

A HOMILY ON FAMILY LIFE

BY HIS GRACE ARCHBISHOP MALCOLM RANJITH, THE ARCHBISHOP OF COLOMBO AND ALSO THE PRESIDENT OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE SRI LANKA

This Sermon was given in Sri Lanka at the Madhu Shrine on 15th August 2010. The Catholic Bishops Conference in Sri Lanka had decided to have a very special programme for families in 2010. We present it in an abridged version because of the insights that it gives to family life and the ways in which we may seek to support it in our personal and professional lives.



" Today we have come to this Madhu Shrine as families to celebrate and participate in the "family week " organized by the Sri Lanka Catholic Bishops' Conference. We may say that today family life has become prey to struggles and disputes in the world. There are different contradictory opinions spreading about family life. Many married couples are uncertain of the aims and objectives of family life, and several married couples live under pressure and tension. . Therefore at a time like this, we reflect and think about the true nature of family life. "

" For us Christians, married life is a Sacrament, since it is established by God as an institution to witness deeply to His great love. It is said in the APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION "FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO" of Pope John II, "With the creation of man and woman in His own image and likeness, God crowns and brings to perfection the work of His hands: He calls them to a special sharing in His love and in His power as Creator and Father, through their free and responsible cooperation in transmitting the gift of human life: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. Thus the fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator-that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person. Precisely because the love of husband and wife is a unique participation in the mystery of life and of the love of God Himself, the Church knows that she has received the special mission of guarding and protecting the lofty dignity of marriage and the most serious responsibility of the transmission of human life.'"(28). Therefore according to these words, the dignity of married life rests on the deep witness given to us of God's great love. It is not limited to sexual union of the partners. This blessing is given by God to married people to strengthen their love for each other and to live in fidelity. "According to the plan of God, marriage is the foundation of the wider community of the family, since the very institution of marriage and conjugal love are ordained to the procreation and education of children " (FC. 14). God has established married life to fill the children that are born out of this love and the whole world with His love. It is said in the Bible that God, without allowing man to live alone, gave him a partner to live with. It is written , "The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (Gen. 2/18,24). God's love that is expressed in married and family life is the biggest challenge to selfishness in the world today."."

" In 1994,The United Nations declared a Year of the Family, but family life is not a human institution, it is not an agreement made between man and woman on certain conditions , but it is a life of sacrifice that man and woman make for each other because of the great love they have for each other. If love is on one side of the coin, sacrifice is on the other side."

" You cannot give witness to God's love without sacrifice. Today family life is facing serious problems, because there is no sense of sacrifice in the family. Husband and wife find that it has become impossible to love the other person more than oneself. Parents find it difficult to love their children more than themselves. That is why family life is beset by selfishness and the cares of the world. "

" It is written in the Bible that God promised Abraham , "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing... I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted." Even when they reached old age, they didn't have children. One day God visited the tent of Abraham and Sarah and He told Abraham, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After all I am worn out and my master is old ". That means that Sarah did not understand God's plan at that time, but as time went by, Sarah had a son and called him Issac. Therefore, in every married life, there is a greatness that only God can give."

" My beloved married brothers and sisters, if you go through the pages of the Bible, you will find that God chose some leaders from families to be His messengers or to lead His Covenantal people. Among them you find, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Elkhana and Hannah, David and Bathsheba. It is through these people that God prepared the Israelites to accept His Covenant and abide by it. Therefore we need to understand how God works through families to bring His Eternal mysteries to the world. Look at the family of Joseph and Mary at Nazareth. Look at the life of Mary, Our blessed Mother. It is said in the APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION "FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO" of Pope John II, "Thanks to her motherly aid, may each Christian family really become a "little Church" in which the mystery of the Church of Christ is mirrored and given new life. May she, the Handmaid of the Lord, be an example of humble and generous acceptance of the will of God. May she, the Sorrowful Mother at the foot of the Cross, comfort the sufferings and dry the tears of those in distress because of the difficulties of their families. (FC.86). All the values that you would like to have in your families are found in her."

May she, the Sorrowful Mother at the foot of the Cross, comfort the sufferings and dry the tears of those in distress because of the difficulties of their families. (FC.86).

" First, we see the very deep faith she had in God. When the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and said that she would conceive a child and that the child will be holy, she responded saying "Fiat voluntas tua" – "Thy will be done". Because of the deep faith she had in God, she was able to say these words – "Let Your will be done and not my will". Every Christian family must be able to say these words, especially when you face difficulties in married life, when you think of giving up on the family and leaving home – even St. Joseph felt the same , to leave Mary and go away quietly when he found that the child was not his, yet he submitted to the will of God and accepted the child and fulfilled the responsibilities very humbly and faithfully that God assigned him."

" Second, we see a very deep prayer life in Mary Our Mother. She received this prayer life from the community of elders in Israel. She accepted the traditions of her elders, traditional customs of her elders and it is her elders who moulded her life of prayer and kept her close to God. With those experiences she undertook the responsibility to mould the life of Jesus. That's why we find in Jesus Our Lord, before any mission he undertook, he went to the mountains to pray, he went to the

synagogue and to the temple to pray. It is His mother Mary who taught him the first lessons of prayer life. Therefore I would like to ask from mothers and fathers who are here, how many of you impart those traditions of your forefathers to your children ? How many of you give your children the gift of faith you received from your forefathers ? How many of you give that wealth to your children ? Look at the life of Our blessed Mother and that wealth of experiences she imparted to her son and learn from her glorious life."

" Thirdly, we find that she, while living in fidelity to her family and witnessing to the love of God in her own family, also went to help those in need, she was charitable and she herself became the expression of charity and God's love. When she came to know that Elizabeth was to bear a child, she left her own work and went to help her and stayed with her for three months, and this is what we heard in today's Gospel. Do you also live with such great concern and love for your neighbours, for your own brothers and sisters at home ? ."

" Finally we see the life of sacrifice in the life of Our blessed Mother. As she followed her son very closely , she gradually realized and was well aware that someday people will crucify him. . Simeon said to Mary Our blessed Mother in the temple, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.", Simeon told her that she will experience sorrow because of this child, but she still encouraged her own son as he went on his mission. His Lordship Bishop Savundranayagam said in his homily , " that it is Our blessed Mother who asked Jesus to help the wedding couple and turn water into wine, and she encouraged Jesus to show his divine power. When he was offering his own life on mount Calvary, she remained there at the foot of the Cross as a great source of strength for her son, enabling him to fulfill the plan of God, the will of God. This is the commitment she made as a mother for her family."



" Therefore my beloved brethren, you must also make the same commitment for your family. Appreciate your family, it is given through the gracious love of God. Today in Sri Lanka we find several marriages have broken down and this is because each family member does not make a deep commitment in love and sacrifice, and there is no inspiring spirituality in our families, sometimes family members are not ready to sacrifice their own selfish aims for the sake of unity in the family. .

Appreciate your family, it is given through the gracious love of God.

" As we celebrate this family day, the Catholic Bishops Conference in Sri Lanka is asking you to be guided and enlightened by the life of Our blessed Mother and her Nazareth Family. Make your families examples and inspiring models of holiness and sanctity. Then it will be a source and way for your children to achieve holiness in life and this itself will be the greatest blessing you can give them. Today there are married couples who say that they don't need children and they have pets instead.. There are young married couples who say that they don't need children now , 'let us enjoy our life and then think of having children '. How late it might be when they decide to have children. That means that these couples prefer , 'lifeless family life'. His Holiness Pope John Paul II said that this is the ' culture of death '. We need to reject and throw away this culture of death, for the Lord came to give us life and to give it abundantly. We need to protect God's precious and invaluable

plan for our families. Throughout the country, we need to get involved in programmes protecting Christian values imparted to our families by God. Our wealth is not in our lands, our properties, our businesses, our bank accounts or our big companies, Our wealth is in our children, our wealth is in our people. Homes without children are like empty tombs in the cemeteries. No sound you find in such places."

" Therefore, let us kneel and plead at the foot of Our Lady of Madhu, Our Blessed Mother and ask her to protect our families, to protect our beloved country, to protect our children, the greatest treasure we have and to give us the grace to help families in distress. Ask Our blessed Mother to help us to be united and live as one family without dividing ourselves on nationality or religion or language. I appeal to all of you to pray especially for this intention."

" MAY OUR BLESSED MOTHER BE OUR QUEEN IN OUR FAMILIES AND PROTECTOR OF OUR FAMILIES ! "
