

THE PEACE AND JOY OF CHRISTIAN FAMILIES

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

The challenge that we place before the Lord in our prayer today is how to create a family environment in which each person can thrive. The topic is vast. Hopefully each of you will find some helpful thoughts in this meditation even if your personal situation differs from that of husband and wife with young children.

Let us have in mind as we pray, the Holy Family of Nazareth, where day after day for so many years, joy and peace reigned not just within the walls of the holy home but all around Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Infectious Joy constantly emanated from that home and that is what we want, that is what we ask the Holy Spirit to grant us.

This task is truly daunting in these times of ours. So many distractions get in the way of the basic human socialization that needs to take place within the family. Someone who works closely with young people was bemoaning the fact that so many have not been parented. What he meant by that was that even within the home, children often have scant interaction with their parents, starting when a toddler is sent to daycare, no meals together, each member of the family looking at a screen, and the result is teenagers and young adults who have not learned how to have an adult conversation, how to look at another person in the eyes, how to concentrate.

It should be clear that on the basic human level, parents need to go about parenting in a thoughtful way, ready to invest all the time that is necessary. St Josemaria said the following in his homily, *Marriage: A Christian Vocation*, "Parents should find time to spend with their children, to talk with them. They are the most important thing – more important than business or work or rest. In their conversations, parents should make an effort to listen, to pay- to pay attention, to understand, to recognize the fact that their children are sometimes partly right or even completely right in some of their rebellious attitudes."

Vital attitudes are transmitted invisibly during the innumerable situations of family life. One of the most important attitudes is faith and trust in God's fatherly providence. Anxiety will no doubt

threaten to cloud the heart of your children. But think of the strength you can infuse in them if, from an early age, you pass along a supernatural way of looking at every situation.

Here is some consummate wisdom from St. Josemaria in his book *Furrow*: "There is a remedy for those anxieties of yours. Be patient, have rectitude of intention and look at things with a supernatural perspective." He goes on to say in another point, "If you fix your sight on God, you will know how to keep calm in the face of worries; if you can forget petty things, jealousies and envies, you will save a lot of energy which you need if you are to work effectively in the service of souls." These two points are worthwhile meditating on our own at leisure because there is so much there—patience, rectitude of intention, supernatural vision, putting everything in perspective, especially if we find ourselves absorbed by petty things, jealousies, and identities. As the Founder says, if we can forget those things, we will save a lot of energy and we will not lose our peace.

Speaking of patience, how often did we hear our own parents say to us, "All in God's good time." God is indeed the Lord of time. Patience must reign in the home, beginning with the parents. Consider those mysterious words of Jesus: "In your patience you will possess your soul." We can interpret those words to mean, "In your patience you will remain in control of your emotions, you will avoid losing it," so to speak. Impatience does much damage, we don't need to be convinced of that. It does much damage because it creates a toxic environment of irritability, and resentment. And furthermore, it leads us to end up doing things in a sloppy way, in a superficial way.

Along the same lines, a truly Christian home will be a "complaint free zone," so to speak; no complaints. Complaining is a really bad sign, as explained by the creators of Optimal Work. Hopefully by now you have discovered this very important program, and if not, just Google Optimal Work and you'll discover a whole new approach to working with concentration and growing through difficulties. As the the creators of Optimal Work explain, the way we grow in any virtue is by encountering and overcoming difficulties involving that virtue. Our default setting is to flee that difficulty and fall back to safe ground. Safe ground being, for example, looking at Facebook or Tik Tok or some social media. Every time we fall back we step back from that difficulty, we lose the chance to grow. But if we decide to take that difficulty head on, we grow.

Take, for example- speaking of difficulties, the first difficulty of the day, the alarm clock. It is vital that the children learn resilience from an early age, which means developing the capacity to get out of bed on time. It is so different- disappointing to come across a twenty year old incapable of getting out of bed on time. Why speak about difficulties, taking them head on? Because as the developers of Optimal Work go on to explain, when people develop the habit of complaining often, it is a sign that they never did learn how to reframe. When they come up against difficulty, reframing means seeing the positive side of the difficulty and determining to take it head on. If they

don't do that, they will complain, and if they complain often, it's a really bad sign. That's why it's so important there in the family setting that the parents find ways of transmitting this vision and helping their children to avoid complaining at all costs.

Another attitude to aim for is "grateful amazement", to borrow someone's graphic expression. In other words, gratitude. To the extent that we're developing our interior life we will develop the capacity to see everything as gift. We will not take things for granted. And that that attitude will rub off on the children, especially if we verbalize this vision of things if we go out of our way to explain why we have to be grateful.

Our Christian homes need to be oases of joy. St. Josemaria wrote, "Every Christian home should be a place of peace and serenity. In spite of the small frustrations of daily life, an atmosphere of profound and sincere affection should reign there together with a deep rooted calm, which is the result of authentic faith that is put into practice."

Speaking of joy, you will- you will enjoy this charming anecdote from iPray with the Gospel- hopefully you have discovered this very helpful app. And here's the anecdote: the enemy hates joy as much as he hates God. The enemy, of course, being Satan. A good smile is for the enemy, like bug spray for a fly. St. Bernard said once to his sister Humbelina- we can be grateful that Humbelina as a name no longer exists. He said to her, "I see that you will be a saint." "Really," she replied, amused. "How do you know?" "It's obvious," the saint answered. "You never lose your sense of humor and you always smile, and that's a sign: Hell has never had a sense of humor or a true smile."

"Joy is indispensable to a Christian's life. When a soul is joyful, it has wings to fly towards God. A happy soul is closer to God and is able to undertake works of service for other people. In contrast, sadness paralyzes one's desires for sanctity and apostolate. It is a great evil because it clouds our vision." These are words from *In Conversation with God*.

We should never ever underestimate the power of our example. As St. Josemaria points out, "Let your children see that you are trying to live in accordance with your faith. Let them see that God is not only on your lips, but also in your deeds; that you are trying to be loyal and sincere, and that you love each other and you really love them too."

During this time of prayer, we can think just back over these past weeks: How has my example been? Have those in my household seen that I am not only speaking as a person of faith but living as a person of faith?

Well, let us conclude this time of prayer with some reassuring words of Pope Francis, words with which he finishes *Amoris Laetitia*: "No family drops down from Heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us."

We finish as always with a reference to Our Lady. Mary, renew in us each day a love filled with patience and tenderness. Give us an ever greater confidence in the inspirations sent to us by your spouse, the Holy Spirit.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless you. God bless your family.



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