

# Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

## MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

# FOSTERING FAMILY VALUES

### SUNDAY READINGS:

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

Psalm 128:1-5

Colossians 3:12-21

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

### FAMILY: UNITING LIFE AND LOVE

Family life is where our deepest desires and God's plan can converge. In his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (FC) [On the Family], Saint John Paul II wrote: "The family finds in the plan of God ... not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do." Then, the Pope summarizes the

family's identity and mission in a single phrase: "an intimate community of life and love" (FC 17).

Yes, that is what God creates a family to be and intends it to become. We can say further: this "intimate community of life and love" is also our deepest desire and the ideal for which we strive in our families.

**Realistic View.** One great myth that should be laid to rest is that of "the perfect family." None has ever existed! Once we let go of the expectation that we can create the perfect, trouble-free family, we can get on with what is possible and doable; we can work at becoming a good family and, indeed, a holy family.

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Our family is not holy because it is perfect; it is holy because God's grace is at work in it, helping it to set out each day on the pathway of love. Creating a stronger family means starting with the one you have: accept its limitations, value its strengths, believe God has called and blessed *your* family.

**Professional Viewpoint.** Jack Dominian, the respected British family life counselor, summarizes the family love relationship in three essential, interrelated elements: SUSTAINING, HEALING, and GROWTH. These concrete ways of loving are central to healthy marriage and family life.

SUSTAINING LOVE includes day-by-day loving interaction, expressed in five phases. It requires *availability*, being physically and emotionally close to each other. *Communication* follows and it includes talking, listening, sharing, and confronting each other. There should be *demonstration of affection* (a kiss, a hug, an embrace, a kind word). *Affirmation* or appreciation must be expressed. *Resolution of conflict* is needed through forgiveness and reconciliation. These five ways of giving sustaining love are central to marriage and family; every time the couple and their children participate in this sustaining loving they are praying.

**Continuing Efforts.** We are all wounded people, and our wounds are manifested in our relationships. HEALING LOVE seeks to identify these mutual wounds and tries to remedy them. This can be done in many ways: offering security for insecurity, acceptance for rejection, appreciation for poor self-esteem, courage for fear, and so on. Marriage and family life are probably the most important sources of healing in society.

MUTUAL GROWTH is the third dimension of marital-familial love. Over the years and decades of life, a family facilitates the development and growth of all members, seen through achievements in social, emotional, and intellectual goals. In fact, the realities of daily family life constitute their "liturgy," and it is the ordinary experiences of the week that they bring to Sunday Mass as their offering.

**An Ongoing Project.** Family solidarity can be achieved through ordinary activities like the following: Pray with and for one another; Spend time together; Play and work together; Share meals; Talk about significant matters; Respect and trust one another; Develop family traditions; Do something for others; Seek outside support; Ask for professional help.

Fathers, mothers, children, ask God's grace to become "an intimate community of life and love" on this Holy Family Sunday. Your prayer will be heard!

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## NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

**First Reading - Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14:** The book of Sirach (written two centuries before Christ) contains wise counsels on how to live a life pleasing to God. Today's portion deals with the relationship between parents and children and the respect and care expected from children for their parents.

**Responsorial Psalm - 128:1-5:** This psalm selection portrays qualities of an ideal family. One's wife is truly a fruitful vine in the recesses of the home and children are like olive plants around the table. Such family blessings are truly a marvelous gift from the Lord.

**Second Reading - Colossians 3:12-21:** Today's second reading comes from Paul's letter to the Colossians. Paul identifies several social virtues especially applicable to family life. Every family would do well to implement what Paul says today about authentic charity towards one another.

**Gospel - Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23:** Our Gospel today from Matthew informs us that not even the Holy Family was spared life's trials and sufferings. When the Christ Child's life was threatened, the family had to flee their homeland. They became displaced persons in a foreign land and had to live there until the danger had passed. We are invited to reflect upon many families in today's world that face the same challenges, uncertainties, and sufferings.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who has recently published [Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language](#) (Orbis Books) as well as [Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights](#) and [A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis](#) (Faith Alive Books).

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