



THE NEW SHOFAR

BISHOP MICHAEL HOUGH

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The triune God is a communion of love, and the family its living reflection – Pope Francis

Sadly, one phenomenon characterising the modern Western world, is the breakdown of family life. *The most rampant divorce rate of human history, which in some cities in the United States has reached a rate approaching a 100%. One large city, unnamed, recently had a divorce rate of 500%, five divorces for one marriage that year. The national American rate is well over 50% and climbing constantly. European social scientists, who see what's happening, say America on these conditions cannot survive (John Hardon).*

The breakdown of what was once a united cohesive parochial life, where parishes live together and work together as clusters of united families, is in many countries is but a fond memory. For many it is little more than an outdated social oddity. Despite this, the preservation and the restoration of Christian family life is essential if a Christian society is to survive. This sounds like a big call, but it is reasonable to say that Christianity will survive only where the family either survives or is restored. With this introduction we go back to our subject, the Holy Family, model for the modern world. We begin by looking as the foundation for our further reflections on the qualities of the Holy Family. If we look closely at the Holy Family as described in the New Testament, we find certain unmistakable qualities that all families, natural and supernatural, desperately need in today's divided world.

Applying to Ourselves the Qualities of the Holy Family

We believe all families are born of God. No Christian group of people come together as a family except by a special providence of God. It is God who brings us together in marriage. Furthermore, we believe that every family comes into existence to be a reflection on earth of the Trinity. God as God is not a solitary. God as God is a community.

Families on earth are brought together by God to be created manifestations of the unity that exists between Father, Son and Spirit. Faith reminds us of how our father and mother did not just happen to meet one another and coincidentally happened to marry and by some quirk of fate happened to have us as offspring. No! Every family is the providential creation of God who is Himself the infinite community of the most blessed Trinity.

A part of the beauty of marriage and family is the way God brings the different members of a family together in unity. Different people, with a variety of gifts, made one in the sacrament of marriage. It is the same with God - the three Persons in God are not the same. Father is not the Son. Father and Son are not the Holy Spirit. Yet all form together the one God. A family ceases to be a family when each person pursues his or her own interests without reference to or concern for the other members of the family. Diversity enriches us as a family but it becomes an evil when it functions in a loosely knit group of people who do their own thing but happen to live in the same household. A family is a family! It is not a group or a cluster or a crowd or a chance gathering of different people.

Families must communicate and share common goals

At the heart of this common love is a common purpose. If only love can unite different people and enable them to live and work together in peace and harmony, then only the common united vision of those who belong to this family gives them existence as a family and sustains them in family life. But a common vision for family takes time and effort. It means talking, sharing, listening, forgiving and endless patience and self-sacrifice. Happy and fulfilling families do not happen by accident. It takes work, commitment and a willingness to put the other person first. One reason why so many marriages collapse today is because family life is built upon self-sacrifice and hard work. When the joy and rapture of the honeymoon wears off, it is time to settle down and in grace build a Godly family together, as is the divine plan for humanity.

For Christians, this common vision grows out of faith. We believe there is one destiny for all men and women, one means of salvation. One Jesus Christ who is Lord and Saviour of all, one Way to the Father. When this faith is shared and celebrated in families, the fullness of heavenly blessings is ours and only then shall we taste and see the fruits of being a family called together under God. There is no substitute for a common gospel vision. Based on a unifying faith which unifies diverse people with different gifts by the strongest bond of unity possible, a united family collaborates with God in the building of a just and compassionate community called into existence for divine purposes.

A New Year guide for growing our families under God

Forgive: *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you (Colossians 3:13).*

Self care: *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body (1 Corinthians 19:20).*

Love others. The most important one, answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."

Be a role model. *Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity (Titus 2:7).*

Don't be discouraged by failures. *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9).*

Value your friendships. *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? (Ecclesiastes 4:9-11)*