



Families, where are the saints of the third millennium?

What a marvelous adventure and responsibility it is for the family to transmit the faith! We bring our children to discover Him who gives us life and who gives meaning to all of our days. We present them with the Friend par excellence, Christ, God who became one of us to show us his love and to lead us to the discovery of true freedom and lasting happiness. We awaken in them the thirst to build a relationship with Christ in the intimacy of prayer and the Eucharist. We dare to invite them to become saints, cooperators with Christ in building a better world. Yes, what a challenge and marvelous adventure!

Discovering the joy of loving Love

The world is even more beautiful this morning! A new baby has been born! It's Catherine and Nicholas's baby. Filled with wonder at the mystery of this brand new life, they still have tears in their eyes. The sacred moment of their child's birth has introduced them to their new role: being parents! They are dreaming of a future for this unique little being who looks so much like them and is also created in the image of God.

As parents who are rooted in a deep faith, they want to give the best of everything to this child that God – Creator and Father – has entrusted to them. They know that this little being is a child like no other, whom God has wanted and deeply loved through all eternity. They know that this little person, created in God's image and likeness, is invited to take part in God's divine life through baptism. Their child is

invited to live life with God as a daily gift of love.

The day will come when this child will say: "I believe in God's love"... thus making the fundamental decision of a Christian life – a decision that is "not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."¹

This person who is encountered is Jesus Christ – God with a human face – who came to live among us to propose to us a reconciliation with God, to save us from eternal death and to promise us that our bodies



will resurrect one day. It is Christ, the first of the resurrected, who truly lives by our side – as guide, master and friend *par excellence* – and teaches us to become more human with each passing day.

The greatest gift of all

At the heart of Christian life, there is a “yes.” There is an intimate and personal relationship with Christ, a relationship of trust that begins with baptism and blossoms throughout our lives. In requesting this sacrament for their child, parents give him or her the greatest gift of all: the little one becomes a *child of God* by adoption and a child of God’s family, the Church. The baptized child becomes a member of the Body of Christ; Christ as Head is the young one’s brother and walks by his or her side. All the baptized, now the child’s brothers and sisters, also share the journey that leads to the Father. This child will never be alone.

Indeed, God, who is so tender and so close to us, is the only one who can fully satisfy the human soul – an immortal soul. In order to carry out his great plan of love, he chose to count on us. God needs us and through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, even more fully since our Confirmation, we are able to fulfill God’s reliance on us.

What a joy it is to know that we are loved by the Creator of the universe and are invited to love God and love *with* God all of his children throughout the world! These two loves are inseparable... “Love of God and love of neighbour have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.”²

What a joy it is also to let ourselves be freely drawn forth by Christ! To choose to be like him and

to tell others – who are searching for the meaning of their lives and for enduring hope – the truth that Christ shares with us... “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”...

For there is the challenge and the mission we receive on the day of our baptism: we are to seek to identify ourselves with Christ, aiming humbly for holiness and taking an active role in the great movement of the new evangelization. We are to become apostles, attentive to the desires of the Holy Spirit. We are to pass on to our children, our families, our friends and all whom we meet the unimaginable news of a God who loves them personally and who is waiting patiently, fully respecting their freedom, for them to open the door of their lives to him.

“When you grow up...”

Like Catherine and Nicholas, so many Christian parents rejoice at the thought that their children have been created by Love and for Love with a view to the never-ending joy of the citizens of heaven. Nothing is more important to these parents than helping their children respond freely to their vocation as children of God. This is their main goal as educators; for that reason, they make sure to nourish their children’s souls as well as their minds and bodies.

Why then should we be surprised if, rather than asking children what they want to do when they grow up, these parents — in order to sow and keep alive in them the desire to welcome God’s will — sometimes ask their children: “What do you think God expects of you in your life?” ...

By teaching their children to seek God’s will, parents enable them to continue the love story between God and the human being. We learn to make our will conform to the will of God as our thoughts and feelings increasingly reflect our communion with Christ. In this way, a Christian can say: “God’s will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am

“Evangelizing a person, you see, is saying to them: You also are loved by God through Jesus Christ.”

– St. Francis of Assisi

to myself.” This is the road along which “self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy.”³

God is looking for saints

In fact, God is seeking cooperators in our families. In entrusting his children to parents who are the bearers of Gospel values, God hopes that sooner or later he will reap an abundant harvest of vocations to holiness: in marriage or single life in lay apostolate, and in priestly or religious life.

As an anonymous author has said so well: “When God wants something special done in our world, he sends a baby and then he waits...”. He waits for parents to form women and men who are free and responsible, with an unswerving conscience. Even while knowing that they are sinners, having decided to follow Christ, they have confidence in his forgiveness and in the power of the Holy Spirit, and are ever hopeful in their journey in the midst of the world.

God, in other words, is waiting for saints. He wants to “sanctify” us, to make us more like Him. But is holiness not an impossible goal, an insurmountable challenge? How can we get there? The answer is simple: “Your daily encounter with Christ takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind. There is no other way: either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or we shall never find him”.⁴

Through daily life

It is thus in the hum-drum of everyday life that parents realize the unique mission to raise saints. The task of educating, when it is inspired by faith, seeks little-by-little to root children in a way of life that is typically Christian and thus anchored in faith, hope and love. They learn to give of themselves and to love in a Christ-like manner, for the glory of God



and in the service of those they meet along the way. This is the kind of education that children receive when parents help them to develop their talents and nourish their personalities with good habits and virtues: a work ethic, patience, a spirit of sacrifice, order, serenity, joy, strength, prudence, obedience, justice, humility, a spirit of poverty and sharing, generosity, kindness, forgiveness, etc.⁵ Yes, it is to teach them to love. But to love *like Christ*, by giving themselves at the service of those who are placed in their path.

More effectively than through words, children learn of our faith through our actions: a cake made and offered to new neighbours; the request for forgiveness after a fight with a friend; an invitation for friends and family to share furniture, toys and clothing with an adolescent who is choosing to give life in difficult circumstances.

And what a blessing when parents can count on the support of the extended family – grandparents, godmothers and godfathers, aunts, uncles and cousins – and on the parish community! This network is an incomparable treasure that helps to root children in the values that give each family its particular colour.

Being consistent

Even at a young age our children can begin to learn to spend time with Jesus, who dwells within their hearts, to trust Him with their joys and sorrows, to talk to him while playing in the school yard, while doing their homework, while helping wash the dishes or clean the house. Gently, they are introduced to his presence and become contemplatives in the midst of their daily activities.

Once they become adults, they will get up every morning and ask: “Lord, what would you like me to do today?” ... They will have learned to count on God’s grace, on that divine energy that is found in prayer, in the Gospel and in the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. They will then accomplish their day-to-day work to the best of their ability so they can offer it to God with love. They will share in the priesthood of Christ and have a soul that is able to offer everything to God.

Attentive to the voice of the Spirit, they will give their lives, bit by bit, day after day, serving others and leading them to God. They will know that “The Christian’s program – the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus – is ‘a heart which sees’. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”⁶

They will not hesitate to stay faithful to Christ, and they will be consistent with their faith as they make personal and professional choices and

“Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid. Christ knows ‘what is in man’. He alone knows it.”

– John Paul II, inaugural homily of his papacy, October 22, 1978

decisions, in spite of the opposition they might encounter. They will be ready to pay this price in order to become the light of the world, able to transform the world from within to bring about a new political and economic world order, and at the same time a new spiritual and cultural order.

Getting involved

Today, Christians face many challenges from a society that lives as if God did not exist. “The current world situation in particular summons the conscience of Christians in regard to the harrowing problem of respect for human life from conception to natural death, as well as that of the hunger and misery of masses of the world’s peoples. Their plight invites Christians to a globalization of solidarity in the name of the inalienable dignity of the human person, above all when defenseless people are struck by natural catastrophes, laid low by the indiscriminate machinery of war and economic exploitation, and confined to refugee camps.”⁷

The suffering of so many people, born and unborn, invites us to prayer and action: “All those whom misery has deprived of their condition as human beings are the neighbour for whom Christ has died. His ‘Eucharistic’ heart has borne all the world’s misery on the cross and his Spirit urges us to take an option for the poor and for innocent victims, as he did – peacefully and effectively.”⁸



False Pluralism

How can we stay silent when faced with an ideology that, under the pretext of giving everyone an equal place in our culture, attempts to silence Christians and to exclude them from public life, from societal debates, from places of learning? This false pluralism is another challenge for the disciples of Christ. As full-fledged citizens, how can they divorce their deepest beliefs from their actions in society? How can they set aside the faith that engages them to propose – not to impose – a vision of things and solutions to social problems inspired by Gospel values? This would be a betrayal.

The time has come for families to stand up, to dare to speak up in the social and cultural arena about the real nature of the family; to gather together to celebrate and defend the identity of the family while asking for their constitutional and natural rights – especially their freedom of conscience, religion and expression, and their right to educate their own children in conformity with their moral and religious convictions. As Christians of the third

The Eucharist: Source of Christian Marriage

Ever since the world began, in God's great design of love, the family has been rooted in the union between a man and a woman in marriage. This is where the future cooperators of God are born and raised. The family is "a necessary good for peoples, an indispensable foundation for society... a great and lifelong treasure for couples [and] a unique good for children."⁹

The family, the cradle of life and love, also becomes a community of faith and a *school of humanization* when it is built on the sacrament of marriage. It becomes a small *domestic Church* that lives in God's presence; God is involved with the

millennium, we cannot yield to indifference or to fear. The daring of the first Christians is an example that calls us to go against the tide and to build a family culture, a civilization that respects the sacred character of life and the dignity of each person.

Transmitting the faith today means transmitting a vision of life and of reality that is different from what is offered by our culture and secular media. It also means setting an example for our children to prepare them to fight for justice and truth about mankind, so that they bring the light of the Gospel to the heart of public life, the culture, the economy and politics. Our children will need a solid formation, as well as courage and the support of our prayers. Most of all, their perseverance will be rooted in the hope that flows from daily contact with the Holy Spirit.

"True holiness consists in doing God's will with a smile."

– Mother Teresa



spouses who have promised to help each other to become saints. "The grace of marriage spreads throughout married and family life, like a great treasure from which the spouses can come and draw.

Let's get in the habit of talking about marriage, of bearing witness of our marriage as a strength for every day."¹⁰

Becoming one

This great treasure of grace is inexhaustible. Why? Because it is "the Eucharist [that] is the very source of Christian marriage."¹¹ It is the sacrifice of Christ's love for his Church – and for the couple's small domestic Church, too! – that is the source of love between the spouses. It is the new and eternal Covenant established by Christ between God and humanity that constantly gives life to their own covenant.

Nothing in the world can compare to the gift that Christ makes of himself: He gives himself as food so that we become *one* in Him. On their wedding day, the spouses enter into a lasting union; fidelity for all time. When they participate at mass together with their children and receive the same Bread of Life, their family becomes one body in Christ, one *communion* of persons. Each of them will then work towards the good and happiness of the others, and all are called to be agents of reconciliation and to build peace together.

By participating in the Sunday mass, the family draws from the source of Love and healing, and so protects its own stability. The Eucharist provides the family with the strength it needs to pursue its mission in the midst of the world: "The specific mission of the family is to en flesh love and put it at the service of society: conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, fraternal love, love of a community of persons and generations, love lived under the sign of a couple's faithfulness and fecundity for a civilization of life and love."¹²

**"What the soul is to the body,
Christians are to the world."**

– Origen

When the cross appears

Sometimes, the communion of the couple or family is placed under great strain. When the cross appears in the form of infidelity, division and divorce, the parents, the children and the extended family are called to participate more intimately in Christ's own experience of death and resurrection. In such situations, many Christian parents still long to transmit the faith to their children. The support of their parish community is thus of prime importance.

It may happen that some adults find themselves in irregular situations. They also need to be invited to participate in the Eucharist and community life even when they cannot receive holy communion. For them, spiritual communion can be a great source of consolation and courage.

The communion of the family may also be wounded when parents see their children reject their faith and Christian values. A French author writes:

"Some children stray from their faith in a way that is lasting and serious. This is the time when they need, more than ever, the faithful and trusting love of their parents. For parents, this is a time for patience, a time of loving and painful powerlessness ... There is no point in dwelling on endless feelings of guilt ... The past belongs to mercy: God's forgiveness is there, always on offer ... What can you do as you wait for the return of the prodigal child? ... 'Watch and pray' ... Because Jesus was the first to suffer for this child, because he gave his life for him or her, nothing is lost, all is saved."¹³

We can follow the example of Saint Monica who prayed for more than 20 years for the conversion of her son, Saint Augustine. This great Father of the Church eventually proclaimed: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

The art of prayer

Experience shows us that to love someone, we need to know them. And to know them, we need to spend time with them. Just ask people in love! That is why *the art of prayer* is essential for those who want to love Christ Jesus, the face of God for our world.

One Canadian poet and theologian offers the following reflection on this art: “Praying is freely giving time to God. As you pray, you let yourself be shaped by him” ... “Praying is lifting your soul to God and asking him what is in keeping with his will”... “Praying is not to empty yourself, it is to unite yourself with Christ by reciting the Our Father, it is sharing his desire to give everything to the Father” ... Praying “is an encounter where you put yourself in God’s presence to love him and let yourself be loved. ... When prayer is arid...you still have the name of Jesus to repeat slowly in rhythm with your breath,”¹⁴ knowing that he sees farther than you and that he will always give you what is best to attain eternal life.

Beyond personal prayer, there is couples’ prayer. Parents often choose to develop the habit of praying together as a couple before teaching their children to pray as a family. For the couple learning to pray, the simplest recipe is often the best: why not pray an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary*? It is our example that sows the desire to pray in the hearts of our children.

God’s thirst

Once we decide to set aside a few minutes for prayer each day, no matter what, we soon notice that the little events of daily life are occasions for teaching children to worship, to praise, to thank, and to spontaneously ask for forgiveness and help.

Why not talk to God as a family? Why not thank Him as a family before every meal that He gives us? Why not have a heart-to-heart talk with him during a hike in the mountains, around a campfire, on the way to school or work, while doing grocery shop-



ping or housecleaning, on the subway, and while hurrying about downtown? We can pray for those we pass by on the street, for the injured person who is being taken by ambulance to the hospital, for our political, religious and media leaders.

Many children like the “qualities game”, where each person in turn names a quality someone else has, and thanks God for it... While on holidays, we can also give each child a personal journal: every evening they can write or draw in it, telling Jesus about the adventures of that day!

What good habits our children develop when we introduce them from a young age into this permanent dialogue with Christ, when we discover with them how He speaks to us through the Gospel and the teachings of his Church.

If parents encourage their children through the years to participate in parish activities such as religious education or youth groups, or to take part in Christian movements and communities – both new and traditional – where they can spend time with their friends who are also friends of Christ, the odds are they will remain solid in their faith throughout their adolescence. In such environments, they will be strengthened by the spiritual support and enthusiasm of their peers, and by the presence of adults who witness to the truth that life is worth living and giving.

Those who make a habit of prayer are one day confronted with an astonishing discovery: God

wants it all! So why not give him everything? We can give him our joys and disappointments, our good deeds and our failures, our studies and work, our hopes and dreams. If we want to do his will, our entire life becomes prayer! Since “God thirsts that

we may thirst for him,”¹⁵ let’s respond to his thirst by making ourselves as available as Mary, his Mother and ours, who pondered everything in her heart. She will walk us along the path of generosity.



“Young people of every continent, do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium! Be contemplative, love prayer; be coherent with your faith and generous in the service of your brothers and sisters, be active members of the Church and builders of peace.”

– John Paul II, Message on the occasion of World Youth Day 2000

¹ Benedict XVI, *God Is Love (Deus Caritas Est)* (2005), no. 1.

² *God is Love*, *ibid*, no. 15.

³ *God is Love*, *op. cit.*, no. 17.

⁴ St. Josemaria Escriva, “Passionately loving the world”, *Conversations with Mgr Escriva de Balaguer* (Scepter Publishers, 2002).

⁵ Xavier Abad, Eugene Fenoy, *Le mariage, chemin de sainteté* [Marriage: A Way to Holiness] (Éditions Le Laurier, 1998).

⁶ *God is Love*, *op. cit.*, no. 31.

⁷ *The Eucharist: God’s Gift for the Life of the World*, Foundation theological document for the 49th International Eucharistic Congress, 2008 (Éditions Anne Sigier, 2006), 57.

⁸ *The Eucharist*, *ibid*, 59.

⁹ Benedict XVI, 5th World Meeting of Families, Valencia, 2006.

¹⁰ Christine Ponsard, *La foi en famille* [Faith in the Family] (Éditions des Béatitudes, 2001), 31.

¹¹ *The Eucharist*, *op. cit.*, 60.

¹² *The Eucharist*, *op. cit.*, 63.

¹³ Christine Ponsard, *op. cit.*, 265.

¹⁴ Jacques Gauthier, *Prier: pourquoi et comment* [Praying: Why and How] (Novalis and Presses de la Renaissance, 2006).

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2560.

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