

Family : The Breeding Ground Of Convictions

(where beliefs and opinions are moulded, shaped and handed down)

Abstract

Family values are the traditions handed down through generations and hold fast to certain principles. They are the 'cloak which shields us' from all that the world throws at us that is harmful or that could weaken our integrity. This paper underlines the need for establishing these values (both material and spiritual) in the Catholic context of family as 'domestic church' – the breeding ground of the conviction of faith. This is seen as even more necessary with the advent of Social Media and its ability to misinform, warp opinion and the consequent effect on the whole person, and from that person to the whole of society. Through the value system we inculcate in our children, we bring the light of Christ into a world that is spiraling into darkness.

Introduction

Children, unlike robots, do not come with built in information or the ability to process data. They come by essential knowledge through their interactions – first with their own family, then friends and others who form part of their environment. Without these interactions, they would be vulnerable to misjudgment and error and the terrible outcome that would follow. And by tradition, it is the family that teaches and promotes the guidelines which translate to values and these values come from a practiced faith.

The Family as Domestic Church

At the Second Vatican Council, one of the documents, *Lumen Gentium* ("Light of the Nations"), describes the family as the 'domestic Church' because it is the first place where young, baptized Christians learn about their faith. It states, "From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries". (*Lumen Gentium*, 11).

This is something most of us have heard in some form or another; one of the most common expressions used is that families are the fundamental 'building block' of society. Similarly, families provide the basis for a value system that serves as the foundation for the continuation and strength of the Church among the lay faithful. 'Family values' is a topic that we will explore in more depth in the course of the article.

Lumen Gentium goes on to explain that this 'domestic Church' has a particular role and responsibility in leading souls to heaven: "In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state" (*Ibid*). Through this letter, the Council Fathers intended to emphasize that Christ is the Light of the Nations, and that, as the Church, we each have a responsibility to bring the Light of Christ to others. Within the domestic Church, this means that parents are to cultivate a family life that is centered on Christ.

The Catholic Church recognizes that grace builds upon nature. Family is one of the most basic, yet important, gifts that God has given us. Through a firm marital commitment between men and women, and through their own active participation in the faith and their pledge to raise their children with a love for Christ and his Church, the domestic Church is one of first places that young Catholics experience the light of the faith in their own lives.

This understanding of the role of the family was emphasized by Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI when he addressed families and youth gathered in Palermo's Piazza Politeama on **Sunday, 3 October, 2010**

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20101003_palermo-giovani.html

The essence of his interaction with the families and youth was the affirmation that the Family is the 'Little Church' Where we 'Learn Meaning of Life': "The family is fundamental because it is the place where there germinates in the human soul the first perception of the meaning of life. This perception grows in the relationship with the mother and with the father, who are not the owners of the life of the children but the first collaborators with God in the transmission of life and the faith."

The emphasis is on the relationship between parents and children, because it is through them that the “torch of faith that is passed on from generation to generation, this flame that is also present in the rite of Baptism, when the priest says: 'Receive the light of Christ. The paschal sign. The flame that you must always keep alive.'”

Our parents’ life of faith and love forms the basis of our convictions and provides us with a moral compass that directs our path. Then again, the phrase “family values” conjures up an array of reactions in today’s politically charged world. And that’s a shame. Because whether our family values are conservative or liberal, that shouldn’t really change the ideals we hold for raising and educating children. Or for that matter, our Catholic faith.

Family Values in the World Today

The unfortunate understanding that Family Values are associated with one’s political agenda, particularly in the western world, is an understanding that needs to be questioned and challenged. This is because the reality of family values is much more than the position we take along the political divide; family values have more to do with how a child learns to thrive in life and faith.

Our children’s values are a reflection of who we are and how we parent. When we articulate and live those values, our children learn life lessons. They learn to express themselves, solve problems, grow from mistakes, and develop other skills and abilities that lead to fulfilled lives.

In the Indian context, one is led to believe that grades are the most important measure of their child’s learning. While no one would disagree that academic learning is vital to success in this day and age, one should also hold on to the understanding that a child’s IQ and EQ both need to be addressed and we need to recognize that parents have the ability to teach children so much more while being family.

Thus, the challenge for families is to provide their children the opportunity to grow and embrace a particular set of human abilities—curiosity, sociability, resilience, self-awareness, integrity, resourcefulness, creativity, and empathy. As a society we owe it to ourselves and to the world at large to articulate a set of family values that positively impact children and adolescent development. These are habits of thinking and behaving that honour the full range of human behavior —our strengths, weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and imperfections. When parents put these values into every-day action, they help create a healthy learning environment for their children and themselves. However, **there is an** important caveat: this value system must be founded on the Christian principle of being light. And being light meanings sharing love and hope. It is not based on a conservative or liberal agenda, but on an understanding that allows young adults the ability and the skills to cope with what life will throw at them. When young people possess these abilities, they are more likely to **flourish** in an increasingly complex society.

The Importance of Family Values in the Context of Social Media

But most of all, a value system lays emphasis on the need to encourage the younger generation to develop critical thinking: to ask difficult questions and to have a discerning and searching disposition. For example, traditional journalism was driven by the values of balance, fairness, objectivity, accuracy, completeness... which all stand for truthfulness. Its purpose was to serve society. The spread of social media seems to be eroding this practice. In this era of alternative facts, misinformation and post truths, the one core value that every family needs to pass on to their children is the gift of critical thinking.

Media provides representations of the world and information. It provides contexts for comprehension, reasoning and understanding of reality. The art of thinking critically is a process. It will not lead you straight to the complete and absolute TRUTH. It does however help to detect and avoid its opposite: lies, deceptions, propaganda.

Relevance and Purpose of Media

In his Encyclical letter, *Caritas In Veritate*, Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the need of this age to work on integral human development in charity and truth. In this encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI lays emphasis on the purpose of media.

The meaning and purpose of the various media must be sought within an anthropological perspective. This means that they can have a civilizing effect not only when, thanks to technological development, they increase the possibilities of communicating information, but above all when they are geared towards a vision of the person and the common good that reflects truly universal values. Just because social communications increases the possibilities of interconnection and the dissemination of ideas, it does not follow that they promote freedom or internationalize development and democracy for all. To achieve goals of this kind, they need to focus on promoting the dignity of persons and peoples, they need to be clearly inspired by charity and placed at the service of truth, of the good, and of natural and supernatural fraternity. In fact, human freedom is intrinsically linked with these higher values. The media can make an important contribution towards the growth in communion of the human family and the ethos of society when they are used to promote universal participation in the common search for what is just. (*Caritas in Veritate* No. 73)

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html

Conclusion

The family holds the key to the future as the next generation that springs forth will be governed by the values system that is infused into their family life. It is pertinent to note that with the advent of social media and instant communication the power of critical thinking must never be undermined. The collective online communications channels of social media that are dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration, is the world that young adults are subjected too. It's a networking centered around 'me': My friends, my contacts, my interests, my activity on the web. This is the BUBBLE, the hall of mirrors, the echo chamber that surrounds our children and unless we apply the criteria of critical thinking, we will succumb in our own echo chamber, for the universe that we have fed will consume us.

It is only the convictions that the 'breeding ground'— the family rooted in Christ our Light - inculcates in us, that will shield us.