

## Can Holiness Grow in Marriage and Parenting?

Leo Tolstoy, in his novel *Anna Karenina*, said, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." His main point? There are universal constants that bring harmony and flourishing into a family, like love, sacrifice, kindness, patience, forgiveness, good humor and faith—all of which are the soul of family unity.

Our faith as Christians is in a Triune God who *is* Family, a community of Persons defined by their relationship to one another, who are eternally united in self-giving and life-creating love. God created humanity in His image to live as a community of persons, defined by our relationship to one another, faithfully united in self-giving and life-creating love. All of which makes marriage and family the sanctuary of life and love, and the ground zero of God's plan to shine His beauty brightly in our world.

But—my God!—how far our world and our families are from this lofty ideal! Does God not “get” the reality of our sorry plight?

Indeed, He does.

The whole Christian story is a story of the Son of the Father coming down from heaven's bliss into our broken world of poverty, violence, and pain, taking up our messy dysfunctional family history *as His own story*, to redeem it.

Stunning!

God became Man to heal *from within* the wounds of sin and division, and to regather the scattered children of God into one Family—the Church. The eternal God wed Himself to time through marriage, in a family, in order to re-unite our fragmented families, making them holy and restoring us to the joy of living in the harmony of love.

What does all this have to do with holiness in marriage and family? Well, holiness is nothing other than getting in sync with God's plan of love and allowing God's grace to repair all of the damage that has marred the beauty of family. This is why marriage, which is the heartbeat of family, was raised by Christ to the dignity of a Sacrament. Sacraments are effective signs of God's remedying grace that empower us to live the fire of His love. Without grace, we are completely powerless to face the hard challenges of loving fallen people in a fallen world.

Especially in the family, where all the ills of society come to roost.

Back in the mid-1900s, Fr. Patrick Peyton made popular the saying, “The family that prays together stays together.” Why? Because prayer is the primary conduit of grace into our lives. If we choose not to pray *together*, we will find ourselves *alone* facing the many enemies of love and unity. But when we cling to prayer, we invite the joy of salvation to break into our world and restore us to our original vocation to be the image of God in the world. As St. John says so eloquently,

“So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

Do you want to be a saint? Go home and love the hell out of your family. And pray, till all hell breaks loose.



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