



Acies Allocutio



Presentata Curia
Sunday 26th March 2015

Mary's experience points the way for the Synod on the Family

My dear fellow Legionaries,

There is a very beautiful image of Our Lady on the cover of this month's edition of the Magnificat. It shows her, a young teenage face, looking with awe, and wonder and almost with a question at the angel. She is being asked to give life to the Saviour, to allow him enter our world. And her answer is simple: "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word!"

Mary opens her whole being to become the place where the Author of life enters this world. She becomes part of the life-giving process which we see all around us. Except in her case she is going to allow the very source of life take root in our world. An extraordinary event in history and an extraordinary privilege for her and us!

Life is one of the greatest gifts of God and on this planet the transmission of life is among the most extraordinary events that happens. There is a great mystery about that transmission of life. It is a partaking in the very work of God who gives life and seeks not only that they might have life but have it to the full (Jn 10:10). He involves us in that work.

The coming into being of life is a miracle. Ask any couple who have a child. They look in wonder at this baby who has been born, who is unique and will soon assert his independence. There is a great mystery about where once there were two and now there are three and that new life full of hope and energy.

It is equally an extraordinary event when someone freely lays down his life that others may have life. History is full of stories of people who were ready to sacrifice their lives for others. That too is a wonder. There are those who lived to tell their tale, others who made the supreme sacrifice. And topping that list is the mystery we celebrate at this time of year. "Christ died for us while we were yet sinners" (Rm 5:8).

Those who choose to be celibate or who remain single often make a great contribution to life. They may not physically generate life but by their work and example help others to live and even to pass on life. Frank Duff is an outstanding example of this as is Matt Talbot. Frank through his work in the Hostels has helped many a child and mother. Matt by his example and prayers has helped many overcome addictions and enabled them to go on and make a good offering of themselves in life.



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But it would be wrong not to acknowledge the extraordinary contribution those make who marry, who bring children into the world and rear them in the bosom of the family. Pope John Paul II was at pains to state this in his lectures on the theology of the body. Who among us would be here if not for the fact of our parents? Think on that: Everyone among us on this planet depended on the cooperation of a male and female so they could exist. The work of male and female together in transmitting life is a massive contribution. Indeed it is a unique contribution.

And this is clearly stated from the very beginning of the Bible. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them and said ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’” (Gen 1:27-28). The very fact of this work of giving life and bringing new life into the world is a sign of God’s blessing.

When he was among us Jesus was challenged on his ideas of marriage. In the Sermon on the Mount he often used the phrase, “You heard how it was said in olden times But now I say this to you” But when it came to what marriage was he took a different line: “From the beginning of creation God made them male and female and for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two will become one flesh” (Mk 10:6-8). Jesus is very clear as to what the desire of his heavenly father is: that a man shall marry a woman and that they give life and become part of God’s life giving process. In this they reflect the Trinitarian God.

The present Synod on the family has at its heart the defence of this will of God in the face of many problems and obstacles. We must be very careful not to be distracted by media presentation of side issues. Facing into a sea of problems, the aim of the Synod is to try and promote the will of God in respect for marriage. The Holy Father has tried to draw the whole Church into this because it is a work for us all. And that is the work of promoting marriage as a stable union of a man and a woman for the good of the couple themselves and not least for the children.

Let us go back to the Genesis text on marriage. In the second Creation account we are told about God helping the man to have a suitable helpmate. To have a good friend who can walk the road of life with you as a friend and support over many years and between them to make family and to help the children grow and mature until they too can find suitable helpmates. We all have to work on how we can help young people find those suitable helpmates. Because sometimes they choose partners not so suitable. Arranged marriages can work if eh parents really think of eh good of the couple and are not influenced by economic argument or political gain. This we all have to work on together in a world where it can be hard to put an old head on young shoulders. And the willingness of young people to listen to the advice of older heads may hinge on how they were treated when they were younger.



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The biblical text speaks of God taking a rib from the man and forming a woman. He takes the rib from near the man's heart. And that also begs a question: how close or suitable are they at a heart level? Is the emotional mix right? Can they open up their hearts fully and honestly to each other? Can they really understand one another? If a couple have a disagreement before marriage and sit down and talk it out and resolve the issue then that can be a good sign that they can make it in marriage. When they shelve issues without a solution, well that may not be a good sign.

It also speaks of them clinging to one another. One of the biggest modern problems arising from modern day life is the risk of drifting apart. He goes his way, she hers. They pass each other occasionally. They do not make quality time for each other and that puts them at risk. They may find their hearts landing on another person. Or they may realise that they have become strangers to each other. All this too is a challenge to a community that is trying to promote God's ways. Clinging to each other means that they keep well in touch as each grows and matures and changes. Quality time is essential in all relationships. I have to find time each day for God and married couples must do the same for each other. And indeed some time for God would not go astray either. So I am struck at how accurate the Bible is from the start.

Clinging also suggests the notion of commitment. Marriage is not about just as long as a party feels like it. It is a solemn undertaking for the good of the parties and the children that they make a life-long covenant of support to each other. The realistic world is that eventually someone might come across a better model or a "proper" man. There are so many fish in the sea! But on their honour before God a specific couple commit to each other for life and do so in the Lord and for the Lord. In effect they say to each other, "I as a mature adult take you as my spouse and I'll stand by you through anything. You can count on me being the friend of your life no matter what!"

May I add here that when a couple pray and bring their union to God and involve him in it, which is how a sacramental marriage should be lived, they are given an extra strength.

Broken marriages are not something we should be complacent about or say, "Ah well, it has to happen". The pain, even financial, it leaves behind, should tell us that we need to become more determined to try and prevent this happening.

What of children? We speak about protecting children. I think we all agree that there is no better environment than a happy home where daddy and mammy are at peace with each other and the children are growing happily together. The happy home is the best environment for children and again we should do all we can to promote such.



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The promotion of the vision of marriage given in the Bible and in the Gospel is one of the great challenges of our day. There are many issues and challenges around the area of marriage but we must never overlook what marriage is as designed by God's will and one of our great challenges is to promote and assist that plan of God from the beginning.

God had a special plan for Mary when he asked her to become the mother of his only-begotten Son. Had God willed he could have let her have her child in her family of origin with Joachim and Anna minding him as well. But God's design for Jesus had to coincide with the original plan of God. Jesus also needed a father figure on earth. This would help him understand and articulate in a human way what the heavenly Father was like. So God's provision of Joseph as a foster father provided for the needs of the son of Mary as he developed. But it also indicates to us what God's preferred option in rearing children is. The many things that Jesus says tell us that St. Joseph did indeed a fine job in helping Jesus at a human level grasp this particular role. In this month of March we celebrate not only Mary's taking on of the life-giving role of mother but also that excellent man given to her to support her and Jesus.

There is a great challenge before us. It is the same challenge that is before the Synod of bishops: how to promote the original plan of God for marriage. It is not going to be a quick-fix. It will require a definite determination and commitment, hard work and perseverance. But if we stay with it and refuse to capitulate to the modern way of selfishness and the abandonment of sound ways, then we will bear fruit.

Let us ask her who bore the fruit of the Holy Spirit to obtain from her Son a miracle on a par with what she got him to do in Cana. Who better can the servants of marriage go to than to her who is the patroness of married life?

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill