

Session 2

The Family Generates Life

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them (Gen 1:27).

The Lord God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him." So the Lord God formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each of them would be its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man. So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man.

When he brought her to the man, the man said:

"This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;

This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body (Gen 2:18-24).

D. Biblical Catechesis

1. *Male and female he created them.*

Why did God create man and woman? Why did he want his image to shine in the human couple more than in any other creature? A man and a woman who love each other with their whole selves are the cradle which God chose to place His love so that every son and daughter born in the world can know, welcome and experience it, from generation to generation, and give praise to the Creator.

In the first pages of the Bible, the good that God planned for his creatures is illustrated. God created man and woman equal in dignity but different: one is male and the other is female. The similarity together with the sexual difference enables both to start up a creative dialogue and make a covenant of life. In the Bible, the covenant with the Lord is what gives life to the people in relation with the world and the history of all humanity. What the Bible teaches about humanity and God has its roots in the events of the Exodus in which Israel experiences the Lord's benevolent nearness and becomes his people, agreeing to the covenant from which only life comes.



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The history of the Lord’s covenant with his people sheds light on the account of the creation of man and woman. They were created for a covenant that does not concern only them but also involves the Creator: “In the divine image he created him; male and female he created them”.

The family originates from the couple contemplated in its sexual difference in the image of the God of the covenant. Body image has great importance in it and says something about God himself. The covenant which a man and a woman, in their difference and complementarity, are called to live is in the image and likeness of the God allied with his people. The female body is predisposed to desire and welcome the male body and vice versa, but this is true even before for the “mind” and “heart”.

The encounter with a person of the opposite sex always arouses curiosity, appreciation, the desire to be noticed, to give one’s best, to show one’s value, to take care and protect. It is always a dynamic encounter, filled with positive energy because in the relationship with the other we discover and develop ourselves. The male and female identity stands out in particular when the wonder grows between them regarding their encounter and their desire to form a bond.

In the account of Genesis 2, Adam discovers that he is a male precisely when he recognizes the female: the encounter with the woman lets him perceive and name his male being. The man and the woman’s reciprocal recognition overcomes the evil of loneliness and reveals the goodness of the conjugal covenant. Contrary to what the gender ideology maintains, the difference of the two sexes is very important. It is the presupposition for each one to develop his or her humanity in relation and interaction with the other. While the two spouses give themselves totally to each another, together they also give themselves to the children that could be born. These dynamics of the gift are impoverished whenever sexuality is used selfishly and excludes all openness to life.

2. *It is not good for man to be alone.*

To fill Adam’s loneliness, God creates “a suitable helper for him”. In the Bible, the term “helper” has mostly God as its subject, so much so that it becomes a divine title (“The Lord is with me as my helper” Psalm 117:7).

Moreover, by “helper” is not meant a generic intervention but the aid brought in the face of a moral danger. By creating the woman as a suitable helper for man, God removes him from the negative loneliness that mortifies and inserts him into the covenant that gives life: the conjugal covenant in which a man and a woman give each other life; the parental covenant in which the father and the mother transmit life to their children.



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The man and the woman are a “helper” for each another who “stands in front”, supports, shares and communicates, excluding any form of inferiority or superiority. The equal dignity of a man and a woman does not admit any hierarchy and, at the same time, it does not exclude the difference. The difference allows the man and the woman to make a covenant and the covenant makes them solid. The Book of Sirach teaches us this: “A wife is her husband’s richest treasure, a helpmate, a steadying column. A vineyard with no hedge will be overrun; a man with no wife becomes a homeless wanderer” (Sirach 36:24-25).

A man and a woman who love one another in the desire and tenderness of their bodies as well as the depth of their dialogue become allies who recognize themselves in one another. They keep the word they have given and are faithful to the covenant; they support each another to achieve the similarity with God to which they are called, as male and female, from the foundation of the world. Along life’s way they deepen the language of the body and the word because both are needed like air and water.

The man and woman should avoid the dangers of silence, distance and misunderstanding. Many times, when the rhythm of work becomes extenuating, it takes away time and energy from care of the relationship between the spouses, and so a time for celebration of the covenant and life is needed.

The creation of woman takes place while man is in a deep sleep. The sleep that God brings down over him expresses his abandon to a mystery that is impossible for him to understand. The origin of woman remains enveloped in the mystery of God, just as the origin of their love and the reason for their encounter and the mutual attraction that led to their communion of life are mysterious for every couple.

However, one thing seems certain: in the couple’s relationship God inscribed the “logic” of his love whereby the good in one’s life consists in self-giving to the other. The couple’s love, which is made up by attraction, company, dialogue, friendship and care, plunges its roots into God’s love who planned man and woman from the beginning as creatures who would love one another with his own love, even though the danger of sin can make their relationship difficult and ambiguous. Unfortunately, sin replaces the logic of love and self-giving with the logic of power, dominion and selfish affirmation.

The two will be one flesh.

Having been created from man’s rib, the woman is “flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones”. For this reason, woman shares in the weakness – the flesh – of man, but also in his supporting structure – bones.



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A comment in the Talmud notes this: "God did not create woman from man's head, that he should command her, nor from his feet, that she should be his slave, but rather from his side, that she should be near his heart". These words are echoed by those of the "beloved" in the Song of Songs: "Set me as a seal on your heart..." (8:6). The profound and intense union is expressed to which the couple's love aspires and is destined. "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh": the man says these first words before the woman.

Until that moment he worked naming the animals, but he was still alone and incapable of words of communion. Instead, when he saw the woman before him, man spoke words of wonder and recognized God's greatness in her and the beauty of feelings. To the communion filled with wonder, gratitude and solidarity of a man and a woman God entrusts his creation. By allying themselves in love, they will become in time "one flesh".

The expression "one flesh" surely alludes to a child, but even before that it refers to the interpersonal communion which completely involves the man and the woman to the point that they constitute a new reality. United in this way, a man and a woman can and must prepare themselves for the transmission of life, for welcoming it by generating children, but also by opening themselves to forms of foster parenting and adoption. In fact, conjugal intimacy is the original place predisposed and willed by God where human life is not only generated and born, but also welcomed, and where it learns a whole array of affections and personal ties.

In the couple there is wonder, welcome, dedication, relief from unhappiness and loneliness, covenant and gratitude for God's wonderful works. In this way it becomes a good terrain where human life is sowed, germinates and is born. A place of life, a place of God: by welcoming one and the Other, the human couple fulfills its destiny at the service of creation, and by becoming more and more similar to its Creator, it follows the path to holiness.

E. Listening to the Magisterium

In family life, the interpersonal relationships are founded on and nourished by the mystery of love. Christian marriage, the bond through which a man and a woman promise to love each other in the Lord forever with their whole selves, is the source that nourishes and enlivens the relations among all the family members. Not by chance, in the following passages from Familiaris Consortio and Evangelium Vitae, to illustrate the secret of domestic life, the terms "communion" and "gift" are used several times.



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Love, the source and soul of family life

Conjugal communion constitutes the foundation on which is built the broader communion of the family, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters with each other, of relatives and other members of the household.

This communion is rooted in the natural bonds of flesh and blood, and grows to its specifically human perfection with the establishment and maturing of the still deeper and richer bonds of the spirit: the love that animates the interpersonal relationships of the different members of the family constitutes the interior strength that shapes and animates the family communion and community.

The Christian family is also called to experience a new and original communion which confirms and perfects natural and human communion. In fact the grace of Jesus Christ, “the first-born among many brethren” (Rm 8:29) is by its nature and interior dynamism “a grace of brotherhood,” as St. Thomas Aquinas calls it. (S.Th. II-II, 14, 2 ad 4). The Holy Spirit, who is poured forth in the celebration of the sacraments, is the living source and inexhaustible sustenance of the supernatural communion that gathers believers and links them with Christ and with each other in the unity of the Church of God. The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called “the domestic Church” (LG 11; Cfr. AA, 11).

All members of the family, each according to his or her own gift, have the grace and responsibility of building, day by day, the communion of persons, making the family “a school of deeper humanity” (GS, 52): this happens where there is care and love for the little ones, the sick, the aged; where there is mutual service every day; when there is a sharing of goods, of joys and of sorrows. [Familiaris Consortio, 21]

The family has a special role to play throughout the life of its members, from birth to death. It is truly “the sanctuary of life: the place in which life-the gift of God-can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth”. Consequently the role of the family in building a culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable.

As the domestic church, the family is summoned to proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life. This is a responsibility which first concerns married couples, called to be givers of life, on the basis of an ever greater awareness of the meaning of procreation as a unique event which clearly reveals that human life is a gift received in order then to be given as a gift. In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, “as the fruit of their mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift which flows from them”.



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It is above all in raising children that the family fulfills its mission to proclaim the Gospel of life. By word and example, in the daily round of relations and choices, and through concrete actions and signs, parents lead their children to authentic freedom, actualized in the sincere gift of self, and they cultivate in them respect for others, a sense of justice, cordial openness, dialogue, generous service, solidarity and all the other values which help people to live life as a gift. In raising children Christian parents must be concerned about their children's faith and help them to fulfill the vocation God has given them.

The parents' mission as educators also includes teaching and giving their children an example of the true meaning of suffering and death. They will be able to do this if they are sensitive to all kinds of suffering around them and, even more, if they succeed in fostering attitudes of closeness, assistance and sharing towards sick or elderly members of the family. [Evangelium Vitae, 92]

F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

Questions for the couple

1. How do we live desire and tenderness in our relationship?
2. What obstacles hinder our path of profound covenant?
3. Is our love as a couple open to children, society and the Church?
4. What small decisions can we make to improve our understanding?

Questions for the family group and the community

1. How can we promote the value of nuptial love in our community?
2. How can we favor communication and mutual aid among families?
3. How can we help those in difficulty in their life as a couple and a family?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn



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