

Teaching the Way of Love

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Is Your Family Important to You?

Last week, my husband and I went to dinner at a local restaurant. The hostess sat us in a booth near two different families. After ordering, both families caught my attention – but for very different reasons. Let me explain.

While both families had several children, one group interacted and the other did not. At one table, there was laughter, eye-contact, and even a gentleness in the corrections given to sit patiently until the meal arrived. At the other, the parents were immersed in their cell phones while the kids did whatever they could to get their parents' attention. (For the record, the parents gave them LOTS of negative feedback at quite a high volume!)



When the meals came the difference in family life continued to be revealed. At the first table, the parents led the family in a prayer, the kids used their utensils and napkins and the conversation continued to flow. At the next table, everyone leaned in and gobbled up the food without a hint of meaningful interaction (save the constant threats by the parents to send the kids to the car if they didn't behave).

It was clear to me (and to the other restaurant patrons) that one family enjoyed their evening out while the other tolerated the experience. One seemed to leave the restaurant satisfied in body and soul. The other – not really.

By default, we all are part of a family. Social scientists tell us that the family socializes us and teaches us to live in community. They say that families protect us and meet our basic needs. Their studies also confirm that family life gives us mental stability and emotional security. The caveat – parents have to decide to provide these elements. They must see importance in family life. With intention, families can flourish. Without intention – not so much.

How important is your family to you? Do you cherish your spouse and your children? Do you make them a priority each day?

From the beginning of recorded time, God has told us that 'it is not good for man to be alone (Gn 2:18). Thus, He created an expression of human love that allows a husband and wife to procreate children and start their own family, which is the most basic building block of society. In God's plan, the family is *the place* where we learn what it means to be in relationship with Him and with others.

This is exactly why each of us needs to make our family life important. We need a community of persons that will not abandon us; that will not kick us out. We need a place where we will be welcomed no matter what we do. We need a place to share our talents and contribute. We need a group of people that will charitably correct us and teach us we are part of something much bigger than ourselves.

Obviously, this is a challenge for all of us. It takes great virtue and effort to put our family before our own wants and feelings. It is not easy to live in a way where the common good trumps your own good. Changing your “me” into a “we” is only possible when you make love your mission and goal.

Love is *the mission* of the family. With love, families can create an environment that is virtuous, secure, and safe. Moms and Dads can take full responsibility for the upbringing of their kids. Children can obey the just requests of their parents. With love, God can enter the family and make it flourish. And, with love, families can eat a meal together in a restaurant and leave satisfied in both their body and soul.

How important is your family to you? Is your home a place where God’s love is revealed and communicated? Is your family an awesome school of humanity or just something so-so? Would people who see your family in public observe loving interactions or not?



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