

Living in the Kingdom

God's Plan for Marriage and the Family (Part III) Lesson 23: The Role of the Christian Family



FC 17

1. *The family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride.*
2. The roles of the Christian family:
 - a. Forming a community of persons
 - b. Serving Life
 - c. Participating in the development of society
 - d. Sharing in the life and mission of the Church

A. Forming a Community of Persons

GS 24
FC 18, 20

3. *"Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self."* The family is a loving community of persons: of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives. The first communion is that between husband and wife, who together form an indivisible unity flowing from God's love for man and Christ's love for the Church.

FC 21

4. The Christian family is the "domestic Church" where all members have the grace and responsibility of building the communion of persons that makes the family a "school of deeper humanity."

Eph 5:25
FC 25

5. **Men:** husbands and fathers. A man must have a profound respect for the equal dignity of his wife and must love her as Christ loved the Church. Men are called to play a role in the education of their children and to reveal and relive the fatherhood of God in their own families.

FC 22-24

6. **Women** have the same dignity and responsibility as men. They are not only wives and mothers but have access to public functions. Yet they should not be compelled to work outside the home, a work of irreplaceable value. Offenses against the dignity of women see them as objects of trade at the service of selfish pleasure, e.g. slavery, pornography, prostitution, discrimination.

FC 26-27

7. **Children:** Christian families should show acceptance, love, esteem, and material, emotional, spiritual concern for every child, as well as supporting the role of the elderly within the community and the family.

B. Serving Life

FC 28-30
Gen 1:28
CCC 2366
HV 11

8. The **transmission of life:** God calls man and woman to share in His love and in His power as Creator and Father. The chief task of the family is to serve life, transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person. Fecundity is the fruit and the sign of conjugal love, the living testimony of the total self-giving of the spouses, and so every sexual act must always be open to new life.

LF 12, HV 12
FC 32

9. **Union and procreation** are the two dimensions of sexuality that cannot be artificially separated without damaging marital love. Every action that attempts to separate these two dimensions and to render procreation impossible is intrinsically immoral. **Contraception** is always wrong because when it is used, conjugal love can no longer be a total and fruitful gift of self.

<p>CCC 2375-78</p>	<p>10. Natural Family Planning (NFP) is the recourse to the woman's periods of infertility to regulate births. It encourages dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control, and prevents the use of sexuality as an "object" that breaks the unity of body and soul.</p> <p>11. Couples who are sterile suffer greatly. Research aimed at reducing human sterility is encouraged, as long as it is according to the design and will of God. Techniques of artificial insemination and fertilization are always gravely immoral, especially when they involve a person other than the couple to conceive (donation of sperm or ovum, surrogate uterus). These techniques betray the child's right to be born of a married father and a mother. Artificial techniques involving only the married couple are also morally wrong because they dissociate the sexual act from the procreative act. A child is not property to which one has a "right," but a gift from God.</p>
<p>FC 33</p>	<p>12. As Teacher, the Church must always proclaim the norms guiding the responsible transmission of life. As Mother, She is close to the many married couples in difficulty over this issue.</p>
<p>FC 36-37</p>	<p>13. Married couples are called to participate in God's creative activity by educating their children. Parents are the primary educators of their children and the family is the first school of social living where children learn the essential values of human life. Parents have the duty to give their children a clear and delicate sex education, in the context of chastity education.</p>
<p>FC 38</p>	<p>14. Parents share in the authority and love of God the Father and Christ the Shepherd, and in the motherly love of the Church. Parents are the first heralds of the Gospel for their children. The family is the first school where children learn to follow Christ, and are introduced to the mystery of salvation and the life of the Church.</p>
<p>FC 42-48</p>	<p>C. Participating in the development of society</p> <p>15. The family is the first and vital cell of society and the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society. As a "small-scale Church," the Christian family is called to be a sign of unity for the world and so to exercise its prophetic role by bearing witness to the Kingdom and peace of Christ.</p>
<p>FC 44-45</p>	<p>16. Families should devote themselves to social service activities such as serving the poor and offering hospitality. They also play a political role in seeing that the laws of the state support and defend the rights and duties of the family.</p>
<p>FC 49-50</p>	<p>D. Sharing in the life and mission of the Church</p> <p>17. The family is at the service of the building up of the Kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church. As domestic Church, the Christian family is grafted into the mystery of the Church and so becomes a saving community, called to communicate Christ's love to others.</p>
<p>FC 51-54</p>	<p>18. As a believing and evangelizing community, the Christian family fulfills its prophetic role by welcoming and announcing the word of God. All members of the family should constantly evangelize and be evangelized. The family is called to preach the gospel to the whole creation, in communion with the parish and diocese.</p>

FC 55-58	19.As a community in dialogue with God, the Christian family has a part in the priestly role of the Church, through the sacraments, the offering of one's life, and prayer. This role is grounded in Baptism and in matrimony, finds pardon in the sacrament of penance, and has its highest expression in the Eucharist.
FC 59-62	20.Members of the family are transformed into spiritual sacrifices through a life of prayer . Parents have the responsibility of educating their children in prayer through their concrete example and living witness. Prayer in the family should be the natural introduction for children to the liturgical prayer of the Church. The Christian family should strive to celebrate at home the times and feasts of the liturgical year.
FC 63-64	21.As a community at the service of man, the Christian family is called to participate in Christ's kingly role in sharing His spirit and practice of service to man, through self-denial and a holy life, and by welcoming, respecting and serving every human being as a child of God.

Bibliography and Abbreviations

- CCC: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*;
- FC: John Paul II, The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (*Familiaris Consortio*);
- LF: John Paul II, *Letter to Families*.
- GS: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*;
- HV: Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*;
- TMHS: Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*;
- TOB: John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*.

Questions for Discussion

Part I

1. How does marriage in God's plan differ from how marriage is understood in our culture? Why do so many marriages fail in our modern times?
2. Discuss the Song of Songs. How is the love between man and woman related to the love of God for His people?
3. How did Christ transform the meaning of marriage?
4. What does the "Great Mystery" that St. Paul speaks of in Ephesians mean for the day-to-day life of Christian married couples? Why is marriage a sign of hope for our participation in the life of the Trinity?
5. How do both marriage and consecrated celibacy reflect the mystery of God's love for His people?
6. What is the point of chastity? Is it more important for single, married, or consecrated people? How do we grow in chastity?
7. What is the problem with homosexuality? What is wrong with two men or two women loving each other?
8. What is the problem with masturbating or looking at pornography? These private actions don't seem to hurt anyone.

Part II

1. Name some essential elements to marriage. What causes a marriage to be invalid?
2. What is the difference between divorce and a Catholic annulment?
3. What are some difficulties that you could foresee in a mixed marriage? What difference would it make if you would marry a Protestant or Messianic Jew, an orthodox or secular Jew, a Muslim, New Ager, or atheist?
4. What is the "grace of matrimony"? What does it do to the married couple?
5. What are the three "goods and requirements" of married love? What are some of the sins that attack and may destroy these goods?
6. What is the problem with cohabitation, if two people really love each other but are not yet ready to get married?
7. What can we learn from the Holy Family?

Part III

1. What are the four roles of the Christian family?
2. How does each member of the family play his or her role in building the family as a community of persons? How does our society particularly challenge the roles of father, mother, children, elderly?
3. What are the two dimensions of sexuality that may never be separated?
4. What is the problem with contraception? What is the difference between using contraceptives and natural family planning?
5. What is the problem with techniques of artificial insemination and fertilization?
6. Who are the primary educators of children, the school, the Church, or the parents? How should parents carry out their educational role to their children?
7. How may the family participate in the development of society?
8. How should the family participate in the life and mission of the Church through its prophetic, priestly and kingly roles?