

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: «The family`s vocation»

In the month of February, during our fraternal meetings, we are proposing some excerpts of the Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family by our Pope Francis. These excerpts will help us in our reflection on the actual situation in our families.

Recall: At the monthly meeting, members should have at their disposal a Bible, at least one copy of the General Constitutions, a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and at least one copy of Living with Christ. Also, members should have in hand their own copy of the Rule.

Good preparation – Good meeting

FEBRUARY 2017 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening Prayer and Song: (According to the Ritual or chosen by the Fraternity)

Biblical Reflection in answer to Article 4 of our Rule:

As Article 4 of our Rule proposes *Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel*, thus we propose a sharing of the gospel, be it the today`s or next Sunday`s.

Afterwards, share your thoughts, using one or two of the following questions:

1. What does this gospel teach us?
2. To whom does it speak?
3. How does it reach us personally?
4. Is it a message of hope? Is there another kind of message? Why and how is it?

Reading: (choose a person who reads calmly)

Introduction (*Article 59 and 60 of the Exhortation*)

Our teaching on marriage and the family cannot fail to be inspired and transformed by this message of love and tenderness; otherwise, it becomes nothing more than the defence of a dry and lifeless doctrine. The mystery of the Christian family can be fully understood only in the light of the Father`s infinite love revealed in Christ, who gave himself up for our sake and who continues to dwell in our midst. I now wish to turn my gaze to the living Christ, who is at the heart of so many love stories, and to invoke the fire of the Spirit upon all the world`s families.

This brief chapter, then, will summarize the Church`s teaching on marriage and the family. Here too I will mention what the Synod Fathers had to say about the light offered by our faith. They began with the gaze of Jesus and they spoke of how he “looked upon the women and men whom he met with love and tenderness, accompanying their steps in truth, patience and mercy as he

proclaimed the demands of the Kingdom of God”. The Lord is also with us today, as we seek to practice and pass on the Gospel of the family.

Sharing:

Take a moment of silence and reflection, thereafter share your reactions to the preceding text. Afterwards continue the reading.

Jesus restores and fulfils God’s plan (*Articles 64 and 65 of the Exhortation*)

... He began his public ministry with the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana (cf. *John* 2:1-11). He shared in everyday moments of friendship with the family of Lazarus and his sisters (cf. *Lk* 10:38) and with the family of Peter (cf. *Mk* 8:14). He sympathized with grieving parents and restored their children to life (cf. *Mk* 5:41; *Lk* 7:14-15). In this way he demonstrated the true meaning of mercy, which entails the restoration of the covenant. This is clear from his conversations with the Samaritan woman (cf. *John* 1:4-30) and with the woman found in adultery (cf. *John* 8:1-11), where the consciousness of sin is awakened by an encounter with Jesus’ gratuitous love”.

The incarnation of the Word in a human family, in Nazareth, by its very newness changed the history of the world. We need to enter into the mystery of Jesus’ birth, into that “yes” given by Mary to the message of the angel, when the Word was conceived in her womb, as well as the “yes” of Joseph, who gave a name to Jesus and watched over Mary. We need to contemplate the joy of the shepherds before the manger, the adoration of the Magi and the flight into Egypt, in which Jesus shares his people’s experience of exile, persecution and humiliation. We need to contemplate the religious expectation of Zechariah and his joy at the birth of John the Baptist, the fulfilment of the promise made known to Simeon and Anna in the Temple and the marvel of the teachers of the Law who listened to the wisdom of the child Jesus. We then need to peer into those thirty long years when Jesus earned his keep by the work of his hands, reciting the traditional prayers and expressions of his people’s faith and coming to know that ancestral faith until he made it bear fruit in the mystery of the Kingdom. This is the mystery of Christmas and the secret of Nazareth, exuding the beauty of family life! It was this that so fascinated Francis of Assisi, Theresa of the Child Jesus and Charles de Foucauld, and continues to fill Christian families with hope and joy.

Reflection:

Take time to fully consider the text, before sharing your reflections.

- What do you retain particularly from this excerpt?

The sacrament of Matrimony (*Articles 71 and 72 of the Exhortation*)

“Scripture and Tradition give us access to knowledge of the Trinity, which is revealed with the features of a family. The family is the image of God, who is a communion of persons. At Christ’s baptism, the Father’s voice was heard, calling Jesus his beloved Son, and in this love we can recognize the Holy Spirit (cf. *Mk* 1:10-11). Jesus, who reconciled all things in himself and redeemed us from sin, not only returned marriage and the family to their original form, but also raised marriage to the sacramental sign of his love for the Church (cf. *Mt* 19:1-12; *Mk* 10:1-12; *Eph* 5:21-32). In the human family, gathered by Christ, ‘the image and likeness’ of the Most Holy Trinity (cf. *Gen* 1:26) has been restored, the mystery from which all true love flows.

Through the Church, marriage and the family receive the grace of the Holy Spirit from Christ, in order to bear witness to the Gospel of God's love".

The sacrament of marriage is not a social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment. The sacrament is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses, since "their mutual belonging is a real representation, through the sacramental sign, of the same relationship between Christ and the Church. The married couple are permanent reminder for the Church of what took place on the cross; they are for one another and for their children witnesses of the salvation in which they share through the sacrament". Marriage is a vocation, inasmuch as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church. Consequently, the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment.

Reflection:

- Which expressions or phrases speak particularly to you? Why? How?
- Take the necessary time to share your thoughts.

The transmission of life and the rearing of children (*Excerpt from Article 81 of the Exhortation*).... The child who is born "does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfilment". He or she does not appear at the end of a process, but is present from the beginning of love as an essential feature, one that cannot be denied without disfiguring that love itself. From the outset, love refuses every impulse to close in on itself; it is open to a fruitfulness that draws it beyond itself. Hence no genital act of husband and wife can refuse this meaning,⁸⁶ even when for various reasons it may not always in fact beget a new life.

Continuation of the transmission ... (Article 81 of the Exhortation)

A child deserves to be born of that love, and not by any other means, for "he or she is not something owed to one, but is a gift", which is "the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of the parents". This is the case because, "according to the order of creation, conjugal love between a man and a woman, and the transmission of life are ordered to each other (cf. *Gen* 1:27-28). Thus the Creator made man and woman share in the work of his creation and, at the same time, made them instruments of his love, entrusting to them the responsibility for the future of mankind, through the transmission of human life".

Reflection:

After the reading, reflect and take time necessary to share on the content of the text.

Then, can we establish links between this exhortation and Article 17 of our Rule noted hereafter?

Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions

Rule 17

In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ.

By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

General Constitutions

Article 24.1

Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, for the Word of God, and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception until death.

Married couples find in the Rule of the SFO an effective aid in their own journey of Christian life, aware that, in the sacrament of matrimony, their love shares in the love that Christ has for his Church. The way spouses love each other and affirm the value of fidelity is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world.

Life –Objective:

During the month of February, let us initiate moments to share with our friends and acquaintances the challenges and benefits of family and fraternal relationships

Events and Information from the Church and the Order

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

End of the meeting: (a prayer or song chosen by the fraternity)

At home

In order to continue our reflection, read the excerpt from Article 84 of the Exhortation

The Synod Fathers also wished to emphasize that “one of the fundamental challenges facing families today is undoubtedly that of raising children, made all the more difficult and complex by today’s cultural reality and the powerful influence of the media”. “The Church assumes a valuable role in supporting families, starting with Christian initiation, through welcoming communities”. At the same time I feel it important to reiterate that the overall education of children is a “most serious duty” and at the same time a “primary right” of parents. This is not just a task or a burden, but an essential and inalienable right that parents are called to defend and of which no one may claim to deprive them. The State offers educational programmes in a subsidiary way, supporting the parents in their indeclinable role; parents themselves enjoy the right to choose freely the kind of education – accessible and of good quality – which they wish to give their children in accordance with their convictions.