

Convocation of Priests
Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
Tuesday, May 10, 2016

“The Sacrament of Marriage and Family Life”

I. Introduction:

- a. I wish to begin by offering my thanks to Cardinal DiNardo and each of you for the opportunity to spend this day with you in reflection and
 - i. To present this timely topic because it represents a key challenge for those who are in pastoral leadership and for the whole Church

- b. We gather here living a two-fold moment of Grace:
 - i. First Moment: The call of Pope Francis to Missionary Discipleship
 1. His call for accompaniment challenges us to meet people in their real need, one person at a time
 - a. It is at the heart of what the Holy Father is asking of us in our pastoral support of marriages and family life
 2. We will explore this challenge in greater detail in our second session:
 - a. Without a proper understanding of it, we cannot address what the Holy Father is asking us to do
 - i. Our goal: To re-establish the credibility/vibrancy of the most basic Community of faith: the family
 - ii. Second Moment: The Extraordinary and Ordinary Synods on the Family:
 1. Both sessions (October 2014 and 2015) were closely watched for a variety of reasons
 - a. What has come to us in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* is a very practical and realistic compendium of what the Church has taught for centuries and its practical application to our modern world
 2. My contention: There is nothing new being taught in this document

- a. Our Catholic teaching remains the same
 - i. What is new:
 - 1. A realistic pastoral recognition of the growing challenges facing married life
 - 2. The call to live “missionary discipleship” and “accompaniment” as a pastoral methodology for Catholic families
- iii. There are two tasks that you and I will address together:
- 1. Goal of First Talk:
 - a. To acknowledge and grow in deeper appreciation of the challenges that exist to family life, within the larger theological meaning of marriage and family life
 - b. The theology is known to all of us in this room
 - i. We will highlight aspects that we need to remember in light of our pastoral ministry to married couples and families throughout the Church
 - c. The Challenges
 - i. Some are Obvious:
 - 1. Holy Father speaks of them eloquently
 - ii. Some are not so obvious:
 - 1. Will have more serious consequences for families in our nation
 - 2. Goal of Second Talk:
 - a. Explore the pastoral methodology proposed by Pope Francis and how it will affect our ministry as pastors
 - i. More specifically: How do I respond to the call of the Holy Father to missionary discipleship in service of our married couples and their families as a priest of Jesus Christ?
 - ii. How does this threefold challenge to go out in mission to those in need, with a spirit of mercy in order to address the

needs of God's people, one person at a time change the way we do ministry?

- a. Our goal: To establish working parameters in which we can effectively serve our people

iv. Allow me to offer one personal "disclaimer":

1. Story: "Odd Couple" and the Rabbi

- a. Point: While we seek answers in our Catholic education, Jewish Education primarily values asking questions

- i. For if you ask the right questions, with a true spirit of humility and obedience to God, we will arrive at the right answers

- (a) Point: Questions are sometimes more important than answers

2. We live in such an age:

- (i) Modernity is raising questions faster than we can answer them

- i. John Henry Newman: we will all arrive at the truth, wherever we start, provided that we travel with Christ

II. A Theology of Marriage and Family Life

a. We are all familiar with the Church's teaching: a teaching that will not change

i. In the natural order, Marriage and families are willed by God in the very act of creation as part of his plan for humanity

- 1. Marriage and families are ordered to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children (CCC, 2201)

- 2. A family that is a man and woman united in marriage together with their children is a primordial relationship that are not created by society but must be recognized (CCC, 2202)

ii. Christian Marriage

1. Based on the natural order:

- a. Created by God into the very fabric of creation

- i. "The Christian family is also called to experience a new and original communion which confirms and perfects

natural and human communion” (FC, #24).

2. Christ elevated marriage to a sacrament, thus rendering it a “mysterion” of divine grace (Eph. 5:32)

a. Trent: 24th session (1563):

- i. “Christ Himself, who instituted the holy sacraments and brought them to perfection, merited for us by His Passion the grace that perfects that natural love, confirms the indissoluble union and sanctifies the spouses”

b. Pope Francis: Marriage is an Icon of God’s love

- i. The icon/image of God who is a Trinitarian communion of persons
 1. An image of God’s love for us (AL #121)
- ii. Icon of Christ’s Covenantal love for the Church
 1. The union of a husband and wife reflects and makes real the loving covenant that exists between Christ and the Church
 - a. Virginity as eschatological sign of the Risen Lord
 - b. Marriage is the “Historical Sign” of the Lord who became one of us (AL #161).

c. Summary: *Lumen Gentium* #11: “Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love that exists between Christ and His Church (Eph. 5:32). The spouses thereby help each other to attain holiness in their married life and by the rearing and education of children. And so, in their state and way of life, they have their own special gift among the people of God.”

3. Saint Augustine: Three Ends of Marriage

- a. Unity: Mutual Fidelity of the Couple in Self-Giving
- b. Proles: Generation of Children
 - i. "Every act of conjugal love must be open to life, even if it does not always beget life (AL #80)
 - ii. Education of Children (AL, chapter 7)
 - 1. Such education is a Serious duty and primary right (CCC, 1136)
 - 2. KEY: to teach children that parents can be trusted to love them (AL, 263)
 - iii. "The gift of a new child, entrusted by the Lord to a father and mother, begins with acceptance, continues with lifelong protection and has its final goal the joy of eternal life."
- c. Sacrament: Indissolubility of the union, as Christ's love for the Church never fails
 - i. Faithfulness
 - ii. Eucharist: These ends are nurtured and strengthened specifically
 - 1. The sacrament of the Bridegroom and the Bride (Sacramentum Caritatis, 27).

iii. Four Theological Statements:

- 1. First Statement: Every Catholic Family realizes the Church in a very unique way as the Domestic Church. (LG 11, GS, 52)
 - a. Domestic Church is the Church localized and particularized in a concrete situation
 - i. It is the most basic and fundamental expression of the Local Church
 - ii. A Catholic Family is both a societal cell and an ecclesial Cell. It builds up the People of God and it is formed by the Word of God (AL, 227).
 - b. The Domestic Church is where the faith is learned and passed on

- i. “First school of Christian Life” (CCC, 1657, GS, 52.)
 - ii. The evangelizer of many other families and of the neighborhood of which it forms part.” (Evan. Nuntiandi, #71).
 - c. Parents are the:
 - i. “First and best teachers of the faith” (Sacrament of Baptism)
 - ii. “Heralds of the faith” with regard to their children.” (CCC, 1656)
 - iii. Parents are called to educate their children in the fullest sense of the word and form them into the image of the Lord
 - 1. Family is where
 - a. the joy of work
 - b. fraternal love
 - c. generosity
 - d. mercy &
 - e. forgiveness are learned.
- 2. Second Statement: Every Catholic Married Couple is a communion of persons that reflects the love of God as Divine Community of the Trinity
 - a. Key to this communion is friendship:
 - i. “Friendship with the Lord”
 - 1. This union intimately involves the salvation of each spouse who is chosen to accompany the other on the road to salvation
 - ii. “Conjugal Friendship”
 - 1. Reciprocal Submission
 - a. Greatest form of Friendship (St. Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 123)
 - b. Love: must be at the “Heart” of every Catholic family (i.e., Chapter 4 of AL)
 - i. Without love, the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons
 - 1. Love of spouses
 - a. “Sexuality is not a means of gratification or

entertainment; it is an interpersonal language wherein the other is taken seriously, in his or her sacred and inviolable dignity” (AL #151)

2. Love of children
 - a. The creative power of God’s love is manifest in a special way in the procreation of children

3. Love of extended family members
 - a. Grandparents are the “living memory” without which the family is already in decline

3. Third Statement: Every Catholic Family is a “privileged community” that is open to life (Chapter 5 of AL)
 - a. “Graced Paradox of Love”
 - i. The more deeply one loves another, the more open and expansive that love becomes

4. Fourth Statement: Every Catholic Family is wounded by sin, is in need of grace to be healed from sin and its effects (Chapter 8 of AL)
 - a. Two objective factors to be considered:
 - i. Nature of the situation that a family may be living in and
 - ii. The ideal of the Gospels
 - b. Assessing the subjective culpability of the persons involved demands discernment
 - i. Goal: To give the most generous response which can be given to God in the circumstances of one’s life

III. Challenges Facing Catholic Family Life

- a. Initial Observation: The Family Life is changing: We see it in our pastoral ministry every day
 - i. For example, the very definition of a “family” in the dictionary has changed

1. 1913 Edition of Webster's Dictionary: two entries
 - a. First: "The collective body of persons who live in one house and under one head or manager; a household, including parents, children and servants, and, as the case may be, lodgers or boarders"
 - b. Second: "the group comprising a husband and wife and their dependent children, constituting a fundamental unit in the organization of society"

2. 95 years later: In the online version of Meriam-Webster's dictionary
 - a. "A group of individuals living under one roof and usually under one head."
 - b. "A group of persons of common ancestry" (#3 in old version)
 - c. Fifth on the list: "the basic unit of society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children"

3. Point: There is no "stereotype of the ideal family but a mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems." (AL #57).

b. Obvious Challenges facing Families:

- i. Pope Francis gives an extensive and exhaustive treatment of many of the more obvious challenges
 1. *Evangelii Gaudium*, Chapter Two:
 - a. The crisis of Communal Commitment
 2. *Amoris Laetitia*: Chapter Two
 - a. Christ Himself was sympathetic to the crises facing families (AL #21)

- ii. Obvious Challenges can be categorized in many ways:
 1. "Societal/ Economic" Challenges
 - a. Poverty, violence
 - b. Migration, Immigrants and human mobility
 - c. Addiction of every sort
 - d. Support Systems are strained
 - i. Extended Family is absent
 - ii. Neighborhoods are changing

 2. "Spiritual" Challenges

- a. Divorce, separation
 - i. Francis reaffirms the natural right for every child to have a mother and father
 - 1. Both are necessary for the integral and harmonious development of the child (AL, 172)
 - b. Changing role of parenting:
 - i. Excessive Feminism
 - ii. “Societies without fathers” (AL, 175-176)
 - c. Loss of respect for human life at all stages
 - d. “Culture of the Ephemeral”
 - i. Narcissim
 - e. World politics of reproductive health (AL #42)
- c. There are less obvious challenges that are equally dangerous
- i. “Crisis of Disconnection”: I am spiritual but not religious
 - 1. The dissociation between the personal, spiritual search for God that is now seen as private and the need to be religiously affiliated with any community or church:
 - a. Spiritual is ME and Religious is We
 - 2. We see this effect in ecclesial life:
 - a. Cara: Research and Resources for the New Evangelization
 - i. Two sobering statistics:
 - 1. 68% retention rate for Catholics who were raised such from birth
 - 2. Rise of “Nons”: Largest group after Catholics are former Catholics
 - 3. Causes for this disconnection are many:
 - a. Societal: lack of trust in all institutions
 - i. It seems to me that it represents the final conclusion to the proposition: “cogito ergo sum”
 - 1. The Subject has become the criteria for truth, Community and defining the Common Good
 - 2. Result: An attitude of Indifference
 - ii. Second Challenge: “Challenge of Technology” Our world is experiencing change that is unparalleled in human history

- a. It is not simply quantitative change=
 - i. An increase in the volume and scope of digital technology while life remains fundamentally unaltered

- b. It is a qualitative change in our society that is changing the fabric of human life
 - i. We have moved through three stages of this change with technology
 - 1. Initial Stage: As a tool for business and education
 - 2. Explosive Growth: Tool that effects the social structure of society
 - 3. Now: It has become a formational force that is driving the very formation of human life
 - a. It is no longer a tool but has taken on a life of its own that is beyond any one person to control
 - b. Practically: Profound effect on the human person and his/her ability to think, comprehend, communicate, socialize and imagine human life

- c. In terms of Family Life:
 - i. Breakdown in the ability to form and maintain face-to-face community is a serious challenge to all aspects of family
 - 1. "Technological disconnect" (AL, 278)

iii. A Third Challenge particular to the United States:

- 1. "Excessive Busy-ness"
 - a. In his book, *The Holy Longing*, Ronald Rolheiser, (a member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate),
 - i. In the second chapter: "The Current Struggle with Christian Spirituality", tries to identify the demons that confront us:
 - ii. "Pathological busy-ness, distraction and restlessness"

1. “Today, a number of historical circumstances are blindly flowing together and accidentally conspiring to produce a climate within which it is difficult not just to think about God or to pray, but to have any interior depth whatsoever.” (p. 32)

- iii. RESULT: “Narcissism accounts for our headaches, pragmatism for our heartaches, and restlessness for our insomnia.” (p. 32).

- b. In terms of Married Couples and Families:

- i. Challenge: To learn to choose between the “Good” and the “Better”

1. Neglect to turn our houses into a “homes”

IV. Conclusion:

- a. Cognizant of these challenges and striving to preserve the truth of what we believe, the Synod Fathers and the Holy Father are asking us to examine our pastoral methodology to do two things:
 - i. Remain faithful to what we believe
 - ii. Accompany people who are troubled or lost, in order to restore hope and allow them to offer the most generous response to what God is asking of them
- b. This will be the matter for our next session together