

SEPTEMBER – CHARITY

We learn of God's love through the Scriptures, the testimony of God himself, where we read that "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40). The Scriptures therefore instruct all, including families, to practice charity because Christ is present in every person, especially the poor and needy.

Breaking Open the Theme

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis called on the family to have an "expanding fruitfulness"⁷⁴ that seeks to give life outside of one's own family through charity. Charity is a living out of the family's kingly mission to serve others. Pope Benedict XVI explains that there are three unique elements to fruitful Christian charity that distinguish it from any other form of social assistance: a heartfelt concern for the fullness of another person's humanity, a "heart which sees" and faith.⁷⁵

Pope Benedict XVI reminds Christians that it is not enough to "meet the needs of the moment," such as providing food or shelter. They must also "dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity."⁷⁶ One of the beautiful ways to do this is to allow the other person to give back to the giver, welcoming their gifts of friendship and faith.

To allow this deeper giving and sharing, families need "a formation of the heart" from an "encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others."⁷⁷ This new heart looks upon love of neighbor not as "a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal 5:6)."⁷⁸ It is a "heart that sees" like the Good Samaritan. "This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly."⁷⁹

Finally, Christian charity must not leave God and Christ out of the equation because it is concerned with the *whole* man. As Pope Benedict XVI points out, "Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God."⁸⁰ Families should therefore naturally share their faith; with the help of grace, they will know when they should converse about the faith and when they should silently share the faith through loving actions.

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Meditation

From Pope Francis' Amoris Laetitia

A married couple who experience the power of love know that this love is called to bind the wounds of the outcast, to foster a culture of encounter and to fight for justice. God has given the family the job of “domesticating” the world and helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters. ... For their part, open and caring families find a place for the poor and build friendships with those less fortunate than themselves. In their efforts to live according to the Gospel, they are mindful of Jesus’ words: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). In a very real way, their lives express what is asked of us all: “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed” (Lk 14:12-14). You will be blessed! Here is the secret to a happy family.

By their witness as well as their words, families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, they arouse a desire for God and they reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. ... Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God’s love present in society.⁸¹

1. How do we live out charity in our family towards others?
2. Why does charity enrich family life and expand its fruitfulness? Do we think people can actually encounter Christ by helping those who are in need? Why or why not?
3. How can our family learn to know God better through love in our own family and love toward those we don’t know?

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Scripture Reading — Psalm 86:1-7, 11-12

A prayer for God's protection of the poor

Incline your ear, LORD, and answer me,
for I am poor and oppressed.
Preserve my life, for I am devoted;
save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my God; be gracious to me, LORD;
to you I call all the day.
Gladden the soul of your servant;
to you, LORD, I lift up my soul.
LORD, you are good and forgiving,
most merciful to all who call on you.
LORD, hear my prayer;
listen to my cry for help.
On the day of my distress I call to you,
for you will answer me.
Teach me, LORD, your way
that I may walk in your truth,
single-hearted and revering your name.
I will praise you with all my heart,
glorify your name forever, LORD my God.

Family Project

Volunteer as a family with your parish, local Knights of Columbus council or other local Catholic ministry. If there are no nearby Catholic charities, then consider volunteering at a nearby soup kitchen or similar local charity.