



THE NEW SHOFAR

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The human family is a gift from God for the good of the world

Our celebration of the Feast of the Holy Family at the opening of a new year is an invitation to celebrate all that is good in the God given gift of marriage and family life. It is meant to remind us that family life is a sharing in the very life of God – Father, Son and Spirit. It is through the family that God reveals Himself and his plans for all men and women. If there was ever a time when the beauty and the power of the Christian family needed to be preached and proclaimed it is surely in the world in which we live today. As Christians we remain deeply convinced that it is only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that people legitimately place in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled. Families need God.

Marriage and family life were a part of the creative plans of God unfolding at the very beginning of creation and they reached their fullness in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. This event in human history sanctified families of all times. He was born into a human family and so families are revitalised by all Jesus the Christ of God did for the world.

Driven by selfishness and a “me only” philosophy, there are powerful forces seeking to destroy it or in some way to deform it. Such ideas are forgetting that the well-being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the good of the family. Healthy families mean a healthy world. At least that is the divine plan as revealed by God. The Church perceives in a more urgent and compelling way her mission of proclaiming to all people the plan of God for marriage and the family. The dignity of the human person is upheld and celebrated in the family as called into being by God Himself. Sadly though, families struggle in the face of this corruption of ideas and over-emphasis on the rights of the self.

What is called for on this feast day is a commitment to conversion

When God created man and the woman in love, He created them in His own image and likeness and created them for loving. The whole of humanity is created to be living in this kind of loving community and at creation, were gifted with the graces necessary to make this a reality. Furthermore, it is in this setting that human sexuality is celebrated as a part of the same divine gift of creation. It is the way in which we participate in God’s ongoing creation and as such is a source of holiness, of grace and is meant to be celebrated within the bonds of marriage and family.

As has been revealed to us in the scriptures, marriage and family are celebrated as a part of the communion of love between God and people. We can see this in action against the backdrop of the relationship between God and His chosen people Israel. That love

did not end, even in the face of infidelity and constant breaches of the covenant. God's love endures and divine love heals.

This is why, in the Old Testament, we see the nation's major sins being expressed in the language of broken marriage relationships - idolatry is prostitution, infidelity is adultery, disobedience to the law is abandonment of the spousal love of the Lord. But the infidelity of Israel did not destroy the fidelity of the Lord, and therefore this faithful love of God is put forward as the model of the of faithful love which should exist between spouses.

Jesus Christ, Bridegroom of the Church

The traditional Christian world view is that the communion between God and His people finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He is the Bridegroom who loves and gives Himself as the Savior of humanity, uniting us to Himself as His body. During His life He gave testimony to the truth of marriage as a gift of God.

His ministry and mission are all about this divine love, a love that reaches its pinnacle in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ makes of Himself on the Cross, a sacrifice offered for His bride, the Church. In this sacrifice of love, faith enables us to see the divine plan at work in all men and women, a plan witnessed to by a sanctified marriage relationships.

The world today needs sanctified marriages and Christian families

Marriage is important for the world because in the relationship of love between a man and a woman, we can see and experience the nature of the eternal covenant set in place by Jesus in the shedding of His blood on the cross. Such love has the power to transform, to uplift people's lives and to bring the husband, wife and family into the fullness of love that is possible for those who live as God created us to be living.

Because marriage is a sacrament, spouses are bound to one another in an unbreakable way. Their belonging to each other represents the relationship of Christ with the Church. It is a sacred bond. Rich in blessings when faithfully lived.

Marriage relationships are a reminder to the Church, and to the world of what happened on the Cross. The husband and wife are to share their faith with each other and to be for their children *witnesses* to the salvation in which they share through the sacrament. Christian marriage and the Christian family build up the Church.

Pope Francis stresses how family holiness is always tied to little gestures and not just to grand theories. They are the quiet things done by mothers and grandmothers, by fathers and grandfathers, by children. They are little signs of tenderness, affection and compassion shared daily. The small gestures, the generous giving of self. Love is shown by little things, by attention to small daily signs which make us feel at home. Faith grows when it is lived and shaped by love. That is why our families, our homes, are true domestic churches. They are the right place for faith to become life and life to become faith. In families we live as Jesus lived – mother, father and children.