

Sacrificial Love and Respect: The Means for Attaining and Nurturing a Holy Family

By: Fr. Joseph Pellegrino

I certainly hope all of you have had a wonderful Christmas. Christmas week is a week to celebrate our families. I know those you with children or grandchildren loved seeing the joy on the children's faces when they opened their presents. It's quite clear to me that so many of our parents really enjoy their children.

It is so fitting for us to be celebrating the Feast of the Holy Family of Christmastime. The family is the central unit of our faith life. If God is love, and he is, then we first experienced his presence while we were still inside our mothers. We were nurtured in his love through the love of our families.

I would like to reflect today particularly on family life.

We have to begin, as most families begin with marriage. You might not realize it, but your priests spend and enjoy spending a tremendous amount of time preparing people for marriage. I meet with couples a minimum of five sessions, usually a lot more than that. Some of you might say, what do you priests know about marriage anyway that you could prepare a couple? Well, aside from the courses we take, like Psycho dynamics of Interpersonal Relationships of Marriage I, (followed by Psycho dynamics of Interpersonal Relationships of Marriage II), and aside from our training by our pastors, what do we priests know? We know what makes a marriage a marriage: and that is sacrificial love, the very presence of Christ on the Cross. Everything that I do, whether it's discussing communications or problem solving or finances or children or in-laws or out-laws or goals, everything revolves around helping the couple make sacrificial love a reality in their marriage. It is not for decoration that we wear the cross of Christ. It is a sign that we want to love as he loves.

I have a lot of fun with the couples I see. Sometimes I ask them what the three most words in marriage are. After they respond, "I love you," I tell them, "No" The three most important words in marriage are "You're right, dear." Actually, that's not that much of a joke. Aside from major decisions which flow from the husband and wife together, most of the other squabbles aren't worth getting upset over. "You're right dear," if it is not patronizing, can actually express a form of sacrificial love. A person is willing to sacrifice his or her opinion on a minor matter out of love for their spouse. The cross of Christ doesn't have to involve a major sacrifice; perhaps it is just as simple as loving, caring and accepting someone else's view.

I spend a lot of time on marital communication. Trying to understand the needs of a spouse that lie beneath the communication takes a lot of work and a lot of sacrificial love. The spouse that listens not only to what his or her spouse is saying but why they are saying it, is really loving. So many of you have said to me, "My husband, my wife, really understands me." That doesn't just happen. It results from a real, practical application of the sacrifi-

cial love of Jesus to the care for one's spouse. It results from not being happy with responding to "What my husband or wife is saying," but also, to respond to "Why my husband or wife is saying this."

Another concrete application of the sacrificial love of the Lord is simple respect. I try to bring this out over and over again with the young people. "Never, allow anyone to say a negative word about your spouse, even if it's true, especially if it's true." Respect each other's individuality, need for privacy, need for all forms of support. Treat each other with respect and you earn the respect of all who know you. Treat each other with respect and your children will grow up understanding what respect is. Everyone complains that respect is missing from our society. Perhaps, they are right. But respect cannot be imposed upon society, it flows from the basic unit of society, the family.

This brings us to the family. When children experience the respect that their Moms and Dads have for each other then they can learn how they can respect others, beginning with their parents. Even if children grow up in a single home, if the absent parent is treated with respect, then children learn to respect both their parents.

People will often say, "You children will always be your children, but they are only yours to care for a brief time." Children are entrusted to you for around twenty years to help them be that unique reflection of the image of God your love for your spouse united with God created them to be. When you nurture your children's individuality, nourish the divine life within them, and lead them, that is educate them, to become decent Christian leaders, then you are respecting them for whom they are—even if this means occasionally being told that "You are the meanest Mommy in the world" because you care.

Family comes first. Joseph leaves his country and friends to go to Egypt to protect his family from Herod. You turn off the TV set, keep garbage out of your home, set reasonable rules and do everything you can to protect your family. Your family is more important than any of the lures of the materialistic aspects of our society. The heart of your family is the presence of Jesus Christ, present in each other as individuals and present in your family unit. This is the one, true family value. Our means for attaining and nourishing this value, our means for attaining and nourishing the presence of the Lord, are sacrificial love and respect.

May your family continue to grow in the Love of the Lord throughout the new year.

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READINGS OF THE WEEK

Sirach 3:3-7

Colossians 3:12-21

Matthew 2:13-23

December 29, 2013

英 女 王 維 多 利 亞 時 代 的 聖 誕 節

鄒 保 祿 神 父

雖然在十九世紀之前，英國曾慶祝過耶穌聖誕節，但沒有比維多利亞女王時代(1819-37-1901)來的更完美，因為很多聖誕的傳統來自她的時代，例如：

甲：盒子日

當查理狄更斯(1819-1870)出版名著“聖誕頌歌”(Christmas Carol)之時，它給予讀者們很大的震撼，此書強調在聖誕節一個愛德的行為。使富裕的維多利亞的富貴人給貧窮人分享他們的財富。聖誕節後一天(12/26)為盒子日，在這一天教會打開教堂的奉獻箱，把裏面的金錢捐給窮人。

乙：唱聖誕歌

在中古世紀人們已唱聖誕歌曲，但到了宗教改革時代衰微一時，到了十九世紀時的維多利亞女王時代又恢復這種美好的習慣，著名的有如“普天下大喜慶”(O come all ye faithful)，“小白冷鎮”(O little town of Bethlehem)，“走向馬槽”(Away in a Manger)。至到現在，宗教和非宗教人士都很喜歡這些歌曲。

丙：聖誕卞片

第一張聖誕卞片首先出現在一八四三年，與查理狄更斯的名著“聖誕頌歌”一書同年，它本是亨利(Henry Cole)的想法且由他的朋友若望何思理(John Calcott Horsley)的設計，且印了一千多份而只花一個仕令。第一張卞片的圖片是一家人快樂地在一起喝酒。兩面都畫有行愛德的圖片，把狄更斯的聖誕節愛的氣份放在一起。

丁：聖誕樹

在十六世紀時，德國已有聖誕樹的習慣，但要等到維多利亞的德國籍的丈夫亞爾伯特王子(Prince Albert)在一八四一年把德國的習慣傳入。在聖誕樹上加放臘燭，送給他的妻子和兒女，這第一個裝飾品是用手做的。此外，又放些糖果和餅乾，到了後來，又加添小裝會1飾品。

戊：吃火雞肉

牛肉和鵝肉是聖誕節主要的食物因為比火雞肉便宜，貧窮人家沒有自己的烤箱，他們便拿到麪包店去烤。如果他們連牛肉或鵝肉都認為太貴，只好吃兔子肉了……
維多利亞女王雖然可吃火雞肉，但有時也吃天鵝肉。

由此可見，現代的聖誕節習俗多從德國和英國傳入的。