

## Session 6

# Work, a Resource for the Family

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### A. Opening hymn and greeting

### B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

### C. Reading from the Word of God

When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls. Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, has an unfailing prize. She brings him good, and not evil, all the days of her life. She obtains wool and flax and makes cloth with skillful hands. Like merchant ships, she secures her provisions from afar. She rises while it is still night, and distributes food to her household. She picks out a field to purchase; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She is girt about with strength, and sturdy are her arms. She enjoys the success of her dealings; at night her lamp is undimmed. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her fingers ply the spindle. She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy. She fears not the snow for her household; all her charges are doubly clothed. She makes her own coverlets; fine linen and purple are her clothing. Her husband is prominent at the city gates as he sits with the elders of the land. She makes garments and sells them, and stocks the merchants with belts. She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs at the days to come. She opens her mouth in wisdom, and on her tongue is kindly counsel. She watches the conduct of her household, and eats not her food in idleness. Her children rise up and praise her; her husband, too, extols her: "Many are the women of proven worth, but you have excelled them all." Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting; the woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her a reward of her labors, and let her works praise her at the city gates. (Proverbs 31:10-31).

### D. Biblical Catechesis

#### 1. *Who can find a worthy wife?*

In the portrait from the Book of Proverbs, a woman's activity assumes a value of primary importance in the domestic and family economy. The woman, a figure of both human and divine wisdom, expresses through her work the creative genius of all humanity. The qualities attributed to women, in fact, can hold for all the persons called to a sense of responsibility to the family and work.

The picture outlined is that of an ideal woman who lives good relations inside the family. In Israel, by trusting in his wife's organizational ability and work, the husband could dedicate himself to the profession of judge, a role that fell upon wise men, usually elderly men who had acquired wisdom over time.



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This division of domestic and professional duties sheds light on the importance of the common agreement between a husband and wife in planning their work. Each one is asked to make every effort so that the other can express his or her talents as well as possible.

In turn, society should give all possible support so that the spouses can make their work choices freely and responsibly. The children, together with the husband, also praise the mother and exalt her talents. This surely idealized family picture is offered as a model from which to draw inspiration and encouragement. The exemplary family lives in fear of God and puts its trust in Him.

The prosperity it enjoys, which is recognized as a divine gift, is taken care of and enhanced in everyday industriousness.

The woman senses the responsibility entrusted to her and makes every effort, without sparing herself, to respond to the task required of her. With her attitude she invites everyone to be responsible for his or her actions, but also to take care of the other members of the family and to be concerned about social life by contributing to the common good. Personal gifts and talents are at the same time a responsibility towards God and towards one's neighbor.

Our thoughts go to the parable of the talents which are given to everyone so that they will be multiplied (Cfr. Mt 25:14-30).

### **2. She rises while it is still night.**

The woman who wakes up at night and works at night describes a kind zeal that eliminates all forms of idleness. The woman's industriousness, which is far removed from any negligence, is stressed further in the text when it notes that she "watches the conduct of her household, and eats not her food in idleness". Everyone is called to be constantly vigil to not give in to the temptation of idleness by falling short of one's responsibilities and neglecting one's commitments.

The portrait of an ideal woman who is averse to all forms of idleness is the icon of someone who is not afraid of toil and sacrifice because she knows that using her energies is not useless but has a meaning. Through her work, in fact, she provides for the needs of her family and can also help the poor and beggars.

This ever up-to-date example challenges family life. One of the family's responsibilities is to open up to the needs of others, whether near or far. Attention to the poor is one of the most beautiful forms of love of neighbor that a family can experience.

Knowing that through one's work one can help those who do not have what is necessary to live strengthens one's commitment and supports one's toil. On the other hand, to give what one has to those who have nothing and to share one's



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wealth with the poor is to recognize that everything we have received is grace, and that at the origin of our prosperity there is a gift of God, which cannot be kept for oneself but must be shared with others. With this kind of attitude, social justice is promoted and a contribution is made to the common good by contesting the selfish ownership of wealth and opposing indifference to the common good.

***She opens her mouth in wisdom.***

One characteristic trait of the ideal family is that it refrains from gossip. What does the family talk about? What is the tone of their conversations? The appeal of the woman portrayed in the Book of Proverbs is also enhanced by the fact that “she opens her mouth in wisdom, and on her tongue is kindly counsel”. It is the parents’ duty to teach their children to do good and to avoid evil and, furthermore, to appreciate the commandment of love of God and neighbor. The consistency of the parents’ life strengthens their teaching and makes it true, and all the more so when it has to do with good to be done and love to be lived. The model of those who practice what they teach is perennially valid, and today in particular it maintains all of its incomparable effectiveness.

Today communication often appears to be distorted. Words are spoken and messages are sent out with the superficiality of those who assume no responsibility for the consequences of what they say. A responsible person seeks the veracity of the facts and talks about what he is convinced of. Biblical wisdom invites us to shun lies and avoid useless talk. The Christian family, by listening to the Word of God, has the great responsibility to give witness to it faithfully and prevent it from being stifled by too many useless words.

In a society where distorted and deceptive communication is at the origin of so much suffering and misunderstanding, the family can become the favorable context for education to sincerity and truth. To admit one’s errors by asking for forgiveness and assuming one’s responsibility in a consistent way is a lifestyle that is anything but spontaneous to which the children should be educated from the earliest age.

Since she speaks with wisdom, on the ideal woman’s tongue there is only “kindly counsel” The wisdom of speech consists in giving voice to the good and avoiding the kind of criticism that ruins the family dialogue. For this purpose, it is necessary to let listening to the Word of God make family life more evangelical by enlightening and enriching the quality of communication.

***She looks to the future confidently.***

Family life and a woman’s life in the family is not as easy and accessible as it seems in the ideal portrait of the Book of Proverbs, such as when women are forced to work doubly, both inside and outside the home. It becomes of decisive importance, for example, from the practical and the affective standpoint, for the



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spouses to share the educational duties and to collaborate in the domestic duties. Today the grandparents’ presence appears to be very valuable for many families, but their contribution to family life risks being recognized too little and exploited too much.

The attraction of a woman who looks to the future confidently, and thus recalls hope in the future, is of great current significance. Despite their everyday difficulties, many families represent an authentic sign of hope for our society. The virtue of hope has its origin in confident trust in Divine Providence.

Gratitude is certainly due to every wife and mother. As the Book of Proverbs notes, “Give her a reward of her labors”. The domestic work of taking care of the home, educating the children and helping the elderly and sick has a social value much higher than many professions that are also well paid. The woman’s irreplaceable contribution to the family’s formation and the development of society is still awaiting due recognition and appropriate evaluation.

The family is the context for formation to many virtues and it is also a school of recognition for the efforts lavished by parents with gratuity and love. Learning to say “thank you” is anything but automatic, and yet it is entirely essential.

**Gift and responsibility** make up the pair in which the work of the family and everyone in it is placed. All are called to recognize the gifts received from God, to put one’s gifts at the disposal of others, and to enhance the value of the others’ gifts. Each one is responsible for the others’ lives. Through work each one provides for the good of everyone in the family and can also contribute to those in need.

By living in this way, family affections and ties expand to the point that they recognize every man and every woman as a brother and a sister who are all children of the same Father.

**E. Listening to the Magisterium**

Work is a resource for the family in the twofold meaning of a source of sustenance and development of the family and, at the same time, the place where solidarity between families and generations is exercised. The Church’s teaching suggests keeping work in correlation with the family. Moreover, what development model could we imagine without the family which gathers its fruits and through its procreational choices guides its further developments? *Laborem Exercens* proposes the correlation of work with the family and reminds us that “the family is simultaneously a community made possible by work and the first school of work, within the home, for every person”.



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*Work and the family*

Work constitutes a foundation for the formation of family life, which is a natural right and something that man is called to. These two spheres of values-one linked to work and the other consequent on the family nature of human life-must be properly united and must properly permeate each other. In a way, work is a condition for making it possible to found a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work. Work and industriousness also influence the whole process of education in the family, for the very reason that everyone "becomes a human being" through, among other things, work, and becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education.

Obviously, two aspects of work in a sense come into play here: the one making family life and its upkeep possible, and the other making possible the achievement of the purposes of the family, especially education. Nevertheless, these two aspects of work are linked to one another and are mutually complementary in various points.

It must be remembered and affirmed that the family constitutes one of the most important terms of reference for shaping the social and ethical order of human work.

The teaching of the Church has always devoted special attention to this question, and in the present document we shall have to return to it. In fact, the family is simultaneously a community made possible by work and the first school of work, within the home, for every person. [Laborem Exercens, 10]




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

### *Questions for the couple*

1. Do we thank the Lord for the work that allows us to support our family?
2. What relation is there between our being workers and our vocation as spouses and parents?
3. Are domestic work and childcare shared by both?

### *Questions for the family group and the community*

1. In the working world, does unjust discrimination exist between men and women, between single and married women?
2. What educational role can the family, schools and the parish play in training young people to the value of industriousness and social responsibility?
3. How can solidarity in the working world be regained today? What help can the Church provide?

## G. A commitment for family and social life

## H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

## I. Closing hymn



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