

Meditations: Feast of the Holy Family

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during these days of the Christmas season. The topics are: God's plan for the family; cradle of all gifts; our first apostolate.

- God's plan for the family
- Cradle of all gifts
- Our first apostolate

THE CHILD'S father and mother were amazed at what was said about him (Lk 2:33). We are also amazed that God became a child and needed a family. In the family, we learn to let ourselves be loved, helped, and

forgiven. We are loved and cared for long before we are aware of it. We will never be able to pay for that love, and the cycle continues generation after generation. It is not a burden that overwhelms us but a reality that fills us with gratitude and urges us to reciprocate. Thank you, Lord, for the family you have given each of us!

With your whole heart honor your father; your mother's birth pangs do not forget. Remember, of these parents you were born; what can you give them for all they gave you? (Sir 7:27-28), Sacred Scripture says. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who have cared for us before we could even thank them. It is only right that our parents should share in our happiness. Very often, they are the ones who plant the seeds of faith and piety in our lives.

St. Josemaría highlights each family's irreplaceable mission: "When I think of Christian homes, I like to imagine them as being full of the light and joy that were in the home of the holy family. The message of Christmas is heard in all its forcefulness: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.' 'And may the peace of Christ triumph in your hearts,' writes the Apostle. It is a peace that comes from knowing that our Father God loves us, and that we are made one with Christ. It results from being under the protection of the Virgin, our Lady, and assisted by St Joseph. This is the great light that illuminates our lives. In the midst of difficulties and of our own personal failings, it encourages us to keep up our effort."^[1]

WHAT IS truly important in our lives is knowing that we are loved and learning how to love. This happens first of all within our own families. But, at the same time, our families are not perfect. We are all flawed. That is why we can now ask Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to intercede for all families in difficulty.

This first social circle could be called the cradle of all gifts. There we feel blessed and affirmed for who we are and discover that our life is also a gift to others. It is written in our hearts that we are all children. Some are also fathers or mothers, and some have brothers or sisters... but we are all sons or daughters. Life has been given to us; someone is waiting for us. Even in the most challenging situations, our condition as children is so powerful that it usually continues to be a privileged path to God the Father.

"The Western world considers Christmas a family celebration. Being together and exchanging gifts emphasizes the strong desire for reciprocal communion and sheds light on the highest values of the family institution. This is shown by the communion of love between persons based on truth, on love, on the indissoluble fidelity of husband and wife and on openness to the gift of life. In the light of Christmas, the family sees its vocation as a community of shared plans, solidarity, forgiveness and faith, where individuals do not lose their identity, but contribute with their own specific gifts to the growth of all. This is what occurred in the Holy Family, presented by faith as the first model for families enlightened by Christ."^[2]

IN BETHLEHEM, God became one of us. He wants to experience our history, our journey, and our freedom. "The family is also a sign of Christ. It manifests the closeness of God who is a part of every human life, since he became one with us through his incarnation, death and resurrection."^[3] The power of the family is so great that it fills us with hope. The transformative and healing power of love in the family can overcome all difficulties, no matter how great they may seem. Our families are the place God chooses to give us all his gifts: first, life, and with it, faith, vocation, a name, education, temperament, language, and a place to belong. It is an incredible challenge and the reason St. John Paul II chose to include an invocation to the Queen of the Family in the litany of the Rosary. Since then, millions of voices and hearts have asked our Lady to protect families around the world,

that they may all be the cradle from which humanity is continually renewed.

Our parents and siblings are our own flesh and blood, and our apostolic concern naturally begins with them. The apostolate of Christ's first disciples began thus. Andrew *first found his own brother Simon and told him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). Then he brought him to Jesus (Jn 1:41-42)*. And John, who, with Andrew, came to our Lord first, shared his discovery with his brother James and prepared him to receive Jesus' call when he found him working with the nets. It is only logical that St. Josemaría would call Moses' commandment about honouring one's family *a most sweet precept*.

Like Mary and Joseph, we want to be filled with admiration. In Bethlehem,

God came down to each family, especially those that are most wounded, to heal, accompany, and discover with us the decisive role he has planned for each child and for the infant Jesus.

^[1] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 22.

^[2] John Paul II, General Audience, 29 December 1999.

^[3] Pope Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, 161.
