

Reflection
On the Following Catechetical Documents on the Family

Familiaris Consortio
Letter to Families
Letter to Children

By
Marlon De La Torre, MA, MEd.
Director of Marriage and Family Life

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The role of the Christian family in the modern world serves the model our Holy Father wishes to impart in the hearts and minds of the faithful to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is in the family where the Gospel is to be received and lived in order to foster the work of the Church. In reading the Holy Father's documents on the family and children, he provides a sense of direction for Holy Mother Church to know and understand the mystery of marriage and the family. In all three writings, he stresses this point almost immediately within the first part of *Familiaris Consortio(FC)*, *Letter to Families* and *Children*.

The Church in her wisdom is aware of the some of the negative aspects the family is being exposed to i.e. divorce, misunderstanding of parental authority, contraception, sterilizations, misunderstanding of the sacrament of matrimony and cohabitation. Pope John Paul II draws upon the plan for marriage as set forth in Part two of (FC) to counter these erroneous acts against marriage and the family. The first point he makes is that God is the author of love. This love is effectively handed on to man by nature of his creation. Whether through marriage, virginity, or celibacy, the vocation of the human person is to love. Within the context of marriage, man and woman are called to a total self-gift of love to one another within the bonds of Holy Matrimony. The emphasis of the total self-gift of love between man and woman refreshes our understanding regarding the context of the family as a communion between God and the covenantal bond with our spouses. Furthermore, this definitive communion is fully complete in Jesus Christ.

Man and woman are called to mutually give and receive each other in unity as one flesh. Both are to be a sincere gift to one another. This mutual giving between man and woman resonate throughout the *Letter to Families*. Another point of obvious

consistency between all three documents is the value of life. The Church's teaching is definitively clear on the openness to life and the protection and dignity of marriage and the forbidden use of any contraceptive device that inhibits life in any way. Hence, the use of Natural Family Planning and the active conjugal and faithful engagement between man and woman in holy matrimony serve as the proper and natural basis for the protection and service of life. The love, joy, and value of children cannot be understated. Part of this love is the opportunity to have children and educate them as primary educators. This understanding of the parents' role as the primary educator has been somewhat lost within the sphere of Holy Matrimony due to the lack of emphasis on having children.

Regardless of what secular society is attempting to profess, parents' primary role is to educate their own children and reciprocate the gift of life given to the parents by educating the gift i.e. children. Assessing this fundamental task on the role of educating children, the Holy Father effectively concentrates the family mission to participate in the development of society as a whole. A key theme throughout all three documents is the defense of the dignity and vocation of the human person. Through this defense, the family aids in the building of the Kingdom of God serving as one of its fundamental tasks. The Church calls forth and welcomes the family to take an active role within the life and mission of the Church to evangelize, communicate the Gospel to the children, educate the children and provide sound catechesis (FC, 50-54).

Great care must be taken to foster a sound family structure. Preparation is the key with any sacrament. The Church serves as truth, beauty, and goodness for the family effectively cultivating the role of the family centered on Christ. Part of this care centers on sound marriage preparation which (FC) lay's out with appropriate canonical,

liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral instruction. The appropriate agents within this preparatory process include the Bishop and Priest, deacon, men and women religious and lay catechists who specialize in marriage preparation. Why mention all these agents? Holy Mother Church loves her children and desires care of their souls whether in preparation for marriage, active engagement during marriage or in difficulties within the marriage.

In conclusion, our Holy Father clearly outlines the importance and value of the family and the gift of life. The family is not only the conjugal fidelity of man and women; it is also the openness to the gift of life in fostering and educating children for the kingdom of God. The role of the family must never be diminished by any external force contrary to the mission of Christ to proclaim the Gospel and develop an intimate communion with him. In love, the beauty of family shall persevere in all its splendor and glory because it is gift from God to his creation. This last point, in my opinion draws upon our Holy Father's passion and instruction on the family.