

Family

SCRIPTURE

“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot of wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother – this is the first commandment with a promise: so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth”. (Eph.5:21-6:4)

Also Cfr.: Gen.1:26-29; 2:18-24; Sirach 26:1-4, 13-16; Col.3:18-21; 1 Pet.3:1-9; Mt.19:3-6; Mk.10:6-9; Jn.2:1-11.

OPENING PRAYER

God, Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for having created us in your own image and likeness, and made us male and female. We praise and thank you for the precious gift of Your only begotten Son, Jesus, our Redeemer and Saviour, born into the Holy Family. He showed us Your Way by walking Himself the same Way, the Way of the Cross, and the Way to Eternal Life. We praise and thank You for the Holy Spirit whom we now implore to fill our hearts and minds so as to enlighten our minds with your truth, inflame our hearts with your Love and strengthen our wills with your design for the wellbeing of all our families in this Archdiocese of Calcutta. We entreat you, dear Father, in a special way, to be with all those who are entrusted with the responsibility of nurturing, safeguarding and promoting Christian family life mirroring the Holy Family of Nazareth, here in this part of our country. We make this prayer through the powerful intercessions of Mary and Joseph, and in the precious name of Jesus our Lord, Amen,

INTRODUCTION

One of the most beautiful, intense and fulfilling human experiences is to form a family. In Christianity, the family is sacred, and in the Catholic tradition, the family life is a Sacrament. “Since the Creator of all things has established the conjugal partnership as the beginning and basis of human society and, by His grace, has made it a great Mystery (Sacrament) in Christ and the Church (cfr.Eph.5:32), the apostolate of married persons and of families is of unique importance for the Church and civil society. The family has received from God its mission to be the first and vital cell of society”. (Vat.II, A.A. 11).

Healthy marriages and healthy families lead to healthy individuals and healthy societies. However, today in the modern world, Marriage and family life are greatly threatened by many disruptive forces such as polygamy, divorce, so-called free

love, excessive self-love, the idealizing of pleasure and the illicit use of birth control. Also disruptive are modern economic conditions, social and psychological influences, the demands of civil society, and problems resulting from population growth/explosion, especially in India.

Writing an Editorial on “Modern Family”, the Kolkata Edition of **The Telegraph**, dated May 20, 2013, on page. 8, states:

“...the Western liberal imagination, by now, has little problem accepting two men or women getting married, or, as it were, civilly united. (Some like to keep God out of such unions, and some do not even have a problem with that). But what the same liberated imagination still cannot accept as readily is the idea of same-sex family – i.e., a child with two fathers or two mothers. By an ingenious twist of rights-based reasoning, such a scenario is seen as depriving a child of its rights to have parents of both sexes”.....”The delinking of sex from reproduction and therefore from the perpetuation of the conventional family, is what appears to be the most threatening aspect of same-sex marriage combined with parenting”.

It is in the context of such threats that the Church courageously upholds and fosters the “dignity and supremely sacred value” of marriage. (Vat.II, G.S. 47)

PART 1: TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH

The beauty of the **Biblical Message** on the family has its roots in the creation of man and woman, both made in the image and likeness of God (cfr. Gen.1:24-31; 2:4-25). Bound together by an indissoluble Sacramental bond, those who are married experience the beauty of love, fatherhood, motherhood, and the supreme dignity of participating in this way in the creative work of God.

In the gift of the fruit of their union, they assume the responsibility of raising and educating other persons for the future of humankind. Through procreation, man and woman fulfill in faith the vocation of being God’s collaborators in the protection of creation and the growth of the human family. Blessed John Paul II commented on this aspect in *Familiaris Consortio*: “*God created man in his own image and likeness (cfr. Gen.1:26-27); calling him to existence through love, he called him at the same time for love. God is love (cfr.1Jn.4:8) and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion (G.S. 12). Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being*” (F.C. 11).

The Creator’s plan for human kind was disrupted by original sin (cfr. Gen. 3: 1-24). The consequences of the fall of the first parents have been experienced throughout history in the lives and events of the chosen people. It is in this historical context, God sent His only begotten Son for our salvation. The Son of God, the Word made flesh (cfr. Jn.1:14) in the womb of the Virgin Mother, lived and grew up in the family of Nazareth and participated at the wedding at Cana, where he added importance to the festivities with the first of his “signs” (cfr.Jn.2:1-11). In joy, he welcomed his reception in the families of his disciples (cfr. Mk.1:29-31; 2:13-17) and consoled the bereaved family of his friends in Bethany (cfr. Lk.10:38-42; Jn.11:1-44).

Jesus Christ restored the beauty of matrimony, proposing once again the one plan of God which was abandoned because of the hardness of the human heart, even within the tradition of the people of Israel (cfr. Mt.5:31-32; 19:3-12; Mk.10:1-12; Lk.16:18). Returning to the beginning, Jesus taught the unity and faithfulness of the husband and wife, refuting the practice of repudiation and adultery. Precisely through the extraordinary beauty of human love – already celebrated in a heightened manner inspired by the Song of Songs, and the bond of marriage called and defended by the prophets like Hosea (cfr. 1:2; 3:3) and Malachi (cfr.2:13-16) -, Jesus affirmed the original dignity of the married love of man and woman.

Even in **the early Christian community**, the family appeared as the “domestic church” (cfr. CCC, 1655): In the so-called “family canons” of the Apostolic letters of the New Testament, the great family of the ancient world is identified as the place of a profound solidarity between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between the wealthy and the poor (cfr. Eph.5:21-6:9; Col.3:18-4:1; 1Tim 2:8-15; Titus 2:1-10; 1Pet.2:13-3:7; cfr also the Letter to Philemon). In particular, the Letter to the Ephesians recognized the nuptial love between man and woman as “the great mystery”, making present in the world the love of Christ and the Church (cfr. Eph.5:31-32).

Over the centuries, especially in modern times to the present, the Church has continually taught and developed her doctrine on Christian marriage and family. One of its highest expressions has been proposed by the **Second Vatican Council** in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, **Gaudium et Spes**. It has dedicated an entire chapter to the promotion of the dignity of marriage and the family. Describing their value for the constitution of society it says, “the family, in which the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the very foundation of society” (GS 52). Particularly striking is its appeal for a Christ-centered spirituality in the spouses’ life of faith: “Let the spouses themselves, made to the image of the living God and enjoying the authentic dignity of persons, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification. Thus, following Christ who is the principle of life, by the sacrifices and joys of their vocation and through their faithful love, married people can become witnesses of the mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by his dying and his rising up to life again” (GS 52)

After the Second Vatican Council, the successors of St. Peter enriched this teaching on marriage and the family, especially Pope Paul VI in the encyclical **Humanae Vitae**, which offers specific principles and guidelines. Subsequently, in his Apostolic Exhortation, **Familiaris Consortio**, Pope John Paul II insisted on proposing the divine plan in the basic truths of married love and the family. According to this exhortation, the only ‘place’ in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage. The covenant of conjugal love, freely and consciously chosen, by man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God himself (cfr. G.S. 48). The institution of marriage is not an undue interference by society or authority, nor the extrinsic imposition of a form. Rather it is an interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love, which is publicly affirmed, as unique and exclusive, in order to live in complete fidelity to the plan of God, the Creator (modified from F.C. 11)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in art. No.1660, gathers the fundamental aspects of this teaching: “The marriage covenant by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature, it is ordered to

the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a Sacrament (G.S. 48; Code of Canon Law, 1055,1)". The doctrine presented in the Catechism touches on both theological principles and moral behaviors developed under two separate headings: **The Sacrament of Matrimony** (Nos.1601-1658) and **The Sixth Commandment** (Nos.2331-2391). An attentive reading of these sections of the Catechism provides an updated understanding of the doctrine of faith, which supports the Church's work in the face of modern day challenges. The Church's pastoral ministry finds inspiration in the truth of marriage viewed as part of the plan of God, who created man and woman, and in the fullness of time, revealed in Jesus the completeness of spousal love elevated to the level of Sacrament. Christian Marriage founded on the mutual consensus of the partners is also endowed with its own effects such as the good and duties of the spouses. At the same time, marriage is not immune from the effects of sin (Gen.3:1-24), which can cause deep wounds and even abuses to the dignity of the Sacrament.

The recent encyclical of Pope Francis, **Lumen Fidei**, speaks of the family in the context of a reflection on how faith reveals: "just how firm the bonds between people can be when God is present in their midst" (LF, 50). "The first setting in which faith enlightens the human city is the family. I think first and foremost of the stable union of man and woman in marriage. This union is born of their love, as a sign and presence of God's own love, and of the acknowledgment and acceptance of the goodness of sexual differentiation, whereby spouses can become one flesh (cfr. Gen.2:24) and are enabled to give birth to a new life, a manifestation of the Creator's goodness, wisdom and loving plan. Grounded in this love, a man and a woman can promise each other mutual love in a gesture, which engages their entire lives and mirrors many features of faith. Promising love for ever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings, a plan which sustains us and enables us to surrender our future entirely to the one we love" (LF. 52). "Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness" (LF, 53).

PART 2: LIGHT AND SHADOW SITUATION

2.1 Light Situation:

- ❖ Comparatively stable and lasting character of our Families, because of the strong social bonds that still prevail in our families and as a result of the Faith Formation given by parents, schools and parishes.
 - ❖ Parents accepting their children as God's gift to them and taking all the care and trouble to bring them up in the Faith.
 - ❖ Our Catholic Schools and Sunday Catechism programmes of our Parishes contribute their own mite to the well-being of our families, especially through their admission policy, financial assistance through concessions and sponsorship programmes and the Catholic Faith Formation and value education.
 - ❖ Pre-nuptial preparations and instructions that take place quite regularly in Bengali, Hindi and English through the agency of the Holy Family Centre, Dharamtala and the Marriage Rectification Course at Fatima Centre.
 - ❖ Strong Family ties that lead to the sharing of time and resources among the families, especially on key moments of life such as Birth, Marriages,
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Sickness and Death. It connects them to their family roots/history and cements the bond among them.

- ❖ Families responding well in large numbers to some of the traditional Catholic devotions and practices like Novenas, Missions, Pilgrimages and May Devotions.
- ❖ Gradual introduction of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in most of our parishes is also going to be a great boon to the renewal of neighborhood families founded on the Word of God.
- ❖ The presence of a small Household of “Couples for Christ” also adds its own value to the renewal of our families.
- ❖ Annual celebrations of “Family Day”, “Couples’ Day”, “Mothers’ Day” and “Fathers’ Day” at both the Parish and Deanery levels.

2.2 Shadow Situation

- ❖ Gradual breaking down of families and steady increase in the number of applications for annulment of marriages and separation of couples, especially in the urban areas, for a variety of reasons and grounds. One of them being the lack of sufficient and deeper understanding, on the part of the couples, of their marriage as a Covenantal relationship for life and a Sacrament too.
- ❖ Total absence of any meaningful follow-up programmes for the newly married couples. Post-marriage accompaniment of the newly wedded is completely lacking all over the Archdiocese. Adult Catechesis and Family Catechesis is missing from our family apostolate.
- ❖ Lack of sufficient Faith Formation of the Parents and their involvement in the handing over of their Faith to their children. Sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation are becoming routine with the Sacramental value and spiritual necessity diminishing. Activities like household chores of cooking, filling water and working on Sundays, (those having off days on weekdays) prevent families from attending Sunday Eucharist together as a family. Thus, full family participation at Sunday Mass is slowly becoming uncommon.
- ❖ Steady decline in Parental Motivation and Leadership is noticeable these days, when career conscious parents inadvertently imbibe secular values and not the Kingdom Values. God seems to have been pushed to the backyard of life. Not enough of quality time is given by the couples to each other and to their children.
- ❖ Absence of regular or even daily togetherness of the entire family for Prayer, Meals and Recreation because of the Social Media and Working Parents. Hardly any meaningful and supportive contact and interaction between the parents and children.
- ❖ Some instances have parents seeking Baptism primarily as a scope for admission into Christian institutions. Sunday school attendance is prioritized against tuition schedules and other social engagements. The need for strong spiritual education and motivation seems to be slipping.
- ❖ Poor Economic and Social conditions of the families, especially in the rural areas, keep the families fully absorbed in their struggle for their daily survival, Therefore, absolutely **no time** for any other concerns than the one of battling for their daily sustenance.
- ❖ Inter-family mingling and interactions are being reduced to the minimum for various reasons, and this makes the families live in psychological, spiritual and social isolation, if not physical aloofness.
- ❖ People live in close proximity with the people of other Faiths and Churches, and hence, mixed marriages are on the increase. A considerable number of

young people even go to the extent of marrying outside the Church or simply lead a life of cohabitation.

- ❖ Absence of regular and planned visits to and contacts with the families by the priests of the Parish. The pastoral ministry of the Clergy and the Religious in our parishes is mostly institution-oriented, activities-oriented and not sufficiently people/family-oriented.
- ❖ The scourge of abortion, sterilization and the appearance of a truly contraceptive mentality among our people truly lead to the demeaning of the dignity of women.

PART 3: SETTING GOALS

- ❖ To build families founded on the Word of God and upholding human life as the crown of creation. The Catholic Family thus becomes a domestic church, both evangelizing and being evangelized and establishing God's Kingdom here in the Archdiocese of Calcutta. The Holy Family is the Model for an ideal catholic family.
- ❖ To help couples to understand the sanctity of the Sacrament of Marriage and family life as a covenantal relationship with God and with their spouses. To clarify to the couples that the roles of husband and wife are always complementary, and never competitive.
- ❖ To educate the husbands and wives on responsible parenthood so as to educate, inspire and encourage their children to grow both physically and spiritually imbibing the positive values and attitudes of Peace, joy, unity, gratitude, contentment, optimism and resilience.
- ❖ To create a renewed understanding that all the domestic churches (catholic families) are different parts of one and the same Body of Christ, and thus making them realize their potentials of giving – money, time and talents – for the spread of God's Kingdom.
- ❖ To encourage more active participation and greater pastoral care by the Parish Clergy in the activities of the Family Life Renewal Movements such as "Couples for Christ", "Marriage Encounters", etc...
- ❖ To transform our families into praying, caring and sharing communities with the methodology of SCC.

PART 4: ACTION PLAN

- ❖ **Monthly Marriage Preparation Courses** in the three languages of Bengali, Hindi and English are to be continued, but with a greater interest and serious involvement of all our Parish Priests. Marriage Rectification Courses are also to be continued.
 - ❖ **TOT (Training of Trainers)** Programme for possible Resource Persons from different Parishes and Deaneries of the Archdiocese who, in turn, will be able to help in the Marriage Preparation Courses at different centres of our Archdiocese (Dharamtala, Barasat and Kharagpur).
 - ❖ Diocesan Family Commission Members to meet with all the Parish Priests regarding the setting up and functioning of **Parish Family Cells** in each Parish. This task is to be completed by April 2014. Each Parish is to provide names of resource persons or volunteers for training who will later serve in various parish Cells.
 - ❖ Accompaniment of the newly married couples through marriage **follow-up programmes**, retreats, workshops, counseling service, family renewal movements such as "Couples for Christ", "Marriage Encounter", etc. These
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programmes are hoped to be at the service of **Adult and Family Catechesis**.

- ❖ A meeting of all the Parish Priests along with the Archbishop to be addressed by the National Servant Leader of **CFC (Couples for Christ)** was planned and executed in the 1st week of July 2013. Following that meeting, the CFC members have been trying to organize Christian Life Seminar/Family Day in different parishes as an awareness programme of the movement of Couples for Christ. Positive and active support of parish clergy is very crucial and pivotal for this movement to take roots in the parishes as well as for bearing much fruit for our families in due time.

PART 5: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- ❖ What are the basic structures already existing in your parish to help support marriage and family life?
- ❖ What are the common problems/difficulties experienced by parishioners in relation to marriage and family life?
- ❖ What needs to change in your parish in order to move from where you are to where you would like to reach?
- ❖ What are your specific and practical suggestions, relevant to your parish for the betterment of family life?

CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, it is quite clear from the foregoing analysis that marriage and family are the prime institutions of the human society, which, these days, are under severe strain for a variety of reasons. So much so, the present Holy Father, Pope Francis, realizing the important role that these two institutions do play for the wellbeing of the society at large, has convoked an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops to be held in October this year as well as a General Assembly of the Bishops of the world next year, in order to consider the various pastoral challenges that the modern families face in the context of their living of the Gospel. We sincerely hope and wish that our Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan, particularly the portion that pertains to marriage and family, would contribute its own share to enable our families to respond to these modern day challenges and threats in a positive way – the Jesus Way.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Dear Mother Mary, Mother of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, you accepted the will of God in your life and became the Mother to His Son. This Son of God accepted His Father's Will for Him and showed us how to live, suffer and die in order to gain eternal Salvation. We now humbly ask you, dear Mother, to intercede for all of us with your dear Son for the grace to seek and accept always the Will of the Father in our lives and in the lives of our families so that we too may reach our eternal destiny, Amen.

ANNEXURE

- Pope Pius XI, **Casti Connubii** (1930).
- Vatican II, **Church in the Modern World** (G.S): Nos. 47-52.
- Vatican II, **Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity** (A.A.):No.11.
- Pope Paul VI, **Humanae Vitae** (1965).
- Blessed John Paul II, **Familiaris Consortio** (The role of the Christian Family in the Modern World – 1981)
- **The Catechism of the Catholic Church**, (Nos. 1601 - 1658 & 2331 - 2391)
- Preparatory Document (Vatican City, 2013) on **Pastoral Challenges to the family in the context of Evangelization**