

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

July 21-22, 2018

Readings: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:13-18; Mark 6: 30-34

I believe that today's readings are more challenging for me than they may be for any of you. I say this because it is a challenging message for shepherds, for those called to lead a flock. It is a stark reminder of our need to lead courageously and with integrity.

Ever since an ancient phrase was reintroduced at Vatican II, the family has been likened to a "domestic Church."<sup>1</sup> Our Catholic faith teaches: "The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first heralds 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."<sup>2</sup>

It is as ancient as St. Augustine, who in a work addressed to widows, encouraging them in their new situation of life "that you be mindful to set me also in your prayers with all **your domestic Church.**" In another place he wrote to a woman saying "we consider your **house** to be no insignificant **church** of Christ."<sup>3</sup> Think about it...household church.

I have no doubt that family life in 2018 is challenging, as it has been for decades and centuries past. This is in the face of some disturbing statistics about the state of family life in our country. Of the 3,946,000 million babies born in the United States in 2016, approximately 40% percent of them were to unmarried women, down slightly from the year before. It was not until 1969, that "unmarried births" rose above 10%.<sup>4</sup> In those cases of unplanned pregnancies, countless women have made courageous decisions to choose life over death, and we ought to support

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<sup>1</sup> See St. Augustine in "On Widowhood" *De Bono Viduitatis*: "...ut me quoque orationibus vestris memineritis cum tota **domestica vestra ecclesia**" "that you be mindful to set me also in your prayers with all **your household Church.**" Bishop Pietro Fiordelli of Prato, Italy re-introduced the concept at the Council session of 23 Nov. 1962 to draw attention to the sacrament of matrimony.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium*, paragraph # 11

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, Epistle 188 1,3 "**Domum** enim vestram, non parvam Christi **Ecclesiam** deputamus."

<sup>4</sup> See National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov/nchs/data](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data)

these decisions. Any pro-life Catholic worth his or her salt seeks to help women in difficult circumstance so that they may in fact choose life. Having said that, no amount of “spin” could be placed on these statistics in order to remove a disturbing trend in our country. Once society accepted the separation of marriage from family, things changed radically.

And once marital union is removed from its openness to life, something fundamental is altered within the marriage. The dire predictions of Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* issued fifty years ago this Wednesday (and listed in my bulletin column this week) have become increasingly clear.

However, today I wish to focus on the positive trends I am seeing. The joys as well as struggles of family life form part and parcel of our lives as Christians. I have the utmost respect for our many families here at the Cathedral who are diligently trying to preserve the bonds of life and love in their families. I am amazed at their creativity, energy and zeal in truly making their homes places where the love of Jesus occupies center stage.

What a blessing to know that couples and families come to receive the Sacrament of Penance, make sincere efforts to worship together at the same Mass on Sunday, and preserve the family meal and prayer time. I cannot imagine how tired Mom and Dad are at the end of a long day, yet remain committed to a family rosary after dinner. All these efforts edify me and serve to reinforce the Church’s need to offer her support. But they also give evidence that the family truly is like a domestic Church.

But guess what....that also means that there will be disputes, just as there are in the Church! I myself certainly remember well some of my own struggles with parents and siblings over the years. To our young people present today- it would mean so much to your parents if they knew that you prayed for them in their role as parents.

I assure you that they are praying for you, and too often even lay awake in bed wondering how best to help you to be happy and holy in a world that often seeks to undermine the very virtues they try so hard to instill in you.

Respect for parents derives ultimately from gratitude toward those who by their life and love have brought you in the world and have enabled you to

grow in stature, wisdom, and grace. This respect includes obedience and true docility.

When Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, she said in her lecture: “Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the action that we do. It is to God Almighty - how much we do it does not matter, because He is infinite, but how much love we put in that action.”<sup>5</sup>

As we observe the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, I hope and pray that couples will take the time to read it, for it is first and foremost a beautiful teaching on the nature and meaning of marriage. It also speaks quite prophetically about responsible parenthood, exhorting couples to prayerfully consider how they may respond to this call according to their particular circumstances.

Though controversial when released, it remains a forceful and serious document that speaks to us today. May we humbly accept its message of life and love, and above all, pray for all couples who enter into this sacred union.

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<sup>5</sup> Mother Teresa's Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, given on 11 December 1979 in the Aula of the University of Oslo, Norway.