



SESSION TWO

The Christian Vision for the Family

A Catholic vision seeks to sustain and enhance people's capacity to discover the meaning of life in the context of God's love. Such an understanding of the meaning of being human confirms the person's dignity as an individual, while supporting them in their relationships with God and with others.

(Share the Good News, 28)

1. Welcome, Introduction and Overview (5 min)

Welcome back. Last week we looked at the reality of family life as we have experienced it in our own lives and in terms of what we see happening in the world around us. Then we listened to how Pope Francis sees family life today as he addresses it in *The Joy of Love*. Here are some of the main points that came out of our discussion at the end of the night. *(Facilitator to recap on the discussion from the previous night.)*

Tonight we look at the Christian vision for family. Again, we start by listening to the experience of a

variety of people in the world today and then you will be invited to articulate your own experience. People have been asked to reflect on how they see family portrayed in the media, in movies etc, and then on their own ideal for family. Having watched the video, you will be invited to articulate your own thoughts and then we will hear what Pope Francis proposes in *The Joy of Love*. Let's begin by recalling the guidelines for good communication which we agreed last week.



2. Video Clip 4: Vox Pop (5 min)

People talk about their dream for their family.



3. Discussion (20 min)

People address these two questions:

- What did you hear in the vox pop?
- What is your dream for your own family?



Video Clip 5: Input – God Makes all the Difference (20 mins)

Pope Francis himself has chosen a life of celibacy. He is not married and does not have children. But he belongs to his family – his parents, siblings, nieces and nephews, and other relatives. All of us belong to one family context or another. Pope Francis intended that his document *The Joy of Love* would include all. And yet he does single out the unique and indispensable role of loving parents and their children. He sees it as our obligation to the future of humanity that we create welcoming places where children are born and supported to grow as free, mature human beings who are equipped to reach their own unique potential.



“Anyone who wants to bring into this world a family which teaches children to be excited by every gesture aimed at overcoming evil – a family which shows that the Spirit is alive and at work – will encounter our gratitude and our appreciation” (77)

Pope Francis affirms the value of sacramental marriage that is permanent, faithful and welcoming of children. Sacramental marriage makes sense when we believe in the Good News that God is love, that God loves each of us unconditionally and that God’s dream for each

one of us is that we grow to become the kind of people who love others and are loved in return. Otherwise the ideal of marriage as a permanent, committed, loving relationship may appear as ‘a dry and lifeless doctrine’.

“The lasting union expressed by the marriage vows is more than a formality or a traditional formula; it is rooted in the natural inclinations of the human person” (123)

God loves us no matter what! God’s mercy embraces everyone regardless of who they are or what they have done. In today’s world many people are caught up with material concerns, such as how much money we earn, objects we own, the position we hold in society. These

are things whose benefit for our lives can be immediately felt and seen in concrete reality. It can be difficult to even consider as important our relationship with the God of love whom we encounter deep within our hearts and to find time to nurture that relationship.

God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a communion of love. Because we are created in God's image we are made for relationship, to love and be loved. It is written in our DNA! To really become

aware of this in our hearts we need to develop a relationship with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through reflection and communication with God.

“The triune God is a communion of love and the family is its living reflection” (13)



In this context, the Sacrament of Marriage is not just a social convention, it symbolises a couple's public commitment to one another and through it a couple receives God's grace to sustain them in their marriage. When a couple commits to this life-long relationship of love, in an awareness of being supported not only by

the love of their families and friends, but also by God's grace, it cannot but be a source of strength as they set out on their journey. Their common life as husband and wife, and the network of relationships that they build with their children and the world around them, will be steeped in and strengthened by the grace of the sacrament.



“Marriage is a precious sign, for when a man and a woman celebrate the sacrament of marriage, God is, as it were, “mirrored” in them; he impresses in them his own features and the indelible character of his love. Marriage is the icon of God's love for us” (121)

Families who commit to faithfulness, stability and love are beacons of God's love in the world. Pope Francis says that every family despite its weaknesses, can be a light for the world.

God is the supreme Creator of all life. God created human beings in his own image and likeness. Pope Francis' ideal for married love is that it would always be open to a fruitfulness that gives birth to children and draws the couple beyond themselves. Real love always opens up to others, never closes in on itself. The couple that gives birth to new life is a living image of God who is the source of all life.

The Church upholds marriage as a permanent union between a man and a woman, open to the possibility of life. Pope Francis reminds us that for those living in other family situations, 'The Church makes her own the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception' (AL 54).

Christians in all family situations are members of the Church. Pope Francis reminds us that they require pastoral accompaniment that reaches out to them where they find themselves, in such a way as to lead them along a pastoral path of discernment and conversion.

Pope Francis commends families who care for their elderly relatives, sometimes in spite of the strain that may be placed on the other family members. Such families witness to the sanctity of life in all its stages. He urges the Church to assist and support families who care for and support their elderly members. Pope Francis also commends families who take care of family members with special needs. They witness the value of every human life, by 'caring for the mystery of the fragility of human life'. 'Families who lovingly accept the difficult trial of a child with special needs are greatly to be admired ... If the family, in the light of the faith, accepts the presence of persons with special needs, they will be able to recognise and ensure the quality and value of every human life, with its proper needs, rights and opportunities.'

“A special word of appreciation is due to those associations and family movements committed to serving the elderly, both spiritually and socially. Care and concern for the final stages of life is all the more necessary today, when contemporary society attempts to remove every trace of death and dying” (48)

“No union that is temporary or closed to the transmission of life can ensure the future of society” (52)

The Joy
of Love





Jesus constantly showed care and compassion for families during his life on earth. His Gospel of the Family was not a series of abstract ideas but rather a concrete source of comfort and companionship for every family, especially those who experienced difficulties. For example:

- He ministered to a couple on their wedding day in the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana;
- He visited Peter's mother-in-law who was ill;
- He offered sympathy when he heard of deaths in the homes of Lazarus and Jairus;
- He responded to the wailing of the widow at Nain whose son had died;
- He heard the pleas of the father of a child with epilepsy.

‘The covenant of love lived by the Holy Family of Nazareth illuminates the principle which gives shape to every family, and enables it better to face the vicissitude of life and history. On this basis, every family despite its weaknesses can become a light for the world’ (66)



Jesus also affirmed the indissolubility of marriage. He said ‘What God has joined together let no man put asunder’ (Mt 19:6).

However, Jesus always preached a Gospel of Mercy and no one was outside his love. Pope

Francis urges that the Church today accompany and minister to all families as Jesus did, including those whose marriage is broken and those who are in unions that the Church does not recognise as valid.

In the midst of the frenetic pace of life today the virtue of tenderness is important in family life. The image of a child sleeping in her mother's arms after being nursed is found in one of the Psalms as a concrete image for the love between God and his people. This is an image brimming with love and tenderness. God looks upon us with this

tender love all the time! Right now God is looking upon this gathering and his look is a gaze of love. Sometimes in family life, a gaze of love can say it all. Imagine the difference a gaze of love in a family can make as opposed to a look of scorn or contempt or perhaps even worse, a situation where people never meet each other's eyes.



“Against this backdrop of love so central to the Christian experience of marriage and the family, another virtue stands out, one often overlooked in our world of frenetic and superficial relationships. It is tenderness” (28)

There is no perfect family, but there are many great families. Families are a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities with all their joys and hopes and problems. Pope Francis insists that all families, whatever their make

and shape, are surrounded by God's love. At the same time we should not lose the awareness that the great values of Christian marriage and the family correspond to a yearning that is part of human existence.

“I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfill their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way. The Synod's reflections show us that there is no stereotype for the perfect family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems” (57)



5. Discussion (20 min)

- How does this vision of marriage compare with the image of family portrayed in modern media?
- How is it different?
- How does Pope Francis' reflection on God compare with your image of God?
- What have you found reassuring or challenging in tonight's discussion?

6. Invite the participants to fill in the comment sheets

7. Video Clip 6: Closing Reflection (5 min)



8. Tea/Coffee



IN SUMMARY



God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We call this union between Father, Son and Holy Spirit the Blessed Trinity. God is a triune God, a communion of love. We are created in the image of God and so we are made for relationship, to love and be loved. God loves each one of us unconditionally. God's gaze of love is upon us at all times.

Everyone belongs to a family, whether as sister, brother, spouse, grandparent, son, daughter or parent. In *The Joy of Love* Pope Francis includes all in their different roles, all of whom are sharers in the love of the family. However, he singles out parents and their children, who he sees as vitally important for the future of the world and the future of the Church.

He affirms the value of sacramental marriage. A man and a woman who commit to a permanent, exclusive, life long relationship of love, and are open to the gift of new life in their children, are an icon of God's unfailing love for each one of us.

In the sacrament of marriage a couple receives the grace to sustain them in their lifelong commitment.

The ideal of permanence and exclusivity is countercultural in a world that values material things and where people move quickly from one focus to another.

While there is a Christian ideal, there is no such thing as the perfect family, but an interesting mosaic of different realities. Whatever their make and shape all families are surrounded by God's love.



God's love and mercy embraces everyone, whoever they are and whatever they have done. Pope Francis urges us to reach out to all families with care, compassion and support.

There are many stories in the Gospels which tell of Jesus reaching out to families, especially those in need: the wedding feast at Cana; Peter's mother-in-law; the widow at Nain, the father of a child with epilepsy. No one was outside of Jesus' love and mercy.

Pope Francis urges families to foster the virtue of tenderness by treating one another with the gentleness with which Jesus related to those around him.

Families are a gift to the Church which is 'a family of families'.

