



Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - June 2007

Fundamental Rule 19 – Obedient to God’s Will

St. Vincent Pallotti writes:

When His Blessed Mother meekly complained about His staying behind (in the Temple), our Lord Jesus Christ answered respectfully: “Did you not know I must be busy with my Father’s affairs?” Out of love for our Lord Jesus Christ, unless in some rare case when necessity and charity clearly demand otherwise, we must avoid the company (the conversation) of our relatives if there is a danger that it might prevent us from doing the Will of God our Father in all things and at all times.

OOCC III, p. 48

There are further passages in Holy Scripture where Jesus teaches us that there can be situations in which the duties of family life do not take precedence.

Let us meditate on some Gospel passages:

In Mt 4,22 Jesus calls the sons of Zebedee ... *“At once, leaving the boat and their father, they followed him.”* There would surely have been enough work for them all to do in order to provide for the family, but they followed Jesus’ call.

In Mk 3, 22 - 35 we read that the scribes thought Jesus to be possessed, therefore his family came and requested to talk to him, and he observed *“Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother,”* and he does not allow his family to intrude.

Finally, in Lk 10,42, he rebukes Martha for complaining that Mary did not help her to serve the guests, but rather was listening to his words, he said *“Martha, Martha, you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her.”*

Thus, it seems to be a question of being aware of the heavenly family we belong to, of knowing its duties, and of responding to them. We are to hear Jesus' call, follow his example and cultivate brotherly/sisterly relationships with all persons, so that all persons, but most especially those who did not have the good fortune of having a good family life, will experience God's love through loving persons who know that they belong to the heavenly family, the family of Jesus, and who take others into this community.

Let us therefore pray with St. Vincent:

... Oh how foolish I have been in not profiting by the intercession of the Angels and Saints and my most beloved mother, Mary, as I could have and should have. ... I never cared to imitate the virtues of the Saints as I could and should have done. But now, enlightened by Your grace, through your infinite mercy and through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, ...I firmly believe that you will grant me ... the grace to imitate the Saints in order that I may closely imitate my dear mother Mary, and my first-born brother, Jesus Christ, with greater perfection until death."

(from the 25th meditation of "God, the Infinite Love")

But let us return once again to fundamental rule 19 and let us meditate on the phrase: "*unless in some rare case when necessity and charity clearly demand otherwise*".

There is, in our time, a change in family life, the old traditions and standards, especially those of the Christian family, are carelessly and thoughtlessly abandoned. There is an urgent need to look at this reality, love calls us to respond in this pastoral and apostolic field which is the family because it is in the family that the foundation of a person's life of faith is formed, here he or she learns to see life as being filled with the presence of God. Awakening in the child a sensitivity to God is fundamental, what is transmitted to the child by living in a truly Christian family cannot be learnt, even by the very best catechesis. It is unfortunate but many children grow up in non-Christian surroundings and this important education and formation of the heart is withheld from them.

Let us listen to Bishop Joachim Wanke, talking about this in his homily on the Feast of the Holy Family in the Cathedral of Erfurt, Germany, on December 31st. 2006:

... It seems that there was at least one successful family, namely the Holy Family of Nazareth. ... The experience of security and acceptance is part of Jesus' humanity. The experience of having to learn what is required from each one by living together in cramped surroundings is part of his humanity. Enduring need and lack is part of it, as is the experience of just how precious solidarity and human sympathy can be in times of hardship.

As we celebrate this feast of the Holy Family, we unite our thanks for the Holy Family of Nazareth with our thanks to God for all the holy and, less than holy, families of today. There is a great deal of gossip about broken marriages and families, but let us also keep our eyes fixed on the reality of many successful marriages and families which form the basis of our human society. Today we celebrate that God gives grace so that a man and a woman are faithful to one another, that they give life to children and nurture them to grow into life, that younger family members care for the older ones, sometimes to a heroic degree of caring for them in illness and debility for many years. It is a blessing that there are families!

The family is also, today, a learning space for successful human and Christian life. The family helps to introduce young people to the mystery of God and to stay rooted in it. One can understand the fundamental tenet of our belief, that we are loved by God, only if one can experience what this means: being accepted and being loved by another person. The warmth and security experienced in the arms of one's mother and father, the active concern of parents, the community of brothers and sisters, of relatives, of friends: all of this is an introduction to the mystery of God's presence, even today in our world which is characterized by reason and technology.

Let us not forget that all the love and solidarity that we give to each other is embraced by, is made possible by, God's love and mercy. In Holy Scriptures the love of a father and a mother is referred to as a greater love which carries and supports us even when all earthly securities fail.

Living together in a family is a **school for selflessness**. There is no better place in which there is the opportunity to practise selflessness than in a family: the experience of becoming richer instead of poorer by letting go. ... In the bosom of the family one learns best what we call Christian life practice. The feasts of the liturgical cycle of the Church's year as entry doors to believing in God; the experience of praying and singing together at home and in church, of talking about life while sitting at the kitchen table so that all the problems and difficulties of faith can be brought out and discussed, and last, but not least, it is in the bosom of the family that the practical model of Christian Catholic parents and grandparents who do not talk a lot, but just follow single-mindedly and faithfully their path of faith within the Church, is seen. All of these are precious aids for the upcoming generation in order that they themselves may grow into being upright Christians.

For Reflection:

- Do I cultivate relationships with the persons I meet in a brotherly/sisterly spirit that is life giving?
- What about the relationships with my family; do I escape from my relatives and cultivate love for "my neighbour", or for those outside of the family circle?
- Do I keep contact with my heavenly family and do I ask them for their help with all my concerns?