

THE FAMILY: LEAVEN OF A NEW HUMANITY

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, 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.

As we begin our reflection on the last meditation or reflection on the celebrated document of the Holy Father, *Amoris Laetitia*, that Apostolic exhortation that elaborates on the beauty of marriage, on the theology of marriage, we want to look at marriage as the Holy Father teaches us in his ninth chapter of *Amoris Laetitia*, the spirituality and the family itself as leaven for the new- for a new humanity. To put it in even more simpler terms, to see the family, the Christian family, the Catholic family, as the light of the world, as the salt of the Earth, as the leaven in the Mass.

Jesus himself delivers a very powerful message. Since he is the Son of God made man and his sojourn here on Earth are the thirty- three most spectacular, extraordinary years of the whole history of creation, it's the culmination point of creation that God Himself becomes part of our world. He doesn't drop from the sky with melodrama, with blasts of trumpets and drum rolls and elaborate processions, but rather, he's born like everybody else, probably hidden, much more humble fashion, in a stable, and he lives within a family. Tradition has it 30 of his 33 years he lives with a mother and a father, a husband and a wife and he leads an ordinary existence of professional work, manual labor as a carpenter. But, his base of operations is his home with his mother and father in that tiny village, Nazareth. What's the message for today in light of our culture, in light of 21st century culture? How do we want to see the family vis-à-vis, the New Evangelization which is all about renewing society in Christ, bringing Christ to the family in a more intense way, in a more profound way? Lord, what do you want us to see?

And perhaps we can start with the very first miracle that Jesus worked, let's look at those optics. They're worked in the context of a marriage, a wedding feast, a celebration. I will read some of those verses, but what strikes us is that it's virtually the only time you see Jesus hanging around celebrating- not only celebrating but celebrating with his mother and not only with his mother, but with his disciples. His twelve apostles are at the celebration. And he wasn't making a mere appearance, he was part of the guestlist, and he was enjoying the festivities of a typical wedding celebration in that part of the world at that period of time. It wasn't like the wedding receptions we have now that happy hour starts at 6:00, dinner's at 7:30, dancing begins at 9:00, lights are out at 11:00- no. More days were celebrated than the number of hours that usually consists in modern day wedding receptions or celebrations. At times, it took- it was seven days of partying given the primitive means of transportation that travel took a very long time, that once you got to

your place of destination you didn't leave immediately, that's for sure, you make that investment of time worthwhile, but that was very customary.

And the Gospel says that, "On the third day, there was rumblings that wine was running out." And so, those optics drive home a powerful message. And what is it? Simply put, I take marriage very seriously. Well, as God only, at the dawning of the creation of the first man and woman, immediately God himself institutes that sacred institution that we do call marriage. It wasn't elevated to the level of a sacrament, the redemption was way off in the horizon, but it was a sacred bond of a very special love, the highest form of human love— that's what leaving mother and father signifies— doesn't mean that you can't have your mother-in-law or your father-in-law living at your home, but it means that the level of love transcends any other kind of human love. And this is willed by God, and this complementarity of the sexes naturally facilitate that bond for life. And God makes it abundantly clear that that bond must not be broken. Though, unfortunately, it is broken. Often there's still that bond there, instituted, established by God himself. Christ, in his divinity, instituted that sacred- that sacred bond.

And now at Cana, he's going to raise it to the level of sacrament. What does that mean in the practice? It means that the husband and wife not only will love each other in a natural way, psychological attraction, physical attraction, the bond of friendship, but another love will be superimposed on their marital love. Maybe superimposed is not the right word— elevated to the very love of Jesus Christ. Matrimony, the specific sacrament instituted by Jesus to facilitate the fidelity, the love, the self-giving that marks a matrimony- the matrimonial marriage, and from that bond the light of Jesus radiates to the children and from the children to society. It bears mentioning, by way of contrast and also to give us a certain sense of urgency of giving priority to the formation of the family, seeing the family the way it was seen in primitive Christianity. The Holy Spirit tells us through St. Paul that the family is the domestic Church. That was very much the common notion in those early centuries of the Church's history, for a whole assortment of reasons. In a certain sense, you could say, it was basically the unit of the parish— couldn't have parochial schools or physical churches, or parish centers or rectories, or even images, Christian images, because Christianity was a capital offense and the penalty for Christian practice was painful execution. So, much of the Church was hidden, or under the radar, if you will, and the family was the vehicle of passing along the faith. And by judging from the history of the Church they did a marvelous job, those Christian families of those days of old.

We find ourselves in similar circumstances. The notion at best of marriage has been greatly diluted— now we have options. There's marriage between opposite sexes, man and woman. But equally valid in the eyes of the popular culture would be a so-called "marriage" of people of the same gender. Or, once that there's no recognized objective truth of marriage, one can make marriage to be anything. You can even make a case for polygamy or divorce and remarriage for that matter. If marriage is no longer an institution of natural law, an institution that is meant to last for life, well, then it becomes very relative what marriage is. And spinning off an identity crisis of marriage, since new human life conceived human life, newborn human life is meant to be the fruit of love between husband and wife, a personification of their love for each other,

when that is not seen as the essence of marital love, then we have tax on human life, especially unborn human life, and that spins off into the right to die, assisted suicide, euthanasia, in vitro fertilization, etc.

Also, we see that the world is in a crisis in terms of its spiritual bearings, that the percentage of practicing Christians, specifically practicing Catholics, is at an all-time low. There's vast doctrinal ignorance— many don't even know that Jesus is God. They see the natural law regarding marriage, human sexuality, human life, not only as relative but as inimical as a repression of legitimate human inclinations, a violation of one's personal rights and embracing natural law and teaching natural law is a symptom of intolerance. So, that's what we're dealing with. And very good people are wringing their hands, is Christianity going to grow? Is it going to slowly fade away? Will there ever be a revival of Christianity? For many, Christianity is not even worth attacking, it's so irrelevant. It means so little, has no bearing on daily life, on and on and on.

And so, the Church, humanity without realizing it, looks at the family here. I am very optimistic. We make that act of faith that Jesus is that victory that has overcome the world. And how was that victory going to occur? I see glimmers of it. I've been blessed to have friends who are husband and wife, mother and father that are passing along the faith to their children. I'm blessed to know husband and wife, moms and dads who are generous in their openness to new human life, who embrace what the Holy Father's encouraging right now throughout his pontificate, especially now that we need to see the beauty of having children, the beauty of motherhood, the beauty of fatherhood. And he's urging the faithful in Italy, but throughout the world, to be generous in having children and raising those children in the faith.

Let's read a bit the Cana event in order to meditate on these optics that I described at the beginning of our meditation. "On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus was invited to the marriage with his disciples." The two prominent words in these first couple of verses is *marriage* and *mother*. Mother, least ideally, is closely connected to the family, it's part of family. Mother is the heart of the family, and a mother exercises her motherhood in the fullest- fullest sense when her motherhood is complemented by fatherhood. And motherhood and fatherhood function at its best when a mother and father are bonded together in marriage.

We see, you'll need a theology course to realize that being a father and being a mother without being married is a handicap in raising the children. I'm not saying it can't be done, it is done. But it's definitely a handicap because the children are made secure, are loved in a more effective way when their mom and their dad are together, are married, are bonded together, and that the first experience of a child, provided they're both alive or one of them is the love between their mother and father and that the love for the children is a love that springs from that bond of love between the mother and father. That's- that's why I've worked with plenty of young people to see that for myself. Separation and divorce always wounds those children, affects them in- certainly in a very negative way. These wounds can be healed, but that separation between mother and father or the lack of the marital bond has ill effects on the children. They need that completion of love, which is never going to be perfect, that comes from the bond between the mother and the father.

And so, hence, Mary, Jesus, the Apostles are hanging out there, spending a lot of time at this celebration. Jesus, why are you doing that? I ask that rhetorically. And I will take the liberty to put words in Jesus' mouth. I take it very seriously. This is the secret of spreading the Gospel, this institution that we call marriage, that we call matrimony. The light of the Gospel is especially radiated through family life because it's the family as the husband and wife, mother and father are bonded together, and they try to grow in their love for each other. The home becomes a school of prayer, a school of charity, a school of contemplation, a school of joy, a school of dialogue. In short, a school of love, a school of charity.

And, to paraphrase a buddy of mine where I was giving unsolicited advice that, like some dads with their little sons, they start training them how to play baseball or basketball or football at a very young age, I told my friend, well, you got to start teaching doctrine at a very early age. It's valid advice, but he told me, well, that only works if I'm walking the walk— that only works if the parents are living what they want to teach because it makes it more credible, obviously. And just giving facts without backing it with the example of living those truths of humility, of charity, of mercy, of prayer, especially given the culture, he told me these true facts about our faith, about morality, they're good facts, they're great facts, but will not be absorbed. So, that family can't just be hanging in there, it has to radiate that light of Jesus.

We read on in this account: "And when the wine failed," I have a feeling that the apostles put a lot of wine away— not exactly being delicate, gentle people, but rough and tumble fishermen who probably partied hard too. Mary, being very much a mom, wanted that party to go on, didn't want her friends to be embarrassed for running out of wine, nor was she going to recommend substituting mountain wine for Mountain Dew or substituting Mountain Dew for wine. So, she prevails on her son to perform his first miracle, the contents- in the context of a wedding. And so, we see that Mary prevails and Jesus works the miracle only after the workers fetch water. Now, that's a lot of work, that's a lot of faith, because it wasn't a quart, it wasn't a gallon. According to this commentary here I have in front of me between 70 to 120 gallons of water. No faucets, a very arid climate, and probably took hours to do that.

And that's our last brief consideration of being a leave for humanity. The- we see the means to- not very theological, but sacraments are not magic. I would liken in the sacraments to a DNA. Some people have virtuoso pianist on their DNA or virtuoso violinist or virtuoso physicist or chemist or dancer or athlete or artist. But I was talking to a very bright professor, got her PhD and just gifted, brilliant lady. But I knew the lady before she got her PhD, and she had to work very hard for that PhD at one of the best academic institutions in the Midwest. At the same time, yes, that marriage has a DNA of love with the heart of Christ, but it has to be developed. And it's revealed in Cana, how do we develop it?

Okay, well, I would say there's three dimensions to it. One is the presence of Jesus himself, devotion to the Eucharist, and also changing water into wine is a Eucharistic symbol of Transubstantiation— the water is raised to a higher level of wine— that's my opinion anyway. And so, there's a Transubstantiation of water which means the Mass and the Eucharist have to be part of marital life, which draws the light of Christ out of that bond. It develops the potential to love with the heart of Jesus. And I would say the presence of Mary

symbolizes the Rosary at home. Interesting to note– it began with St. John Paul, that the Rosary draws the couples together. And Pope Francis is always recommending the Rosary, especially the family Rosary. Couples have told me that, when they do pray the Rosary together, it draws them together in there- the frictions and the bumps of the road are usually smoothed over.

I'd like to share an anecdote of an elderly couple- not that elderly, but at least from my perspective, after I was doing a wedding, and they burst into the sacristy urging me to encourage young people that their marriages could really grow and be really beautiful marriages. And they were telling me that they, even after 42 years of marriage, they never- they love each other very intensely more than when they were courting each other. And they said their love is much more profound, much more based on the Gospel. And they told me their secret- they told me it's the Eucharist, it's the Rosary, and then we are also trying to live the Gospel– Jesus' humility, Jesus' mercy, Jesus' forgiveness, Jesus' patience– we're trying to do that and we have a very good marriage, we love each other a lot. And Fr. Peter, please communicate that to others.

I'd like to end by reading a piece from St. Josemaria's writings or an interview compiled in a book called *Conversations*: "I always look upon Christian homes with hope and affection, upon all the families which are the fruit of the sacrament of matrimony. They are shining witness of the great divine mystery of Christ's loving union with his Church which St. Paul calls *a great sacrament*. We must strive so that these cells of Christianity may be born and may develop with a desire for holiness, conscious of the fact that the sacrament of initiation, baptism, confers on all Christians a divine mission that each must fulfill in his own walk of life." Mary- Jesus, Mary and Joseph, make those sentiments are own.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you've 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.



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