. It is this miracle of transforming suffering into joy that is at the heart of Christian salvation.

Meditation

From Pope John Paul II's Familiaris Consortio

There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion: hence there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life. But, at the same time, every family is called by the God of peace to have the joyous and renewing experience of “reconciliation,” that is, communion reestablished, unity restored. In particular, participation in the sacrament of reconciliation and in the banquet of the one Body of Christ offers to the Christian family the grace and the responsibility of overcoming every division and of moving towards the fullness of communion willed by God, responding in this way to the ardent desire of the Lord: “that they may be one.”⁵⁴

1. What are our family's struggles? How might we work together as a family to heal these areas of hurt or confusion, without fleeing from challenges, shutting anyone out or giving in to despair?
2. What difference does it make to view suffering in light of the cross of Christ? How does this perspective transform the way we approach suffering together as a family?
3. How can we as a family better rely on God's strength in times of difficulty? In what ways can we allow Christ's love to make our suffering fruitful and deepen our love?

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Scripture Reading – Psalm 34:5-11

A prayer for those who suffer to trust in the Lord

I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
delivered me from all my fears.
Look to him and be radiant,
and your faces may not blush for shame.
This poor one cried out and the LORD heard,
and from all his distress he saved him.
The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and he saves them.
Taste and see that the LORD is good;
blessed is the stalwart one who takes refuge in him.

Fear the LORD, you his holy ones;
nothing is lacking to those who fear him.
The rich grow poor and go hungry,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Family Project

Ask each family member to think about one difficulty in the family and to pray for it every day. At the end of the month, share your prayer intentions and experiences.