

Nazareth and Bethlehem - Christ in your own home

"When spouses found their community of life on the Eucharist, their home reproduces spiritually the house in Bethlehem, the home in Nazareth." These words of Bishop Javier Echevarria are drawn from his book, "The Eucharist and Christian Life."

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The centerpiece of the life-giving community matrimony establishes is the Eucharistic mystery. Jesus continues to give himself to his Spouse in the Sacrifice of the Mass; similarly, it is the Eucharist that gives spouses the light and strength to love each other as He loves his Church and to give his Father new children through their faithful and fruitful love. For Christian spouses, the Tabernacle constitutes the constant reference point of their love.

When spouses found their community of life on the Eucharist, their home reproduces spiritually the house in Bethlehem, the home in Nazareth. This is not to assert that they supernaturally incorporate the Family of Jesus on this earth. Mary and Joseph centered their lives on Jesus, who made them one. Everything they set out to do--their thoughts, their dreams, their joys and sorrows--passed through that Son

God entrusted to them. The Evangelists tell us how Jesus came into the most pure womb of Mary when she had ruled out physical motherhood by offering her virginity to the Lord. Matthew also tells us how Jesus entered the life of Joseph when the Patriarch was thinking of leaving his spouse in secret when confronted by that deep mystery so as not to disgrace her. This intervention of the Father reinforced the holy bond Mary and Joseph had already pledged, when He sent the Holy Spirit to her so that his Word might take on human nature, born of a virgin.

Christ does not separate; he unites. By adding affection to charity He increases the respect we have for each other and wisely values our needs in such a way that our spiritual conduct does not weigh upon us. For example, it is not necessary to withdraw from prayer

when we need to repair a door, or receive a visitor, or prepare a meal; those very activities become occasions for an encounter with God. They themselves can be converted into prayer.

What separates people, what causes a marriage to fail, is usually a proud insistence on one's own way of seeing things, thus resisting the gift of God and isolating oneself from others. Here is what St. Josemaria advised spouses to do: 'Banish pride, the greatest enemy of conjugal life; in your little quarrels, neither of you is right. Whoever is the calmer has to say something that shelves his bad mood. Then later on--when you are alone--you can have it out so as to quickly restore peace.'

In the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus unites Christian spouses when both are centered on the Eucharist, and more specifically when they express

their Eucharistic piety together. For many years now we have heard that 'the family that prays together stays together.' And history has confirmed it. There are many ways to put that saying into practice: grace before and after meals, the family Rosary, attending Sunday Mass and occasionally other devotions all together. Let's recognize that of all devout practices, the Eucharist is by far the principal one, even if it is sometimes difficult to take part in it.

It is so important to attend Holy Mass together because Christ is present there in his Sacrifice: It is to make Jesus the connecting link between the spouses and to reinforce the bond of faith and love that unites them. Sunday Mass is an essential element of the week for it helps to center the matrimonial union and the whole of family life on the Lord. It is to give the sacrifice of Jesus the place of honor above everything else.

It is to live in Him and through Him and with Him, even if the church is some distance away and one cannot go there every day.

To be centered on the Eucharist is the same as bringing Jesus home, entering into spiritual communion with the Holy Family. We are led by the hand, as it were, to the Most Blessed Trinity. Some verses of the Spanish poet, Lope de Vega, apply here: At the end of act II in his play on St. Isidore he writes: 'When Christ is living there with Joseph and with Mary, that earthly trinity is a figure of the heavenly one because there is only one God.' A Christian home rooted in the Eucharist draws goodness from the home of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. There, each is thinking of the others and at their service. As the Handmaid of the Lord obeys the one who considers himself unworthy to live at her side, that

humility is what sustains their mutual affection and self-giving.

When the spouses seek to make their faith and love grow in harmony with Jesus' love for his Church--so manifest in the Eucharist--their home already anticipates heaven without losing the simplicity and limitations of earthly things. Tertullian observed this long ago: 'How shall I describe the happiness of the marriage that the Church unites, self-giving confirms, blessing seals, the angels proclaim, and God the Father blesses?...The spouses are like brother and sister, servants of each other, but without any separation of body or soul. Truly they are two in one flesh, and where there is only one flesh, there must also be only one spirit....When he sees such a home, Christ rejoices and sends it his peace; where the two are, there He is, and where He is, there can be no evil.'

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