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# FAMILY RETREAT CONFERENCES

*By*

REV. EDGAR SCHMIEDELER, O.S.B., PH.D.

FAMILY LIFE BUREAU  
NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE  
1312 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W.  
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*Archbishop of Washington*

August 24, 1953

## INTRODUCTION

Much of the material in these conferences has been used by the author in family retreats given over the years in various dioceses of the United States. All the material relates to Christian marriage and family life. Conferences that dealt with such topics as man's final end, sin, and the means of grace, were also given at the retreats. It is expected that retreat masters who use this publication will supply conferences of their own on these latter topics.

The publications listed in the course of the series should enable the family retreat master considerably to elaborate the conferences, should he care to do so, or even to add to their number.

The "family retreat" is a retreat given for husbands and wives together. Aiming to bring the ideal of Christian marriage and family life into full bloom, it is proving an excellent antidote for the secularism that has in our day invaded so many homes. It has gradually over the years taken on the proportions of a large and promising movement. It is hoped that this series of conferences, published to assist family retreat masters in their work, will give added impetus to the movement.

EDGAR SCHMIEDELER, O.S.B.

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## I. INTRODUCTORY CONFERENCE

Since we are entering upon a Family Retreat, it should be in place that we recall at least briefly what a retreat is, what the nature of a family retreat is. Some of those present have undoubtedly made retreats before; others may not have done so. At all events, it should be well for all to recall its nature and purposes.

### WHAT A RETREAT IS NOT

Perhaps we can best do this by first of all looking at the matter negatively. Thus, a retreat is not merely a time of prayer—though it is most certainly a fitting time for serious and earnest prayer. It is definitely a time for closer union with God. Again, it is not merely a time for instruction; that is, a time to listen to conferences or sermons—though it is certainly in place that a fair proportion of the retreat time be allotted to that. Nor is it merely a time to keep silence, although for keeping the spirit of the retreat, silence is quite essential.

### WHAT A RETREAT IS

But a retreat is more than this. It is, from an external point of view, a period during which a person withdraws as far as possible from all external preoccupations, from work and leisure time activities, and in retirement meditates upon the great truths of his holy religion and applies them most painstakingly to his soul. In other words, a retreat consists in abandoning for a time the many duties of Martha, who as you recall from the Gospel story, was busied about much serving, and sitting in contemplation and zealous meditation at the feet of our divine Master with Mary.

It is in such a retreat that God makes known His voice in accord with the words of the prophet Osee: "I will lead her into the wilderness and will speak to her heart."

### A GRACE

Let me ask you that you impress seriously upon your minds at the very beginning of these spiritual exercises that the making of

a retreat is a grace, a special favor of Almighty God. It is, in a sense, a sort of spiritual luxury. At any rate, it is something denied to many others. Needless to say, it would be quite out of place to abuse such a grace. Indeed, it would really be better that one stayed away than that one made a retreat in an indifferent or irreverent way. But, presumably, such remarks are quite superfluous with such a group as this.

#### HOW TO MAKE THE RETREAT

Next to God, the success of your retreat will depend upon yourselves; that is, upon your cooperation with that grace. A few words regarding the manner of making the retreat should assist you in cooperating in the fullest measure. Like guardian angels, you can assist each other, particularly by your example, in the observance of the retreat. But it is also true that one or more individuals could make it very difficult for others to be recollected and make a good retreat. In this connection let me ask you, first of all, that you observe a reasonable silence. There is nothing so productive of a true spirit of recollection as the practice of perfect silence. At the very beginning of the retreat the Holy Spirit exhorts you all, therefore, in the words of the patient Job, "Hold your peace a while, that I may speak whatsoever my mind may suggest." To be sure, there should be no harm in a husband and wife discussing retreat matters together.

To help you to do this; that is, to observe silence, allow me to suggest that you use your spare time to good purpose—for instance, in reading some good spiritual book. "A spiritual volume," says St. John Chrysostom, "is a letter sent us from heaven to make known to us God's will." I hardly deem it necessary to say, on the other hand, that you avoid the reading of any secular publications or periodicals. The whole idea here simply is that if either by speech or reading, you crowd your mind with anything foreign to the truths of religion it will hinder you in your retreat.

#### PRAYER AND SPECIAL DEVOTIONS

Then, too, apply yourselves to fervent prayer and to your favorite religious exercises. The scheduled retreat program which you will all be expected to follow is indicated for you. By way of special devotions I would merely suggest meditation on the re-



treat conferences given you, devout performance of the Way of the Cross, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, recitation of the rosary by husband and wife together, and examination of conscience. If other exercises or devotions appeal to you, well and good. Follow your own bent in the matter.

#### A "FAMILY" RETREAT

Above all, during these days of retreat strive to impress upon yourselves anew the purpose of your existence. Recall the great truths of your religion, your relation to Almighty God, the obligations of your state of life, the ways and means in which you can make your married and family life contribute most effectively toward your sanctification. We know, of course, that in the hustle-bustle of daily life the minds of even religiously-inclined individuals can stray pretty far from these important matters. It is with regard to them that the retreat master is expected to be of assistance to you. And let me say here I consider this definitely a "family" rather than an "individual" retreat. Hence my emphasis will be upon Christian marriage, upon Catholic family living. Other matters will indeed be given attention, but to a more limited extent. Not that they are not important. They are. But they belong rather to the individual retreat than to a family retreat.

#### A NEED

There is no question that there is genuine value in a family retreat. By such a retreat is meant a set of religious exercises that focus the attention of husband and wife together on the spiritual aspects of their wedded life. Indeed, in view of the conditions under which we live today, it is hardly too much to say that there is urgent need for this type of retreat. Certainly it can serve as an effective instrument in offsetting or counteracting the spirit of secularism that has crept into so much family life today. And that is indeed an enemy that must be vigorously dealt with.

The truth is, it has always struck me as strange that the Church is so stringent in her regulations regarding retreats for priests and religious—for those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders or make the religious vows—but has done relatively little to encourage retreats for married people, for husband and wife together; for those, in other words, who receive the great social sacrament of

matrimony, for those who in marriage make sacred promises quite as serious and binding as those made by religious under vows. Actually, husbands and wives, with their family cares and activities and their distractions in making a living and in caring for children, are in all probability diverted more from things spiritual and the affairs of their eternal salvation than are priests and religious. In a sense, therefore, they have greater need for a retreat than have the latter. In that fact alone we find good reason for the family retreat.

As you probably noticed, I did not use a scripture text for this introductory conference, as the priest usually does in preaching a sermon. That was not because there are no applicable texts to choose from. Rather was it that I felt I could more clearly impress upon your minds, at the very beginning, the great need for, and the purpose of the family retreat by quoting to you some words from a very learned and deeply religious woman of our day, Dr. Maria Hermkes. The following are the words to which I refer:

“If the family were what it should and could be, a society of grace, of faith, of sacrifice, how then could so unwholesome a state of things be possible in the world? After centuries of struggle with the native paganism of fallen man, the morning glow of a Christian way of life scarcely rose on our western folk—the hour when Gregorian Chant was folksong and the majestic cathedral rose in lasting witness to the spiritual stature of common man, when St. Francis sang the Hymn of the Sun and Dante trod the path through hell over the Mount of Purgatory to Paradise—even in that hour the shades of secularism, of worldliness, of laicism fell upon our world. How could this be?

“One of the decisive causes of this tragedy of western history—I say expressly one, it is not the only one, but it is the one that has hardly been noticed hitherto—lies without doubt in the fact that the family has not been formed in the Christian mold in the same measure as other states of life; for example, the religious state. The teaching of the Church on marriage and the family has always been the same; but that teaching has never reached its season of full bloom.”

What an indictment that is after two thousand years of Christianity! “The teaching of the Church on marriage and the family has always been the same. But that teaching has *never* reached its season of full bloom.”

And what of today? If, as Dr. Hermkes maintains, people in the

Ages of Faith of past centuries did not bring Christian family life to full bloom, can we pretend to have done so in our day, in this day of a highly secularized marriage and family life? And yet, is that not precisely what we should do? The answer is definitely in the affirmative. We should aim to bring the ideal of Christian marriage and family life into full bloom. There lies the basic solution for the secularism that has come to characterize the life of our day so generally. And I feel that the family retreat, by focusing the attention of husband and wife on those ideals, should prove one of the greatest instruments toward accomplishing that.

### SECULARISM

Dr. Hermkes uses the expression "shades of secularism." She points out that they showed themselves some centuries ago. But today more than shades of secularism are in evidence. Today we see lowering clouds, dark ominous storm clouds of secularism. They have become so alarming that our bishops recently, in two successive years made statements regarding this great evil of the day. And, of course, we see its results, both in the disintegrated family life of the day and in the conditions existing in the world generally.

Let us see first what the term means as applied to marriage. In its full significance secularism means looking upon marriage as a mere profane pact, as an institution shorn of all sanctity. It means the divorcement of marriage and family life from the Church, the separation of marriage and family life from the inspiring and strengthening influences of religion. It means the separation of marriage and the family from God and the things of God.

That is secularized marriage in its extreme, taken in the fullest sense of the word. There are, of course, many degrees of secularism in family life between the total absence of religion in regard to marriage and the family and Christian marriage and family life "in full bloom"—to use the expression of Dr. Hermkes. Presumably no one in an audience like this is living a totally secularized family life. But can we be quite so sure that the family life of all finds itself in the full bloom of Christian living? If it is, well and good. But even then such a spiritual refresher as a family retreat should have great value. It should help you keep it so. If it is not, then the retreat should help in striving for and in attaining that goal. In either case it should serve as an antidote for the secularism of the day.

## CONTENT OF THE FAMILY RETREAT

From what has already been said you should have some idea of what is meant by a family retreat, and what it should deal with. But let me yet speak a bit further on these points. The emphasis in the family retreat is on the family group, and particularly on husband and wife, as husband and wife rather than on the individual, as is the case with the ordinary retreat or a parish mission. Attention is focused on the spiritual bases of married life, on the divinely-ordained purposes of marriage and family life, on the rights and duties of husbands and wives, of fathers and mothers, and on the opportunities and possibilities for sanctification through Christian family living. In a word, attention is focused on developing a full-blown Christian family life.

To put the matter negatively, the family retreat does not deal with non-religious or non-spiritual subjects. For example, it does not enter into a discussion of child psychology, or into the field of marriage counseling or finding solutions for difficult marriage situations, or into economic problems as these relate to family life, or into medical problems. To be sure, these are all good and important, and the Church is much interested in them. But she has developed other media for caring for them—forums, conferences, discussion clubs, institutes, Mr. and Mrs. Clubs and the like. They do not belong in a family retreat. We repeat, the interest in such a retreat centers in the spiritual, in religion, the antidote for secularism. We realize, of course, that a good social order can be very helpful to the family, just as bad economic or environmental conditions can be very harmful to it. Nevertheless, the fact remains that one could have a perfect social order and a most profound knowledge of all the social sciences and still live anything but a Christian family life in "full bloom." Indeed, one could go further and say that a husband and wife might have a profound knowledge of the theology of Christian marriage and still not have a good family life. Knowledge of the principles of Christian marriage is not enough. One must live those principles.

This was clearly indicated by the Bishops of the United States in their statement of 1948 on *The Christian in Action*. Let me quote a paragraph from that document for you:

"It is not enough to profess the Christian truths of the stability and sanctity of the marriage bond and to keep in mind the purposes of marriage. The Christian must make his home holy. It remained

for modern history to record the first experiment in secularizing the home, an experiment which is at the root of so many of our greatest social evils. The Christian home must realize the Christian ideal. The whole atmosphere of the home must be impregnated with genuine Christian living. The domestic virtues must be practiced, and family prayer made a daily exercise. It is in the home that the children learn their responsibility to God and in this responsibility their duty to others. The home is the child's first school, in which he is taught to make the vision of Christian truth the inspiration of all living."

In this statement, then, the bishops first of all speak for what we might call a correct ideology. They speak, in other words, for a knowledge and a profession of the fundamentals or correct principles of Christian marriage. Needless to say, that is necessary. Nevertheless, as the bishops pointed out, it is not sufficient. We must live these truths. We must live the full Christian ideal in our family life. "The Christian," as they stated, "must realize the Christian ideal."

So there, in a few words, we have the basis for the program that is before us these few days of retreat. More specifically, we shall discuss topics such as the following: the nature and purposes of Christian marriage and its place and function in the Mystical Body of Christ; the various religious practices that are particularly suited to the home, giving special attention to the sacramentals as they apply to family life and to the observance of the liturgical seasons of the year in the home; the priestly aspects of parenthood; the opportunities for practicing the virtues in the family circle, and also for teaching them to the children. So, too, will we remind ourselves of the need for ever "seeking first the kingdom of God and His justice"; we will examine sin, the one great obstacle to the attainment of our eternal destiny; we will direct our attention to the means of grace God has given us for the combat against the forces of evil and for successfully working out our eternal salvation.

Let me yet point out before closing that while the priest conducting the retreat will address you a number of times, there will also be other features to the retreat program. For instance, there will be a question period. So, if you really have some questions that you wish to have discussed, let the retreat master have them and he will give them attention at the question period. To be sure, you may also consult with the retreat master in or out of con-

fession. I have already mentioned such special devotions as the rosary, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and the Way of the Cross. A short time will also be given over to an examination of conscience. In this, the retreat master will place before you some soul searching questions relevant to your duties as fathers and mothers, as husbands and wives. Then there will be the closing service. That will be in a sense the climax of the retreat. It will consist of a Family Holy Hour, with appropriate prayers and hymns, the recitation of the pledge to Christian marriage and the renewal of the marriage promises, and Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament, closing with the *Te Deum*; that is, the hymn "Holy God We Praise Thy Name." Some of the Family Holy Hour booklets will be available. I wish each of you would secure one and look it over ahead of time. I am sure you will find this Family Holy Hour service a very inspiring one.

In concluding, let me put to you this question: What will this retreat mean to you? Will it be worthwhile? Will it bring you closer to God? Will it bring real spiritual benefit to you and your family? When a spring on a hillside bubbles up from its sandy bottom, it starts a rill down the slope. For a while the silver thread creeps along, and then suddenly pushes its crystal nose against a knoll. There is a pause, and we eagerly watch to see whether the trembling water will run to the right or to the left. Suddenly, with a leap it rushes off forever to the right. It hurries down to the plain. It broadens into a stream, into a mighty river. It was just a tiny pebble at the left of the knoll that determined for all time the bed of the stream.

Will this little family retreat be such an all-important pause in your life? Will it be the pebble placed by God to keep you from the left—the way of perdition—and to send you once and for all to the right—the way of salvation? God grant that the latter be the case. To this end we will say this prayer:

#### PRAYER

Enlighten me, O Lord, direct and assist me during this Holy Retreat. As thou leadest me into the wilderness, guide me also to that perfection and the means to attain it, to which Thou hast called me. Do not permit, I beseech thee, that these Spiritual Exercises, which for so many have been a means of conversion, be for me, through negligence and tepidity on my part, the cause



of damnation. Grant that I may spend these holy days in perfect silence and a spirit of recollection.

What wilt thou that I do, O God? Behold, I am ready to correspond with thy adorable will concerning me as soon as I shall have learned it. I may, however, delude myself, and there may be hidden in my heart self-love and vanity. Assist me, O my God, to know and remove these obstacles. Perfect the preparation of my heart. It wishes to be subject to thee, and to withdraw from all exterior conversation, to receive more easily the impressions of thy grace and spirit. Amen.

## II. THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

We read, on the opening page of Pope Pius XI's encyclical on Christian Marriage, these words: "How great is the dignity of chaste wedlock." In fact, these are the opening words of that superb document.

If there is one thing I would wish you to take from this retreat, it is a profound consciousness of that dignity of chaste wedlock, of Christian marriage. Perhaps you already have such a consciousness. If so, strive earnestly during these days to renew your appreciation of that dignity.

Surely there is much to the contrary around us today. Pope Pius XI, in the document referred to, speaks of a great number of men who either entirely ignore or shamelessly deny the great sanctity of Christian wedlock, or even, he adds, "relying on the false principles of an utterly perverse morality, too often trample it underfoot." And again—to quote once more from his encyclical—the Holy Father says: "When we consider the great excellence of chaste wedlock—it appears all the more regrettable that particularly in our day we should witness this divine institution often scorned and on every side degraded."

Probably the best way to renew our consciousness of its great sanctity and dignity is to consider its fundamentals assigned it by God.

### THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY—GRACE

First, there is the great central fact that Christian marriage is a sacrament. All marriage, of course, is sacred. That is true even of natural marriage. But under the Christian economy marriage has far more than a natural sanctity. Under it marriage is a grace-conferring institution, one of the seven sacraments of the Church of God. That is, it increases in the spouses the spiritual life of the soul that is sanctifying grace—that life of the soul that we call a participation of the divinity, and, furthermore, it gives them the title to actual graces that assist them in meeting the obligations they assume in their life-long union. They need only to cooperate with that grace.

It should be well to note that this sacrament not only yields



grace to the spouses on their wedding day—that is, when it is first administered to them as a sacrament—but that it remains with them continuously, constantly dispensing to them this fruit of the sacrament we call grace, provided only, as I said, they cooperate with it. In other words, a Catholic man and woman, after their marriage constantly live in a sacramental state. They have a continuing title to the graces of the sacrament of matrimony.

#### ACTUAL GRACE

In mentioning sanctifying grace as a fruit of the sacrament of matrimony I referred to it as the life of the soul that is called a participation of the divinity. In referring to actual graces; that is, to the special sacramental graces that matrimony gives a title to, I remarked that these graces assist husband and wife in meeting the obligations they assume in their life-long union. It might be well to add a few further words about these sacramental graces of matrimony.

Just as the Sacrament of Holy Orders, for instance, gives those who receive it a title to special graces to assist them in fulfilling the duties of their priestly state of life, so the Sacrament of Matrimony gives a title to special grace to the couple who receive it, to help them in the fulfillment of the duties of their state of life. In other words, it provides that Christian spouses are not left to cope alone and unaided with the inevitable difficulties they must face but have a constant source of help and strength in the graces of the sacrament. These special graces of the sacrament serve a number of purposes. They serve to sanctify the joys and to lighten the sorrows husband and wife may meet with in their married life. They help them to meet the difficulties and anxieties of rearing a family. They assist them to practice the virtues to which they are bound in married life. Furthermore, it should be well to point out that these actual graces are as numerous as the forces militating against Christian marriage, and that the more worthy the dispositions the couples bring to the sacrament, the more they have a right to expect help from them.

#### THIS SACRAMENTAL ASPECT IMPORTANT

In the fact that matrimony is a sacrament, that it confers graces, consists the profound difference between marriage in the Old Law and marriage in the Christian dispensation, between merely natural

marriage and Christian or supernatural marriage. It is very important that we get the full import of this sacramental aspect of marriage. Hence, let us yet look at the matter negatively. Thus, by no means is the sacrament of matrimony merely something required by ecclesiastical or civil authorities before a man and woman can live together as husband and wife. Nor by any means is it just a natural contract or agreement. On the contrary, it is something vitally spiritual. It is the union of two personalities throbbing with the supernatural Christ-life of grace. It is a draught, so to speak, from the fountain of living waters provided by the Saviour through the Redemption. It is a never-ending wellspring of holiness that sanctifies husband and wife and their life together. It is a life-partnership of two beings suffused with grace, with spiritual life.

It should be needless to add, therefore, that Christian marriage is most assuredly not something just on the borderline of Christianity, or let us say, something just tolerated by the Church. On the contrary, it is a most sacred thing, a supernatural thing, and it is recognized as such by the Church. Much as the sacred vows of religious consecrate them, dedicating them to the special service of God, so the Sacrament of Matrimony consecrates husband and wife, dedicating them to special work in the Mystical Body of Christ; that is, in the Church. Marriage, I repeat, is a sacrament of Christ's Church. It is one of the seven great channels through which the graces of the Redemption are fed, so to speak, to the members of the human race.

Let us impress on our minds anew during these days of retreat both this great fact and the dignity that it implies. One gets the impression that not a few Catholics in our day fail to understand the full import of the Church's view regarding this. Certainly great numbers outside the Church fail to do so. And we might well add here that the truly dreadful thing that has been done to marriage in our day is the fact that it has been robbed of its sacramental aspect. It is considered by vast numbers as merely a profane contract. And therein we find the fundamental cause of so much broken and disintegrated and unsuccessful family life today.

#### REPLICA OF THE MYSTICAL BODY

A second great and inspiring truth regarding Christian marriage is the fact that the union of husband and wife in sacramental

marriage is a symbol or representation of the sacred union of Christ with His spouse, the Church. Surely, that too lends great dignity to Christian marriage. This teaching implies that the Christian family which is based on Christian marriage is, in a sense, the Mystical Body of Christ in miniature. The basis of the teaching is found in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians. It is in the fifth chapter of that Epistle that he notes that the union of husband and wife in Christian marriage is a symbol or representation of the sacred union of Christ with His spouse, the Church. And it is there too that he implies that the latter sacred union; namely, that of Christ with the Church, should be the model for the former, or the union of the two spouses in Christian marriage. "Let wives be subject to their husbands as to the Lord," he says, "because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church." And what of husbands? "Husbands," he adds, "love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and delivered Himself up for her that he might sanctify her."

In its entirety this fifth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians implies that the Christian family, based on Christian marriage, is a miniature replica of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. The husband and father is the head of the body and represents Christ. The wife and mother is the body itself and represents the Church. The children are the members of the body; they represent the faithful.

That is indeed sublime doctrine. At the same time, we must admit, it is mysterious doctrine. As St. Paul clearly states there is question here of a mystery; that is, of something we cannot fully comprehend. Nevertheless, there is not question of a mere figure of speech, or of a figment, let us say of the imagination, or of a bit of poetic idealism. No, there is question of an eternal truth, of a belief or mystery of Christianity.

Hence, we may fittingly, in a spirit of reverence, try to see some of the major implications of this teaching of St. Paul. Thus, his Epistle to the Ephesians obviously implies that the bond that unites Christ and the Church—His spouse, as she is called—should be mirrored in the bond that unites husband and wife in marriage, and certainly the former is an unbreakable bond. So, too, does it imply that the attributes or properties that characterize the union of Christ and the Church are reflected in the attributes or properties that characterize the union of husband and wife in marriage. Most assuredly, one of those properties is unity.

Still another implication of high importance that logically flows from this teaching of the Apostle of the Gentiles is that the relationships between members of a Christian family must be most ideal. Certainly St. Paul puts these relationships on the highest plane when he speaks of love. What is to be the guide, the measuring rod of the husband's love for his wife? He is to love her even as Christ loved the Church. If such is the case, then the wife in turn is to love the husband as the Church loves Christ. And, by the same token, one must conclude that the children are to look up to their father and mother with something of the same love and respect that they bear to Christ and His Church.

Pope Leo XIII has some clear words on this in his encyclical on *Christian Marriage*. Referring to the love that should exist between Christian spouses, he speaks of it as a "heaven-born love." Here are his words: "Since the husband represents Christ and since the wife represents the Church, let there always be both in him who commands and in her who obeys, a heaven-born love guiding both in their respective duties. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church." Obviously, this heaven-born love of the husband and father and of the wife and mother should also extend to the children of the family; for they represent the faithful of the Church. And in this heaven-born love we have the great integrating bond that should assure true and harmonious unity. In it we should have an unailing guarantee against bickering and discord, against filial disrespect and fraternal strife within the family circle. But, how different the actual picture of home life we so often see around us in our secularized civilization of the day in which genuine Christian theory and action is so extensively lacking today.

#### THE PURPOSES OF MARRIAGE

Again, to impress upon our minds the profound dignity of Christian marriage, let us yet view the matter from the viewpoint of its purposes. Certainly here, too, we will find that God has given it truly striking excellence. What are the purposes of marriage? Why, in other words, did God institute marriage? The answer, insofar as its primary purpose is concerned, is that marriage, and also the family which is based on it, exist for the child. Their primary purpose is his welfare, his procreation and training. "In marriage" says the encyclical on *Christian Marriage*, "the child

holds first place." That is really to say that there is no reason to believe that, if God had chosen some other way than marriage to propagate the human race on earth, there would be either marriage or the two sexes. And God could, of course, have propagated the race in any number of different ways. For instance, he could have created all mankind directly, as He did the first man and woman. But, actually, he chose this one particular way. That is, He instituted marriage. He made husbands and wives His coadjutors in the begetting of the children of the race. He made them, as that great document, the marriage encyclical, puts it, "ministers as it were of the divine omnipotence." As we read in Holy Writ, He told them to "increase and multiply." And He did more. He also made them His coadjutors, His agents or representatives in the training of the children of the race—in their training for this life and the next, for time and eternity.

And we must not forget that under the Christian dispensation this primary purpose stands at far higher heights than it would be under merely natural marriage. There it contributes not only to the growth and benefit of the human race, but it also contributes to the growth and health of God's great "family" on earth, the Mystical Body of Christ. The following words of our reigning sovereign pontiff, Pope Pius XII, which we read in his encyclical on the Mystical Body, are unmistakably clear in this regard: "Through matrimony," he says, "in which the contracting parties are ministers of grace to one another, provision is made for the external and duly regulated increase of the Christian society, and what is of greater importance, for the correct religious instruction of the children without which the Mystical Body would be in grave danger." The words hardly call for any explanation. They plainly tell us that under the sacrament of matrimony husbands and wives are to provide for the growth of God's church—"for the external and duly regulated increase of the Christian society"—and also for the health of the Church, the latter to be accomplished by the proper training of their children in their religion. Such is the twofold primary purpose of Christian marriage. It is a high and most dignified purpose indeed.

#### A LITTLE LESS THAN THE ANGELS

It should help us further to impress upon ourselves the high excellence of Christian marriage, from the viewpoint of its two-

fold primary purpose, the child, if we considered for a moment what the child is—if we recall his intrinsic dignity and sublime end.

Who, then, is the child? What is he trained for? The child is a creature far above all other visible creatures—"a little less than the angels" (ps. VIII, 6), as Holy Writ tells us. He is a being created according to the image and likeness of God. Nor is he born only for an earthly, natural community. He is born to become a member of the Church of Christ on earth. He is destined for the eternal commonwealth of heaven. He is born to become a fellow-citizen of the saints, a member of God's household.

Truly remarkable, therefore is the fruit of marriage, children born by the omnipotent power of God through the cooperation of those bound in holy wedlock. Truly sublime is the dignity of marriage as seen in the primary purpose for which God established it; namely, the child.

The dignity of the child naturally brings to mind the dignity and excellence of Christian parenthood, of fatherhood and motherhood. Let us turn our attention to that for a few moments.

#### THE DIGNITY OF FATHERHOOD

It is recorded in Holy Writ that all fatherhood is of God. As St. Paul reminds in his Epistle to the Ephesians, all fatherhood in heaven and on earth receives its name from the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The words obviously mean that all honor, all dignity, all power attaching to earthly fatherhood are a representation or reflection of the fatherhood of God.

Here again we have sublime doctrine. It tells us that the honor due to fatherhood, the dignity that is attached to paternity is immeasurably great. It tells us just as clearly, therefore, that we on our part should show fatherhood high regard and profound respect. And, in fact, already under the Old Law had God ordered us by a special commandment of the Decalogue to honor our parents, our fathers and our mothers. "Honor your father and your mother," he said, "that you may have a long life in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you" (Exod. XX, 12).

It should be well to note that the dignity of fatherhood, and the respect we should have for it, are not founded in the personality or in the particular characteristics or qualities of the one who bears the title, but in the office or position that goes with paternity. God has so ordained that the father is the head of the home. He has



ordained that he represents authority in the home—an authority, which, like all other authority, is a reflection of the authority of God. More than that, under Christianity the father represents Christ in the home. There is every reason, therefore, for respecting fatherhood.

Fundamentally, respect for fatherhood is founded in nature. The Fourth Commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother," is really but an expression in words of a law already written in the hearts of man by the God of nature. Hence, we find that even among pagans—at any rate, among those pagans who have kept the natural virtues—the title of father has been one meriting respect.

However, under Christianity the dignity of, and respect for fatherhood has been greatly enhanced. The Church has always unswervingly inculcated a profound respect for paternity. Furthermore, she has gloried in applying the revered title of father as a special mark of distinction. Thus, her head—the head of Christ's great "family" on earth, as St. Paul calls the Church—is esteemed and revered by all her children under the title of the "Holy Father." Again the teachers and writers of the Church in her early days have been called by her "the Apostolic Fathers." A title of particularly high distinction that she confers is that of "Father of the Church."

As we know, the bishop or chief pastor of a diocese is considered the spiritual father of his diocesan flock. So, too, are the pastor of a parish, and also his assistant priests, recognized as spiritual fathers of the parishioners and are respectfully addressed as "father" by them. Religious orders of men in the Church—spiritual families we might call them—very commonly apply to their superiors or heads the term "father." Thus, they address them as "Father Rector," "Father Master," "Father Prior," "Father Abbot," "Father Provincial," "Father General."

A particularly outstanding note that goes with fatherhood is authority. As noted before, the father's authority reflects the authority of God Himself. And that authority is absolutely essential. It is necessary both for the order of the household and for the training of the children. But, unfortunately, in our day many fathers have forfeited their authority in whole or in part, and many children no longer have the respect for paternal authority they should have. The results are seen all around us in the delinquency and criminality that are so characteristic of our day. A great need of our time, there-

fore, is that fathers recapture the authority that is theirs in the home and that children renew their respect for that authority. Obviously a highly important step toward that end would be a renewed consciousness on the part of all of the fact that all fatherhood is of God, and a profound appreciation of the related fact that the authority of the father is a reflection of the authority of God.

#### RESPECT FOR MOTHERHOOD

Respect for motherhood, too, is founded in nature. And the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue applies no less to the mother than to the father. However we find that under paganism that respect for motherhood, and for womankind generally, was often very sadly lacking. But we also find that a great change took place in this regard with the coming of Christ upon this earth. The story of that change is one of the most thrilling and consoling stories in the annals of mankind. It tells, namely, how Christ the God-man when coming upon this earth to redeem fallen mankind, chose for His mother a woman whom He made the greatest and the grandest of His creatures in heaven and on earth. For her sake and in her He raised up womankind generally from the degradation of paganism. He made the wife and mother the partner and equal of the husband and the heart of the domestic world. He dignified all motherhood in the motherhood of Mary, the Mother of God.

We read on the first page of the Gospel of St. Luke how an angel came down from the throne of God and, prostrating himself before one whose name was Mary, made known to her the plan of the Almighty regarding the redemption of the human race, inviting her to become the mother of God, the world's Redeemer. Well indeed might she cry out in exultation in the words of that beautiful canticle the Magnificat: "My soul doth magnify the Lord . . . He that is mighty hath done great things for me."

Following the Saviour's birth, we get glimpses of Nazareth, of Cana, of Calvary, all revealing a woman of beauty and dignity indescribable. The serene light of her glory falling upon the rest of her sex, changed them in their own eyes and in the eyes of their brethren. A new concept of womanhood was born. The sinless Madonna became the ideal and champion of womanly honor.

It was then that there appeared on this earth that most beautiful



creation of earth, the Christian home, the unique sphere of woman that has made her, in the capacity of mother, the greatest power for good on this earth, second only to the Church of God. It was then that the term "mother" took on its fullest meaning; that it became a synonym for all that is good, a balm for every wound, the very life-breath of the young, the guiding star of manhood, the joy of old age. It was then that Christian women became the potentates of the world.

And let us not forget, chivalrous man honored that Christian woman. He was uplifted and elevated by her. He gloried in referring to her under the honored title of wife and mother, of sister and daughter. The results, we know well, were exceedingly beneficial to man and woman, to the family and to all society.

Unfortunately, in modern times there has been another change—a change for the worse. Many in our own time no longer recognize Mary as the mother of God or pay her due tribute as such. As a result, her great influence has in considerable measure been lost to womankind, to the family, and to all the world. Apparently many have entirely forgotten that it was by investing motherhood with unusual dignity through Mary that the Church rescued woman from the inferiority to which paganism had condemned her and assured her the honored position which is hers under Christianity.

What is the obvious lesson? Unquestionably, a return to Mary. As the dignity and grandeur of Christian womanhood and motherhood came of old through Mary, the mother of God, and through devotion to her, so must it be restored through her in our own day. Genuine respect for womankind and motherhood has ever been most closely linked with reverence toward the all-pure mother of God. May our Blessed Mother, patroness of our country under the title of her Immaculate Conception, stir up anew in us a profound and fervent devotion to her. It would mean very much to the family life of the nation.

#### MUTUAL HELP IN MARRIAGE

There is also a secondary purpose of marriage, assigned it by Almighty God, which is of high excellence. This purpose relates rather to the good of the spouses themselves, than to the good of society or the Church; though actually it is in the end not without much influence upon both of the latter too. Reference is made,

namely, to the mutual assistance the married partners must render each other. This shows itself in many ways. Thus, it shows itself in the common sharing of sacrifices, in bearing hardships together, in facing difficulties shoulder to shoulder, in walking down life's pathway hand in hand, seeking to fulfill jointly the duties assumed upon entering wedlock, seeking to work out their salvation together.

### SPIRITUAL HELP

Above all must the mutual aid that is so outstanding as a secondary purpose of marriage be taken in the spiritual sense of mutual help toward each other's sanctification. That is to say, there must be under the sacred bond of Christian marriage a mutual interior or spiritual molding of the two spouses, a determination and ambition to perfect each other spiritually. It is to say that after the two have made their solemn promises to take each other as man and wife till death the two must walk hand in hand—not alone as before marriage, but together, along the road that leads to their eternal destiny. They must henceforth live a partnership that aims at an eternal goal.

In view of these high purposes which God proposed for marriage, it cannot surprise us that God, in His divine wisdom should also have assigned it the two great properties of unity and permanence; in other words, that He should have decreed that there was to be but one husband and one wife, and permanently so until death intervened to part them. Together these two properties constitute the basis for an unbreakable bond. And an unbreakable bond is necessary for carrying out the two purposes of marriage we have referred to, namely, the child's proper training and the mutual assistance the two spouses owe each other.

It should not surprise us, in the least, in view of these considerations, that the very opening sentence of the encyclical on Christian Marriage begins with the words, "How great is the dignity of chaste wedlock." May you take those words sincerely to heart. There is great need for that today. Yes, there is great need that in this day when the sacred institution of marriage is trampled under foot and dragged in the mire, we strive most zealously to bring ourselves to a full realization of its sanctity and excellence—that we impress unfailingly upon our minds the dignity of mar-

riage as a sacrament, the dignity of Christian wedlock as a symbol of the Mystical Body of Christ, and the dignity of the child, the fruit of the union. Few things indeed could do so much to dispel the ominous clouds of secularism that have come to hang over so many of our homes, and to lift our family life generally to heights as high as, if not higher than, it has ever been before. May God speed the day when that will be brought about. May this retreat serve to bring it about insofar as you are concerned.

### III. PRIESTLY ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN PARENTHOOD

In the conference in which we considered the fundamentals of Christian marriage attention was called to the great dignity and excellence of chaste wedlock. As will be recalled, reference was made to the fact that marriage is a sacrament, and that outstanding among its purposes are the begetting of children for the Church and training them for heaven; also the fact that the Christian family, based on Christian marriage, is a representation in miniature of the Mystical Body of Christ. Let it be noted further that the home in which the Christian family lives is rightly called a church in miniature.

Now, all this suggests certain priestly functions for the family and home. And it is not too much to say that the husband and wife, the father and mother, have in a very real sense some priestly functions to perform in the family circle. That, in turn, adds even a further note of dignity and excellence to Christian marriage.

Regarding the sacrament of matrimony, it should be well to recall in this connection that the two parties themselves to the contract administer it. That is really to say they confer the grace of the sacrament upon each other. To do that, is to perform what is normally a priestly function.

Again, since the Christian home is called a church in miniature, it suggests that religious rituals, devotional exercises, priestly functions are in place therein. And, as a matter of fact, good Christian homes have traditionally been characterized by religious devotions and rituals.

That, specifically the husband and father, has priestly functions to perform in the home should appear obvious from the fact that in the Christian family, which is a miniature replica of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, he represents Christ at the head of the home. But, as St. Paul teaches, the wife and mother represents Holy Mother Church; hence she too might very logically be expected to have certain priestly functions to perform.

But let us look into this matter in greater detail in this conference. Let us examine a little further, the basis for the teaching of the priestly office of the father and mother in the home, and then seek also to discuss in what that office on their part consists.

The teaching of the priestly aspects of parenthood is found in St.

Paul's epistle to the Ephesians that has already been referred to. But it is also found elsewhere in the Scriptures. Furthermore, it is indicated in the liturgy of the Church and is testified to by tradition. In the last connection, let me just recall again the words of St. Augustine to which I referred before. Speaking one day to a group of fathers from his own diocese, he addressed them with the striking salutation: "My dear fellow bishops." Then he went on to say to them: "Each and every one of you have in the home the bishop's office to see to it that neither his wife nor his son nor his daughter nor even his servant fall away from truth. For they are bought with a great price."

It is obvious from these words that St. Augustine meant to convey to the fathers that it is a duty of the head of the family to watch over the spiritual welfare of its members; in other words, that the father has a mission that involves the care of souls. Much as the bishop is accountable before God for his diocesan flock, so is the father accountable for the spiritual welfare of the members of his little sheepfold. He is a pastor of that flock. He has priestly duties to perform toward its members. As St. Augustine puts it, "Each and everyone of you have in the home the bishop's office to see to it that neither his wife, nor his son nor his daughter nor even his servant, fall away from truth."

So we see that the teaching that under Christianity the father represents Christ in the home, that he holds a priestly office in the family, is well substantiated.

#### WHAT THE OFFICE IMPLIES

But what, more specifically does this imply? What does it mean? In other words, in what does the priestly office of the father consist?

To answer that we must turn to a consideration of the role or roles, which Christ Himself, whom the father represents, played. What was the office of Christ? What were His powers in that office? Furthermore, did He share that office and those powers with others? If so, to what extent did He share them? More specifically, in what manner and measure did He share them with fathers of families; how with both fathers and mothers?

#### CHRIST, THE UNIQUE HIGH PRIEST

Christ, we know, was called by the Father to be a priest—in fact, the great High Priest. He was pastor and pontiff. And in

that capacity, as He Himself tells us, He enjoyed the fulness of power in heaven and on earth.

Before leaving this earth Christ shared His power with others. As St. Paul put it, He appointed some apostles, some pastors. To his followers He distributed His gifts; He shared His powers in varying degrees. And, according to the powers given them, these were to cooperate with Him in the spiritual care or guardianship of souls.

#### CHRIST'S VICAR AND OTHER PASTORS

At the head of the list, of course, we find His Vicar, the Supreme Pastor, who represents Christ as head of His Church on earth—as head, as St. Paul puts it (Eph. II), of His "Family." Very fittingly do we refer to him, the head of this "Family" of God, as the "Holy Father." In his capacity as Supreme Pontiff, incidentally, he has powers that none other has.

Then there are the pastors placed over specific portions of Christ's flock and given varying amounts of His power or authority over them; that is, the bishops in their dioceses and the pastors in their parishes. Both of these are priests in Holy Orders. Both have been consecrated to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to administer the Sacraments, to teach officially for the Church. Both are, in other words, priests in the fuller sense of the term.

#### THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE FAITHFUL

Finally there is the priesthood of the faithful, or as it is also called, the lay priesthood. This includes all the faithful. St. Peter (I Pet. 2:9) refers to them as the "royal priesthood." They have all been consecrated through the sacrament of baptism, and normally, in time, also through the sacrament of confirmation. Now, this has not empowered them, of course, to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass, to administer the sacraments, as does the priest, or to teach in an official capacity for the Church. These powers are given only through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Nevertheless, it does make them members of the "royal priesthood," to use the term St. Peter applies to them. And they have certain priestly functions to perform. For instance, it is for them to defend the interests of Christ in the home and in public.

Now, among these members of the priesthood of the faithful, there are many who have not only been consecrated through baptism and confirmation, but who have in addition been consecrated through still another sacrament—not indeed through Holy Orders, as is the case with the ordained priest, but through matrimony, a sacrament which dedicates the two who receive it to a new joint office in the Mystical Body of Christ. I am speaking, of course, of husbands and wives, of fathers and mothers. These, by virtue of their Christian marriage, have special priestly or pastoral offices to fulfill in that church in miniature that is the home.

#### WHAT THESE OFFICES ARE

What are these pastoral offices? To answer that question we must, first of all see, specifically, what Christ's offices as pastor were. And the answer is: He was teacher; He was mediator; He was sanctifier. It is in regard to these three roles, then, that we must seek to find how the father of the family represents Christ, how he is to exercise his office of lay priest. So, too, must we find how the mother is to exercise her office as a member of the priesthood of the faithful.

It might be added immediately that, actually, what is said regarding the father of the family in regard to all these offices also holds in great measure in the case of the mother. For, while the duties of the two in the home are indeed not entirely identical, they are assuredly most closely related. And while it is true that only the father is referred to by St. Paul as holding the place of Christ it must not be overlooked that His teaching also implies that the mother represents the Church. Furthermore, it should be noted that, even as Christ and the Church are one, so the husband and wife form a unity in marriage. In other words, the two have the same goal. The two have, as I have already indicated, a joint sacred office to fulfill in the Mystical Body of Christ.

#### THE TEACHING OFFICE

Now, what is that joint sacred office? Pope Pius XII has given us the answer in part in his Encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ. In that document he points out that the sacrament of matrimony implies a solemn consecration of married partners, a sacred dedication of the two to a joint teaching office in the Church, the



Mystical Body of Christ. These are his words in this regard: "Through matrimony, in which the contracting parties are ministers of grace to one another, provision is made for the external and duly regulated increase of the Christian society, and what is of greater importance, for the correct religious instruction of the children without which the Mystical Body would be in grave danger."

Those words clearly indicate one of the main priestly offices of parents; namely, the teaching or instructing of their children in their religion. They, the two of them, are the children's first teachers. And of most outstanding importance here are the truths of religion, since the very end and purpose of their coming into the world is their ultimate union with God. These truths the parents must teach their little ones according to the latter's ability to learn and understand them. They must teach them the life and truths of Christ. They must teach them the laws of God.

This is indeed a high and noble task. And it is a priestly task, a sacred task. As the encyclical notes, partners in marriage, fathers and mothers, have the joint high office of safeguarding, through this medium of teaching, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Under God's plan, in other words, provision is made through their sacramental union, "for the correct religious instruction of the children without which the Mystical Body would be in grave danger."

Little wonder, then, that it has been said that for parents to fulfill this teaching office toward their children is to participate in the lay priesthood in its most glorious form. The very safety of the Church depends in a measure on it.

#### THE MOTHER AS TEACHER

Both father and mother, then, play a part in this teaching office. It is, as the Holy Father put it, a "joint" office. But, it should be well to add a special word about the mother in this connection. For, she plays a truly vital part, indeed a leading or ranking part, in this important teaching office of the priesthood of the faithful. Her knee, in fact, is logically the child's first pulpit. Her nearness to him and her maternal love for him on the one hand, and the child's unbounded trust in her on the other, place her in a commanding position in regard to this task. And, well indeed, may she use that position to teach the child, among other things, that



highly important fact, already repeatedly adverted to regarding the father; namely, that he represents Christ in the home. Deeply should she implant that truth in the hearts of her little ones. Furthermore, she should carefully instil into their minds the fact that the father has great dignity because his fatherhood, like all fatherhood, comes from God, and because the authority which he exercises in the home reflects the authority of God, and also because he is the likeness of the Heavenly Father. So, too, may the mother well give the children to understand that she herself, as a Christian mother, is an image of Holy Mother Church. The religious and moral training of children who will have had these high ideals of the Christian family made known to them from early childhood will hardly prove a serious problem to their parents.

#### TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

It should be well to note, in connection with the priestly task of parents to teach the children in the home, that teaching by example is a matter of special importance, particularly in the case of younger children. In their case, teaching by example is undoubtedly more important than are verbal instruction, preachment, or learning by rote. While both instruction and example indeed have a place, the young child is normally influenced much more by the latter than by the former.

At all events, verbally to teach religious truths and practices to a child and then to neglect their practice, or even to act contrary to them in the home, would assuredly be to leave much to be desired in his religious upbringing. It is the actual living of the faith by the father who represents Christ, and by the mother who represents the Church, that is the key to success in the highly important task of their joint pastoral office of teaching. It is a vibrant Christian life in the family circle, genuine virtuous living in the Church in miniature that is the home, that is the all-important factor in the lives and religious training of little children. Family devotions, little religious rituals in the home, will long be remembered by children, and will long influence their lives. It is an entirely safe statement to make that in their later years, in times of temptation or spiritual crisis, the mere remembrance of the faith of their parents, and the mere recollection of devotions in common on the part of the family members in their home, will prove more of a saving factor for such children than will the knowledge of

the truths of religion, whether that knowledge was acquired within or outside of the home. If, in their early years within the family sanctuary, the children were warmed, so to speak, with human love combined with love divine, if they were inspired and guided by the shining light of faith reflected from their parents' countenances and manifested through their daily lives within the home, then even after they will have left behind them the home hearth of their childhood days and will have gone out into the cold and callous and unbelieving world, they will still hold firmly, come what may, to the faith that was bequeathed to them.

#### CHURCH, SCHOOL AND ENVIRONMENT

It is, of course, a commonplace to say that the Church helps with the religious instruction of the young. But even in this regard there is question of obligation on the part of parents. They must see to it that the children actually receive the instructions that the Church makes available for them. Insofar, more specifically, as the schooling of the child is concerned, there is certainly an obligation on their part to see to it that their children have the benefit of a Catholic school education where that is at all practicable. However, they must at the same time be mindful of the fact that the school is but an extension of the home and not a substitute for it. In other words, they must not shift the tasks of the home to the school. The parents themselves remain the child's prime teachers. And, indeed, they should consider it not only an obligation, but also a great honor to fulfill the priestly task of the religious training of the child that this implies.

Before turning from this consideration of the priestly task of teaching the child in the home that parents have, it should be well also to note the importance, and indeed obligation, of securing for them a good environment. This implies, for instance, the keeping of a watchful eye over the companions they associate with and over the popular means of communication and education of our day, such as the press, the cinema or moving picture, the radio and television, that they make use of. If a child were left a free hand regarding these powerful and influential media, all the results of the teaching efforts of the parents might well be brought to naught. It is highly essential that the child be provided with proper reading material, and that he be protected against the false and vicious printed matter that is so commonplace today. So, too, is it necessary

that he be protected against harmful moving picture, radio and television programs. Certainly the parents have a very real duty in this respect.

#### PARENTS AS MEDIATORS

The priestly office of teaching of parents is, therefore, a highly important and most honorable one. But it is not the only priestly office that they have as representatives, respectively, of Christ and of the Church, as members of the priesthood of the faithful. They must, besides teaching their children the truths of their religion, be for them mediators with God. That is to say, they must pray for them, they must intercede with the Almighty for them.

Here, then, we have another important priestly office of the Christian parent. How important it is, and what truly great things Christian parents can accomplish through it, we see from the example of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. As we learn from the lives of these great saints of the Church, the latter, St. Augustine, had in his youth strayed far from the path of virtue. However, his saintly mother, Monica, never ceased to pray for him, and with the ultimate result that he not only gave up his sinful ways, but eventually became a great bishop and an outstanding saint of the Church. Many another child, we may be sure, has been brought back to the path of virtue by the prayers of a father and mother.

#### PARENTS AS SANCTIFIERS

Finally, besides the priestly offices of teacher and of mediator there is also the office of sanctifier. That office, too, was typified in Christ. What is to be said of the father and mother in regard to it? Does it also come within the scope of the priestly office of parenthood? In other words, can they sanctify each other and their children?

The answer is in the affirmative; though, to be sure, certain reservations must be made. First of all, it must be said that fathers and mothers normally cannot transmit supernatural life to their children. Nevertheless, they have the obligation of seeing to it that supernatural life is transmitted to them. That is, it is for them to bring their children to Christ, in the person of the priest, that through baptism they may be given supernatural life; in other words, that they may be made children of God and heirs to His

Kingdom. Furthermore, they can unquestionably help their children much, as they can also help each other, in working out their eternal salvation, after they have been made children of God through baptism. That follows logically from the fact that, under the sacrament of matrimony, Christian husbands and wives live constantly in a sacramental state, and as a result, have a constant right to the graces of that sacrament, both for each other and for the children committed to their spiritual care. As was pointed out, in discussing the sacrament of matrimony, the husband and wife confer this sacrament upon each other. That is really to say, they are ministers of grace to each other.

#### PERSONAL HOLINESS DEMANDED

It should hardly be necessary to add, then, that in view of these facts that we have considered ; in view of the high position or office of the father and mother in the home, a profound personal holiness must be expected on their part. Often should they think upon their priestly duties, in order to goad themselves on, so to speak, to make themselves truly worthy of the high and honorable office that is theirs. How different much family life of our day would be if parents generally did this ! How different, too, much modern family life would be if young potential fathers and mothers were taught throughout their childhood and youth, as indeed they should be, to respect their fathers and mothers in accordance with the high office that is theirs under the Christian dispensation, and then set about to prepare themselves to be truly worthy of the same high and dignified office of parenthood at some future time !

It would be difficult indeed to think of anything more important than these things to teach young people in regard to marriage and family life. If they, as young folks, had the respect for their parents that the latter's high office in the Christian economy demands, we might also expect that they would prepare themselves carefully for the time when that same revered and respected office will be theirs. The parents should do all in their power, by word and by example, to further such a preparation. Unquestionably Christian family life would benefit immeasurably by it.

More specifically, from the viewpoint of their office as mediators, might it be said that personal holiness is demanded of parents. In fact, if this particular priestly office is to be fulfilled with real effectiveness, an intense personal holiness is demanded on their

part. In other words, nearness to God is required ; friendship with the Almighty is required. It is safe to say that each additional degree of union of their souls with the Creator, each additional stride that they take on the path of virtue and holiness, will render the father and mother more powerful with God, more influential and fruitful in supernatural action on the souls of their little ones.

Hence, in their capacity as parents, it should be said that husbands and wives must not only be holy for their own good, but also for the good of their children. So, too, should it be said that they must not only seek to procure the glory of God through their own personal perfection, but also through the spiritual fruitfulness of the souls of the children whom God committed to their care.

Honorable indeed is the office of parenthood. It is truly a priestly office. May the parents among you always become more and more aware of its dignity. And so, too, may you always become more and more worthy of it.

#### IV. THE HOME, A CHURCH IN MINIATURE

In an earlier conference I recalled to your minds the fundamentals and ideals of Christian marriage. I feel certain that many in this country in our day—I speak of the generality of Americans—no longer have a real understanding and appreciation of those important fundamentals and high ideals. In fact, many no longer even seem to understand and accept the fundamentals of *natural* marriage. It also seems that great numbers today, with our emphasis on a limited materialist science, entirely divorced from the queen of sciences—sacred theology, which deals with man's relations with God—simply cannot conceive of marriage as God made it—a marriage becoming a dignified creature upon whom is stamped the image and likeness of Almighty God. The theory of the brute or beast origin of man, body and soul, popularized by the Tarzans of the moving pictures and a garish press, and even taught from the lectern and rostrum, has effectively done its damaging work. Indifference, too, has unquestionably exerted a debilitating effect.

Certainly our Catholic people must strive to offset this exceedingly harmful situation by zealously keeping their attention focused upon genuine Christian marriage in the full glory in which God instituted it. So, too, must they seek to live in full harmony with it.

In speaking of the ideals of Christian marriage in another conference I referred to the Christian family, which is based on Christian marriage, as a symbol or replica of the Mystical Body of Christ. As I stated, the father represents Christ as its head, the mother represents the body of the Church, and the children represent the faithful of the Church. Since such is the case, the house or home in which the Christian family dwells should very fittingly be like a Catholic Church. And, indeed, we find that the term "little church," or "church in miniature," was applied to the home in the early days of Christianity. Thus, the Greek word for a little church, *ecclesiola*, is found applied to it in the writings of St. John Chrysostom who lived in the early Christian centuries.

St. John wrote as follows: "After the public worship of God we will spread two tables in our homes, one with the fare of the body and one with the food of Holy Scripture; one with the fruits



of earth, and one with the fruits of the Holy Ghost. Prayer and teaching in the Church are not enough; they must be accompanied by prayer and reading at home: for the home is a little church."

In the so-called Ages of Faith that followed his day, Catholic homes were in a very real sense churches in miniature. The father was the priest in that little church. Religious devotions in it, all the members participating, were customary. The eminent scholar, Aidan Cardinal Gasquet, O.S.B., in an address entitled "The Christian Family in Pre-Reformation England," given some years ago, painted a picture of Catholic home life in those days. "There was," he stated, "the constant recognition of God's sanctifying presence in the family. And over and above this," he added, "there were those common religious practices of prayer and self-restraint and mutual encouragement to virtue of which, alas, the modern counterpart of the old English home knows so little." He concluded: "On the faith of those simple and generally unlettered people there was a bloom—I know of no other word to express what I see—which perished as one of the results of the religious revolution of the sixteenth century."

In our own country today, there are still homes to be found in which those common religious practices concerning which the Cardinal spoke, still exist. But there are others, too, and in considerable numbers, where they are totally neglected. In fact, there are some in which they are not even known. If we really wish to keep the spirit of secularism from our homes, if we wish to make God truly honored and respected therein, we may well look anew to those old and tried family religious customs of the past, and reintroduce them, wherever needed, into our family circles. By doing so, we will again make our homes little churches. We will make them in a real sense houses of God.

How, specifically, can that be done? Let us examine in this conference some of the possibilities for doing this. The topic is an interesting and highly important one. At the same time it cannot be said to be a difficult one.

#### THE SACRAMENTALS

First of all, let us turn our attention to the so-called "little sacraments"; that is, the sacramentals instituted by the Church. Those should definitely find a place in the family circle. Many of them even have a direct bearing on family life. A relatively simple but

highly important means of union between the altar and the home, they are so many media for channeling from the one great spiritual reservoir, given into the Church's keeping by Christ, the living and transforming waters of grace from the Saviour's fountains. At the same time, they are an excellent means of counteracting secularism.

Specifically, the sacramentals are blessings or blessed articles. They are, for instance, the blessing the priest gives, the blessing we give ourselves as we devoutly make the sign of the cross. They are holy water, the blessed medal we may wear or have in the home or in our auto, the blessed pictures on the walls of the home, and the wedding ring blessed by the Church on the day it was placed upon the bride's finger before the altar.

Let me point out here in passing, that in the Archdiocese of Westminster, England, a hundred days indulgence may be gained by a married couple who kiss the wife's blest wedding ring and recite with contrite heart the prayer: "Grant us, O Lord, that loving Thee, we may love each other and live according to Thy holy law."

A great number of other sacramentals could be mentioned, all of which can play a highly important role in bringing Christ into our homes, into our daily family life. But rather than try to enumerate all of them, let us single out a number that seem particularly suited to that church in miniature, the home, and examine them in some detail.

#### HOLY WATER

First of all, in speaking of blessings and blessed articles, we may well think of holy water. It is used for many purposes and in conjunction with many blessings. It should be at hand in every Catholic home. The formula which the Church uses in blessing it is a fitting one indeed. It seems to be particularly aimed at home use. Here, for instance, are some of its words: "Whatever it sprinkles in the homes of the faithful, be it cleansed and delivered from harm." And again: "By the sprinkling of this water may everything opposed to the safety and repose of them that dwell therein be banished."

#### THE WEDDING RING

As already stated, the very ring which is the sign of the wedded union is blessed by the Church. This blessing takes place at the altar



on the occasion of the marriage ceremony. It is given, as the words of the ritual state, "that she who wears it may render her husband unbroken fidelity, that she may abide in God's peace, obedient to God's will, and that they may live together in constant mutual love."

### BLESSING OF THE HOUSE

Every church is blessed. And so, too, should every home or "little Church" be blessed. Where that is done there really should not be a striking difference between cottage and castle, between hut and manor house and palace. Any and all of these will then be in a special manner a "little Church," God's blessing resting upon it. The words used for the blessing are the same as those used in the prayer of the Asperges which we have in many of our Catholic churches before the main Sunday Mass. They are a plea, namely "that God may deign to send His holy angel from heaven to guard, cherish, protect, visit and defend all who dwell in it."

It is really unfortunate that in this day of great mobility and lack of home ownership—and presumably, I should also add, because of carelessness—this sacramental, the blessing of the house, is frequently overlooked.

Holy water may be blessed by a priest at any time. Customarily, however, it is blessed before the main Sunday Mass. Some of it should be kept in a place where it is available to the parishioners so they can take it in containers to their homes. At least one holy water font should be in every home. There will normally be a number of opportunities to use it during the day. If used regularly in the evening, for instance, for the blessing of the children before they retire—the practice will be a consistent reminder to keep a supply on hand.

There is also a type of holy water known as Easter water. This, too, is used in the home. For example, it may be used for the blessing of the Easter food. In some places it is used for the solemn blessing of the homes of parishioners by the pastor on Holy Saturday. It gets its name from the fact that it is distributed to the people on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter. Part of the water is used for the blessing of baptismal water, the remainder is given to the parishioners.

There is still a third type of blessing for the home. It is a blessing that may be given annually on Epiphany or the Feast, so-called,

of the Three Kings, or within its octave. Among certain nationalities this blessing is still faithfully carried out. The form or ceremony used is as follows: with chalk, especially blessed for the occasion, the following legend is written at the top of the door of the house: 19-C-M-B-53. The three letters stand for the Three Kings who were traditionally known as Caspar, Melchior, and Baltassar. The numbers, of course, indicate the year in which the blessing is given. Incense is used in this blessing. Presumably that is in remembrance of the incense offered the Christ Child by the Three Kings.

In religious houses, such as monasteries and convents, the legend is written over the door of every room or cell. Like the other blessings of homes, this one is meant to invoke protection over the mind and body of those who dwell therein. The prayer of the blessing reads as follows: "Bless, O Lord, Almighty God, this home, that in it there may be health, chastity, strength of victory, humility, goodness, and industry, a fulness of law and the action of graces through God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and that this blessing may remain on this house and on those who frequent it."

#### PICTURES, ETC.

The evidences of religion on the walls of the home—sacred pictures, statues or images, and crucifixes—are also blessed. This is done so that, as the words of the prayer used in the blessing read, "those that behold them may be led to contemplate and imitate the lives and holiness of those depicted." Might we not well ask here whether there are such pictures in our homes? Is there a picture of the Holy Family, the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Virgin, perhaps of the patron saints of members of your families there?

And speaking of the blessing of the home and its various appurtenances, it should be well to remind that the Church even has a special blessing for the bridal chamber or the room of the father and mother. The words used in blessing it are beautiful in their significance. Perhaps some of us are too sophisticated for the use of such a blessing today. But I dare say, where its influence is found, one may rest assured there will not be found any of the unnatural vices that have become so prevalent in modern married life. It would seem particularly unfortunate, in view of the circumstances of the times, that this blessing is almost entirely overlooked today.

## FOR THE CHILD

Then there are a very considerable number of blessings that center in the child, the primary purpose of marriage. Some of these center in the mother as well as in the child. Thus, there is, first of all, the blessing of the mother with child. The Church prays, in giving this blessing, "that by the obstetric hand of Thy mercy her infant may happily see the light of day, and being reborn in holy baptism forever seek Thy ways and come to life everlasting." Then, pouring forth the blessing of the Church upon the mother and the child within her, the words of the prayer become a plea that God's holy angels "may preside to keep them in peace, and that God's blessing may be ever present."

### THE PARENTAL BLESSING

Again, there is the parental blessing, and more specifically, first of all, the blessing given the newborn babe by his father and mother after birth. Reference is made to the custom of blessing the infant, sprinkling it three times with holy water as the parents say these words: "May the Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, bless you, my child, for time and eternity, and may this blessing remain forever with you. Amen." Very properly is this blessing repeated by the parents after the child's spiritual rebirth in baptism. And this inspiring practice of parents blessing their children should thereafter be kept up as they advance in years under their care. Parents should bless their children, for instance, when they retire in the evening, or when they leave the home, particularly to go on a considerable journey.

Some very inspiring examples of this practice could be given. Let me recall at least two or three. Thus, history tells of St. Thomas More who, while holding the second highest post in England, that of Chancellor, faithfully kept up the practice learned in his childhood home, of every morning asking his father's blessing before setting about his day's duties.

Then there is the instance of the Bishop of India, consecrated several years ago. His consecration had taken place at Rome, and when he returned afterwards to his native city in India a great concourse of people were at the station to greet him. Upon the arrival of the train the first thing he did on alighting was to go directly to his mother, whom he saw in the crowd, and kneel for

her blessing. Then he gave her his blessing. Getting his mother's blessing was a practice he had been accustomed to since childhood.

There are examples from our own country too. Thus, the instance is well known of a monsignor in a mid-western diocese. While his father was still living, every week he would pay him a visit. When it came time to leave, the father would give him his blessing. Then, in turn, the monsignor would bless his aged father.

However, while examples of this practice are still found, the parental blessing is far less common than it was in an earlier day. That is very unfortunate. It is a real loss to Christian family life. Simple as the practice is, it lends dignity to fatherhood and motherhood and makes for mutual respect between parents and children.

### RELIGIOUS EXPRESSIONS

Even such a matter as the use of religious expressions and the reverent use of the name of God in the home is well deserving of mention. Among the Italians and Poles, the Portuguese and Spanish, the French and Germans, the Irish and others, one finds not a few of these religious expressions yet to this day. But in this regard, too, unfortunately, many families have grown remiss. Some have wholly neglected them. We should strive to make them generally accepted again. The expressions have real religious significance, and they can exert a profound influence over the lives of the family members. Like short aspirations, or so-called ejaculatory prayers, they keep the thought of God and the things of God in the home always. They serve as an effective antidote against the insidious and deadly poison of secularism.

The following are some examples of these religious expressions still found among various peoples: "Praised be Jesus Christ"; "God bless you"; "God reward you"; "Thank God" or "Thanks be to God"; "God's will be done," or "If God wills"; "Our Lady, help me"; "The Lord hear us." There is no reason why these expressions cannot be revived and restored again. If that is done, the family will gain much by it. Religion will gain; secularism will lose.

### RELIGIOUS FAMILY MILESTONES

Celebrating religious family milestones within the family circle is also a matter of no little spiritual importance. Especially for younger married couples, such family celebrations present both a

challenge and an opportunity. They present a challenge to create a family tradition that will be truly Christian in character and of great formative influence in the lives of their children. They present an opportunity to defy convention, to dare to be different, to substitute for the flimsy and often faulty standards of the day, standards that are deeply rooted in centuries of Christian tradition and culture. Furthermore they present golden opportunities for strengthening family ties and for developing a true sense of values.

#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

There are many religious family milestones that deserve well to be celebrated. Nevertheless, some are more outstanding than others. Certainly, wedding anniversaries are important, since marriage in Christ is the source of family life. Whether it is a fifth or tenth, a twenty-fifth or fiftieth anniversary, the day the parents received the sacrament of matrimony should be a real occasion for rejoicing, for innocent pleasure and entertainment. But in the Catholic home a wedding anniversary should be first of all a religious event. It may be fittingly observed by family attendance at Mass and family reception of Holy Communion. It offers a good opportunity to talk to the children about the liturgy and character of matrimony, about the wedding Mass and the nuptial blessing. An ever-increasing understanding of these from early childhood on will do much to bring Catholic young people to a true realization of the dignity of Christian marriage, and create in them a reverent attitude toward Christian fatherhood and motherhood. The idea of marriage as a vocation in which man and woman are to be sanctified can be made to grow on children as a result of such a celebration. Furthermore, it can occasionally afford the parents an opportunity to tell their children what joy was theirs as God blessed them with every new child. Again it provides them with an opportunity to refer, by contrast to the vocations of the priesthood and religious life, and to point out that their happiness would indeed be complete if in God's designs a son or daughter of theirs might be blessed with a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. The first seeds of vocation can quite normally be planted in the house.

#### BAPTISMAL ANNIVERSARY

In this country we are inclined to make a good deal over a person's birthday. That is all well and good. But we must not overlook

his rebirth; that is, his birth into spiritual life or the anniversary of his baptism.

What can parents do in connection with the celebration of such an anniversary? Here are some possibilities. When the children are small they may be told of their baptism in story form. In the case of older children the actions, the symbols and ceremonies of the official baptismal rite may be explained to them. Then the parents and children might fittingly renew their baptismal vows. Indeed that should be the highlight of the day. The sponsors might well be invited in for this occasion. Incidentally, no set form is prescribed for the renewal; but there is an excellent one in the booklet, *The Gift of Life, Rite of Infant Baptism* (A translation by Rev. Richard E. Powers). The occasion might well be brought to a close with the singing of a hymn, such as "Holy God We Praise Thy Name." Suitable gifts for the occasion might be a Bible, a picture or statue for a child's room, a book about his patron saint, or other religious book.

#### NAME-DAY CELEBRATIONS

In not a few places where Catholic tradition reaches back to medieval times, the name-day or the feast of the patron saint to whose care the child was committed at baptism, is celebrated as the anniversary of the baptismal day. Thus, besides reminding the child of his baptismal privileges and duties, the celebration impresses on him the saintly life of the one whose name he bears, and teaches him to consider how he may follow the example of his patron in his own state and calling.

Still other milestones well worthy of special religious celebration on the part of the family could be mentioned. Certainly particularly deserving of mention yet are the First Communion and Confirmation days of the children. How fitting it would be if parents accompanied their child to Communion on his First Communion day. How fitting, too, if they presented him to the bishop for Confirmation on his Confirmation day. There are some signs that such practices are coming into their own again. All of them, all such observances of religious milestones in the family, provide excellent opportunities for deepening the Christian consciousness of the sources of grace, for deepening Christian insight, and for putting the spirit of secularism to rout and at the same time for strengthening family ties.



## ENTHRONEMENT

There is one religious practice or devotion to which attention might specifically be called. It is growing rapidly in this country, and apparently in other parts of the world too, and bids well to become quite universal. Reference is made to the so-called Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the Home. It is a practice that grew out of a promise of Christ to St. Margaret Mary Aloccoque: "I will bless every house in which an image of my Heart shall be exposed and honored."

The idea of the Enthronement is that "in the Christian home a throne of love and veneration is erected for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and that His sovereign rights over the family are thereby recognized." The practice is an external recognition of the fact that Christ is the real head of the home. It is not merely a passing act of consecration to the Sacred Heart but a permanent state of devotedness and love.

The enthronement itself is a simple procedure. A picture or image of the Sacred Heart is secured and placed in a prominent place in the home. On a chosen day the pastor is invited to the home to read the Act of Consecration for the family and to bless the picture and the home. Unless a dispensation to the contrary is given by the bishop of the diocese, the presence of the priest is indispensable for the validity of the enthronement. Let me just add yet that the Act of Consecration should be renewed by the family, monthly and on special festivals, and that other like practices should be cultivated. The latter include, for instance, observance of the First Friday of the month; special Sacred Heart devotions during the month of June, the month of the Sacred Heart; the holy hour or a shorter period of devotion in the home on Thursday evenings or at some other time during the week. (Booklet: *Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the Home*, Family Life Bureau, N.C.W.C.)

## HOME SHRINE OR ALTAR

Certainly every home-church should have either the Sacred Heart enthroned or at least some little altar or shrine. That is, a place should be provided for the family to kneel and pray. The altar or shrine need not be at all pretentious. A little table or a shelf affixed to the wall might suffice. A crucifix and a few candles could be placed on it. Above it might be hung a picture of the Sacred



Heart or of the Holy Family. A vigil light might well be kept available, at least for use on special occasions. Children, properly instructed, would consider it a privilege to care for this little domestic shrine.

And so there are still other religious customs that are admirably suited to the home, or that at least can be suited to it. I have not even mentioned such daily prayers in common, as morning and evening prayers, grace before and after meals and the angelus. These, too, like the others, can help to make of the home a church in miniature and to keep from the hearth the spirit of secularism.

But perhaps the best means of all for making of the home a church in miniature is the observance of the cycle of the liturgical year within its walls. Starting with advent and going through the entire year, with its varied feasts and liturgical seasons, the family can find almost endless material and daily occasion for religious practice in the home. However, this field is so extensive and so rich in possibilities that it calls for a special conference if it is to be treated with any real thoroughness.

## V. THE FAMILY AND THE LITURGICAL YEAR

Consideration has already been given a variety of ways and means for making our homes houses of God or churches in miniature. But still further attention may well be focused on this matter. Let us do so in this conference by noting special religious devotions and practices for the home that are particularly suited to the liturgical year.

By the liturgical year we mean the sacred cycle of solemnities by which we commemorate each year the work of Redemption wrought for us by our divine Savior. It consists of certain seasons, such as Advent, Lent, Christmastide, Eastertide, Pentecost, and of feasts, such as the Feasts of our Lord, His Blessed Mother, and the saints.

In our day there is a growing emphasis on the Church's sacred liturgy. Pope Pius XII has encouraged this by giving us a special encyclical on it. It is well that we make what application is possible to the home.

The Church, one might say, lives and breathes in the cycle of the Liturgical Year. The Church in miniature, the Christian family, should do the same. Parents and children will do so, first and above all, if they will participate, insofar as feasible as a family group, with their fellow-parishioners, as the mysteries of Christ are publicly and officially celebrated in the parish church. But they should also do so by special devotional practices within the home; in other words, by careful preparation for the seasons and feasts of the Church year and by religious practices in the spirit of those seasons and feasts. This should do much to bring about a blessed wedding, so to speak, between the altar and the home. So, too, should it bring variety into the prayer life of the family.

In the following we shall examine at least some forms of these devotions and religious practices for the home that conform to the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year. Not all may appeal to everybody. Nor will all fit especially well into every home. But we will find that such practices are so manifold that they will provide plentiful opportunity for selection on the part of all.

## ADVENT

The church year begins with the Advent season. Advent means "the coming." The season, beginning with the fourth Sunday before Christmas and extending to the high feast of Christmas itself is a time set aside for preparation for the coming of our Lord on Christmas Day.

A particular feature of this Advent season, suited to the home and rapidly coming into prominence again, is the Advent Wreath. This wreath may be bought or it may be made in the home. Commonly it is made of pine branches, and is suspended from the ceiling by means of four purple ribbons. It is adorned with four candles, one for each week of the Advent season. The light of the candle represents Christ the Light who is come into this world. All the other features of the wreath also have special significance. Thus, the round form of the wreath signifies the Church's holy cycle, the green of the wreath signify the divine freshness that comes to us by living with the Church's feast and fasts, the purple bands suggest the graces that descend into hearts during the Advent season of preparation for our Lord's coming.

## ADVENT CANDLE

Among some peoples there is also the custom of the advent candle. That is, a large candle is put into a candlestick that is covered with white silk. It is meant to symbolize the Immaculate Mother from whom came the Light of the World, Christ our Savior. If there is a little shrine or altar in the home, this advent candle might well be placed upon it and lit each evening during advent for the family prayers in common. It serves as an eloquent reminder of the Incarnation of the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary. Certainly in the case of children, such a beautiful practice will have great influence. And there is no reason why adults should not also be influenced by it. They will probably understand its significance better than the children.

A simple leaflet is available today for the blessing of the advent wreath by the father as the members of the family gather around it on the Saturday before the first Sunday of Advent (*The Advent Wreath*, Altar and Home Press, Conception, Mo.). The collects of the Masses for the Sundays of Advent are also given in English on this leaflet. Hence they can conveniently be read as the candles

of the wreath are lit for the various advent Sundays. One candle is lit for the first Sunday, two for the second, three for the third, and all four for the fourth. The ceremony provides an impressive little ritual. The children may well have a part in it.

#### CHRIST AND CHRISTMAS—THE CRIB

We often hear the expression today, "Put Christ back into Christmas." The Feast, as we know, has been highly commercialized. Its real purpose has been set aside by many, if it has not even been forgotten. Gifts, greeting cards, celebrations—things that should help to create the atmosphere of a great Christian feast—are often entirely of a secular character. There is little or nothing to remind of the Christ Child. How can that be corrected? How can a genuine Christmas spirit be made to pervade the home? The Catholic parent who gives the matter any real thought will think of a number of ways of doing so. We recall one or the other here.

First of all, the emphasis at Christmas should be on the crib. It should certainly be given as much attention as the Christmas tree. Here, too, incidentally, is a place for candles. A large candle, burning before the crib, will remind all that the Christ Child, the Light of the World, is with us. From this candle, smaller candles placed before the crib, one for each member of the family are lit. This signifies that from Him who is the "Light of the World" all "light" comes.

Here, again, we have available today an excellent leaflet that suggests a fitting ritual for the home on Christmas Eve. Its content runs as follows. When the family members have gathered around the Christmas tree, the father, as head of the home, lights the tree and the candles at the crib. Together the family members then sing a verse or two of the hymn "Silent Night." Next, the mother reads from the Roman Martyrology, the announcement of the birth of Our Lord. (The Roman Martyrology is a volume containing lives of the saints which are read aloud or sung on their respective feast day in conjunction with the divine office of the Church.) On Christmas Day only the birth of our Lord is announced. Following that, another verse of "Silent Night" may be sung. Then, while all stand, the father reads the story of our Lord's birth as told in the Gospel of St. Luke. This is followed by the recitation of the Creed by the whole family, after which the mother reads the oration of the first Mass of the Feast of Christmas. Finally, all join in the

singing of the hymn "Adeste Fidelis." This devotion may then fittingly be followed by the expression of Christmas good wishes and the bestowal of presents.

#### SLOVAK OBSERVANCE

The following Christmas observance is found among the Slovak people and apparently also, with perhaps some variations, among other Catholic peoples of Eastern Europe, such as the Poles. On Christmas Eve an elaborate meal is prepared. The family members have kept a very rigid fast all day—in fact, those of the old school will have eaten absolutely nothing all day until they sit down to this "Generous Supper." Incidentally, a special menu is adhered to, with very few deviations.

The first thing taken at the meal is known as the *oblatky*. The term comes from the Latin word *oblatio* and refers to the bread used for the offertory and consecration of the Mass. It is in the form of a large oval-shaped wafer, and is meant to remind of the "bread that came down from Heaven," or Christ's coming upon this earth on the first Christmas night. The wafers are blest by the pastor during the week before Christmas and are distributed to the families of the parish. Each family is given one for every member. The father commonly serves this "oblatky." He takes one wafer at a time, puts a little honey on it, and hands one to each member of the family. This they then consume together in memory of the "bread that came down from heaven." The honey that is added is meant to signify the goodness of God.

After the meal there is singing of Christmas carols till it is time to go to Midnight Mass. Often groups of young folks go from house to house to sing Christmas carols or hymns.

#### ST. JOHN'S DAY

St. John's day, which comes two days after Christmas, is celebrated with a special little ritual among some Catholic peoples of Europe. There are also at least a few isolated cases in which it is celebrated in this country. St. John is known as the beloved disciple of our Lord, and the observance in his honor in the home takes on the semblance of a little love feast for the family. Wine is blessed "in honor of St. John" after the day's Mass. Before the evening meal the father fills the loving-cup with it and passes it from

member to member with the greeting: "Drink the love of St. John, the apostle. And where charity is and love, there is God."

Incidentally, these latter words, "Where charity is and love, there is God," form the opening line of one of the most beautiful hymns of the Holy Week liturgy. It is referred to as *Ubi Caritas* (Where Charity is), after the two opening words of the Latin version. It is an ideal wedding song and also an excellent prayer for family members.

#### EPIPHANY

Epiphany is no longer celebrated today as it was in the past. Years ago, it was a holy day of obligation. It, also, rather than Christmas, was the day for bestowing gifts. Apparently that was because of the gifts the Three Kings had given the Infant Savior. Mention has already been made of the special blessing for homes for this feast. Since this practice is being gradually revived again, the blessing of the chalk in the church is also coming into its own again. With it the gold, incense and myrrh, are also being blessed again.

#### FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

The Feast of the Holy Family should be of special interest to the family. It falls on the Sunday within the Octave of Epiphany, and is coming more and more to be observed as a true family feast. Family group Communion and family group assistance at Mass are being observed on it in more and more parishes. It also provides a very fitting occasion for the renewal of the marriage promises on the part of the husband and wife, and for the recitation of the Pledge to Christian marriage on the part of all the members as also for the consecration of the entire family to the Holy Family. The Family Holy Hour, which is observed in a great number of churches in the course of the year, is held in not a few of them on the Feast of the Holy Family. (Pledge leaflet and Family Holy Hour booklet, Family Life Bureau, N.C.W.C.)

#### CANDLEMAS

Candlemas Day also has special significance for the family. In this country the custom that has been observed by most families, has been that of securing two or three blessed candles on Candlemas



Day and keeping them in the home for use in the event of a sick-call. But there are many other uses for blessed candles in the home, and happily these are coming into their own again. Thus they can be burned in the home, not only on Candlemas Day, but also on other particularly noteworthy feasts of the Church. So, too, can they be burned on the home altar or shrine during family devotions. Or, again they can serve as the Christ-candle in the center of the dinner table on Sundays or special feast days, on name-days, and on anniversaries of marriages and baptisms.

In Germany one finds the following custom: on the evening of Candlemas Day, every member of the family lights his new candle for the recitation of the joyful mysteries of the rosary before the crib. Then the father cuts from the Christmas tree the branches, still laden with gifts, and distributes them to the children. This is, as it were, the closing of the Christmas season.

#### THE LENTEN SEASON

The Lenten season soon follows in the Church's liturgical calendar. It, too, offers many opportunities for religious exercises suited to the home and family life.

Shrove Tuesday, the day preceding the opening of the penitential season, may fittingly be marked by some special innocent merriment. Many may not approve of the garish ways in which it is celebrated today. But it might be well to remember that the idea of the Shrove Tuesday celebration is Catholic in origin. It can also be kept Catholic in tone.

Very fittingly might the prayer, which is said by the Church after the bestowal of the blessed ashes on Wednesday, be said by the family on Shrove Tuesday evening. Its words read: "Lord give us grace to inaugurate with holy fasting the defenses of Christian warfare, so that we who are to fight against spiritual wickedness, may be helped and so strengthened by self-denial."

Incidentally, Halloween is also of Catholic origin. The word really means the Eve of All-Hallows; that is, of All Hallowed Ones—the Eve of the Feast of All Saints. One may well doubt that in real Catholic days it was celebrated as we celebrate it today. Perhaps we can get back to something better today—at least insofar as our Catholic homes are concerned.

So, too, might it be added, that the word "carnival" comes from the Church. It comes from the Latin expression *carni vale*, which



means "farewell to meat." Catholics celebrated with a "carnival" before embarking upon the abstinence season of Lent.

### HOLY WEEK

The liturgy of the Church for Holy Week, portraying such outstanding events as the institution of the Blessed Sacrament, the passion and death of our divine Savior, and His Resurrection from the dead—is particularly striking. Family members should attend the Church services of these days insofar as possible. But there are observances for the home too. These can do much to keep the family members in the spirit of this sacred season.

### HOLY THURSDAY

Holy Thursday is the feast commemorating the institution of the Holy Eucharist. After the Mass of the day, the Blessed Sacrament is reserved on a special altar in the Church and is left there for the adoration of the faithful all day and night.

In the homes of some Catholic people the evening meal on this great feast is made a sort of symbolic "Last Supper." The family members appear around the festive supper table in their Sunday best. Special buns have been prepared and placed, together with a cup of wine for each member of the family, at the father's place. The father breaks a bun, makes the sign of the cross over it, and hands it, together with a cup of wine, to the mother. Then the same is done for all the other members of the family. When all have been served, they sit down and, while the father reads the Gospel of the Last Supper, they slowly eat and drink in Christ's memory. The little ritual bears no little resemblance to the *oblatky* of the Slovaks on Christmas Eve, at which the father serves a wafer with honey to each member of the family in remembrance of the "bread that came down from Heaven."

Usually the main dish for the meal that follows this symbolic Last Supper is an Easter Lamb. It is carved and served by the father. For, it is he who represents Christ in the home.

### GOOD FRIDAY

The home should be characterized by peace and quiet on Good Friday. This should particularly be the case from noon to three o'clock, if the members are not attending the *tres ores* services in

church which are held in remembrance of our Lord's sufferings and death on the cross. The time may very fittingly be spent in prayer and meditation and spiritual reading. As the altar is stripped in the church, so the table in the home may well be left bare for the meals of the day.

#### HOLY SATURDAY

A special feature of the Holy Saturday church service is the lighting and blessing of the new fire by the priest. From this is lit the triple candle, and then, in turn, the Easter candle, the sanctuary lamp, and the candles on the altar. Here, again, the light represents Christ the Light of the World. It had been extinguished with His death on Good Friday.

In preparing for the festive Easter Sunday meal, efforts may be centered, at least if there is a budding artist in the home, in decorating Easter eggs with pictures of an Easter lamb, the Risen Savior, the Blessed mother, and different patron saints of the family. In Catholic countries the food for the Easter table will have been blessed by the pastor before the morning Mass.

Among other things, Easter is the Church's great baptismal day. The baptismal water is blessed on Holy Saturday. In the early church it was then used for the baptism of the catechumens. If the children have their baptismal candles they may well be placed on the table at the main meal on Easter. Very fittingly, too, may all the family members renew their baptismal vows together.

#### PENTECOST

Between the feast of the Ascension of our Lord into Heaven and Pentecost, the family may very properly include novena prayers in honor of the Holy Ghost in their evening prayers, begging the Holy Spirit to come, with His seven-fold gifts and sanctify the members of the family. Many beautiful prayers for such a novena can be found in the Mass-texts of the Vigil of Pentecost, the Feast itself, and its Octave.

There are other great feasts that occur during the cycle of the liturgical year—feasts of the Blessed Virgin, for instance—that can be celebrated in some special way in the home. Some special preparation for such can be made in the family circle, for instance, by reading and discussing the Mass texts of the Feasts the evening

before. This also would be a very fitting way in which to prepare for the Sundays of the year. Such a practice would help assure reasonable attention and devotion at the Sunday Mass—something that could hardly be expected if one spent Saturday evening and much of the night at an entertainment place, as is only too often the practice today.

The customs that I have mentioned in the foregoing will not all, as I said before, fit into every family circle. However, I feel that a sufficient number has been mentioned to make possible a satisfactory selection for any and every home. There are still others that have not been mentioned. And there is hardly any limit to the adaptations that can be made. There should be no difficulty in finding plenty of suitable ones to enable the family members to make of the home in a real sense a church in miniature, and to live in the spirit of our Holy Mother, the Church, throughout the entire ecclesiastical year.\*

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\*Some of the foregoing is found in the three volumes of the Family Life Bureau, entitled, *Your Home, O Church in Miniature*. The volumes contain much additional material.

## VI. THE HOME, A SCHOOL OF THE VIRTUES

We hear a great deal about sin. And that is certainly understandable, since sin is the one great evil that stands in the way, blocking the road to our heavenly home. Nevertheless, it might be quite possible to place so much emphasis on this negative aspect of spiritual life, as we might call it, that one would tend to overlook the positive aspect, or the practice of virtues. Yet the latter is unquestionably of great importance. The more virtuous we are, certainly the greater the reward that we can expect in heaven.

Hence it is well for us to focus attention on the virtues, and I mean to devote this conference to at least a brief exposition of some of them. The subject is an immense one. We can hardly expect to do more than introduce it. But even that should prove very beneficial. The truth is that some virtues are so closely and extensively associated with the home that they might well be called the domestic virtues. But all virtues are in considerable measure associated with family life. All can be taught within the family circle. The home can be and should be a great school for the learning of the virtues and a great center for their practice.

### A. THE VIRTUES IN GENERAL

Let us first discuss the virtues generally, and then devote our attention to a number of specific virtues. The average Catholic has a fair idea of the meaning of the term "virtue," and also of the various kinds of virtues. Such terms as "theological virtues," "cardinal virtues," "moral virtues," "natural and supernatural virtues" are also familiar to him. Yet it may help us if we refresh our memories with a few definitions.

A virtue can be defined as a habit or permanent disposition which inclines the individual to do good or to avoid evil. This definition suggests, and correctly so, that a virtue and a virtuous act are not one and the same thing. A virtue is more than an act. It is a habit, an endowment, a sort of faculty of the soul or an abiding disposition to act.

Some virtues are infused. For instance, the virtue of faith is infused at baptism. Other virtues are acquired. Thus, we acquire the

virtue of patience, for instance, by repeated acts of patience. Again, we acquire, or at least develop, the virtue of humility by repeated acts of humility.

Perhaps the major categories into which we divide the virtues are: the *theological*; the *cardinal*; the other *moral* virtues. I say "other" moral virtues, because the cardinal virtues are at the same time moral virtues.

The theological virtues have God, as He is in Himself, or as the Author of grace, as their immediate material and formal object. The very word suggests that. *Theos* is a Greek word meaning God. Hence, the theological virtues are virtues that relate to God, that have God as their object. And they are these three: faith, hope, and charity. In other words, they are: belief in God, hope in Him, and love of Him.

The moral virtues do *not* have God or the Creator for their immediate object, but some created good. They are concerned with the means whereby we tend to God. They are called moral virtues because they dispose us to lead moral or good and upright lives, by aiding us to treat persons and things in the right way. Our actions are so regulated by the moral virtues that, in spite of obstacles from within or without, we are induced to press on in a steady course toward God.

While there are only three theological virtues, there are many moral virtues. But among them there are four that have a special name. They are called cardinal virtues. These four are: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Why are they called the cardinal virtues? They are called so, not because they are the chief or most important and outstanding of the moral virtues, but because all the other moral virtues—in fact, our whole moral life—depend on them. The term comes from the Latin word "cardo," which means a hinge. Prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, therefore, are, so to speak, four hinges from which hang all the other virtues—or, let us say, from which flow all the other moral virtues.

With these terms made clear, and before taking up any specific virtues for consideration, it may be well to consider briefly the effective means for cultivating acts of virtue. They are chiefly these: meditation; actual practice; examination of conscience—more especially what is known as the particular examen—; the practice of mortification; use of the means of grace.

Little need be said about the first; namely, meditation. Obviously,

thinking upon virtue—meditating upon its worth and beauty, its advantages and necessity, leads us on to love it and to strive to acquire it.

Secondly, we mentioned the actual practice of virtuous acts. Here the dictum holds, practice makes perfect. By repeating virtuous acts we acquire ease and steadiness in their practice.

The third means for effectively cultivating virtuous acts that we mentioned was the examination of conscience. A regular check on ourselves will show us how we stand with regard to the practice and acquisition of virtue. This, of course, should be accompanied by a resolution to do better when we find reason to believe that we are not doing as well as we should.

The particular examen is even a more effective means. This type of examination focuses attention for some time—even weeks and months—upon one particular virtue or its opposite vice, calling for a persistent and intensive effort to develop the former and eradicate the latter, before going on to another virtue or vice. This particular type of examination is more effective than a general and rambling type. One will usually get much further by resolving to practice a specific virtue than by resolving to be more virtuous generally.

Unquestionably mortification is also a great aid in cultivating virtue. By removing obstacles to virtue, mortification lends facility to its practice. By constantly denying himself things that are innocent and lawful, the individual will be able, with relative ease, to deny himself things that are forbidden.

Certainly faithful use of the means of grace contributes to the effective practice of virtuous acts, giving us, as it does, supernatural aid to that end.

## B. SPECIFIC VIRTUES

### 1. FAITH

In turning to a consideration of the specific virtues, we quite logically take the fundamental theological virtue of faith first. What is it? What are some of the opportunities for its practice in the home?

Faith is the virtue by which we firmly believe all the truths that God has revealed. As already noted, the virtue of faith is infused into the soul at baptism. But, of course, one must practice acts of

faith. Certainly without that, faith will not remain strong and firm. In other words, faith must be exercised. It must be professed. Insofar as parents are concerned, they must teach their children the truths of faith; they must incite them to make acts of faith; they must give them an example of faith through practice in the home.

In place here should be a few words from Dr. Maria Hermkes, whom we have quoted before. By the words she gives an idea of the great importance to the child of the example of the practice of faith in the home. Stating first that parents, though they may be in no sense theologians, can teach the fundamentals of faith to the children, she adds the thought that communication of knowledge is not enough. No, she maintains, knowing the faith is not sufficient. We must live it. Then she goes on to say: "It comes to this—and parents too are developed marvelously in the process—to live forth convincingly, however simply, the Christian world: love lived; faith lived. When the young man in his doubts, in his unbelief, in his heart's coldness, knows that his father and mother are strong in faith and in love, that his unrest is folded into their life of prayer, that is often the deciding factor and suffices in time of crisis more than anything else. How beautiful it is when the one prayer lives on in a child that has fallen from God, 'Help my unbelief, and look upon the faith of my mother,' as indeed we all pray to God that He look not upon our unbelief, but upon the faith of our Mother, the Church. Outside the family such a child will feel himself in a strange land; and he will keep strong root always in the love of his father, in the faith of his mother."

Yes, the exercise of faith on a family basis is important. That is why practices like the following are important: 1) common prayer and other religious exercises within the family circle; 2) attendance at Mass and the reception of Communion as a family unit; 3) the provision of religious articles—crucifixes, pictures, and other religious tokens—reminders of the faith—in the home.

And we may rest assured that faith in the home carries with it many and deep compensations. Beyond a doubt, the misfortunes and heartbreaks of life are borne far more easily in the home of a lively faith than in the home in which its benign and strengthening influence is not felt. When sickness and poverty enter the home of faith, though pain may indeed be experienced, its keen edge is very considerably dulled by hope, and by the knowledge that even



God's chastisements are not unaccompanied by love. Then, too, in the solemn hour of death, faith mitigates the pain of the dying in such a home. Nor does it leave that awful aching void that it necessarily leaves in the hearts of those who remain behind who have no faith. For, they go with a chastened sadness to the last resting place of the beloved departed, and there, kneeling around the cross that marks the spot, they pour out prayerful suffrage that the soul of the departed one may be speedily refreshed and rested. Often they will gather there around the spot to bind ever closer the secret ties of remembrance, and to yearn themselves for that eternal home already attained by those whom they loved and revered in their home on this earth. Yes, we may rest assured such a home of faith has a balm which others cannot have. It yields compensations which others cannot give.

## 2. HOPE

Then there is the theological virtue of hope. It is a virtue that leads us confidently to place our trust in God, and to do so because of His Almighty power and His infinite goodness and promises. And what is it we hope for? What is the object of this virtue? The answer is life everlasting, and the means needed to attain it. As we pray to God, in reciting the Act of Hope: "relying on Thy infinite goodness and promises, I hope to obtain the pardon of my sins, the help of Thy grace, and life everlasting." Left to ourselves, we certainly have little reason for hope. But, relying upon God's mercy and promises, we have every reason to hope. He is both all-powerful and all-good and all-merciful.

Zealous Christian parents will be characterized by the virtue of hope. They will avoid on the one hand despair of God's mercy, and on the other presumption of God's mercy: they will confidently place their trust in God. Furthermore, they will seek diligently to instil this virtue in their little ones. They can do so by making the Act of Hope one of the favorite prayers of the family circle. They can do so by calling the children's attention to God's great goodness to us as manifested in such doctrines, for instance, as the forgiveness of sin and purgatory. And they can do so particularly during the month of November, the month of the poor souls. To be sure, at other times too should there be prayers in the home for the deceased members of the family and of the wider family relationship. Such prayers are a beautiful expression of supernatural

hope, a hope built on the other two theological virtues, faith and charity. Hence there is obviously also opportunity in the home for fostering the great theological virtue of hope.

### 3. LOVE

But undoubtedly there is even greater opportunity in the home for the practice of the "greatest of the three," the theological virtue of love. What do we mean by this virtue, and what are some of the opportunities to practice it in the home? We must refer at least briefly to it, since it is so very fundamental. It is, in fact, the very essence of Christianity. You will undoubtedly recall the occasion on which this was brought out by our Divine Savior. A lawyer, tempting Him, inquired of Him: "Master, which is the greatest law, the greatest commandment?" And the Master answered, in substance, that really there was but one law, the two-fold law of love—love of God and neighbor. To that he reduced all the law and the prophets. It is, therefore, the very essence of Christianity.

We define supernatural love or charity as a virtue by which we love God for His own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. We are really brought into being for the purpose of loving God. Hence, it certainly should be our holy ambition constantly to increase charity in the soul. Greater charity implies greater nearness to God, greater friendship with Him, greater merit, and eventually higher glory in heaven. How then is this to be accomplished? How are we to increase charity in the soul? Spiritual writers set forth these means: 1) striving for more perfect knowledge of God; 2) striving for greater purity of heart and detachment of creatures; 3) gradual purification of our love of God; 4) frequent exercise of charity or performance of acts of love of God.

A few words of explanation should be in place.

1. Regarding the first means—*striving for a more perfect knowledge of God*—we know that God is infinite goodness. But the good is more lovable, the better it is known. It is really the profound knowledge of God on the part of the blessed in heaven that make their love of Him so full and overflowing. Hence, we should meditate on His perfections, His goodness and power and mercy, etc., and not center all our attention in earthly interests and pursuits.

2. As to the second means of growing in love of God—that is,

*striving for greater purity of heart and detachment from creatures*—little explanation should be necessary. Obviously, the more we divest ourselves of self and the more we diminish in our love of created things, the more we grow in love of the Creator. It is preoccupation with self and the things of this world that disputes our heart with God.

3. Then there is the third means of growing in love of God—*the gradual purification of our love of God, or the gradual perfecting of our love*. That is, we must strive really to love God for Himself, and not, for instance, because that gives us some satisfaction, or because we expect a reward in return.

4. Finally, there is the *exercise of charity or the actual practice of acts of love or the performance of deeds of love*, as a means of increasing love in the soul. Practice makes perfect. Every act of charity disposes the soul toward the increase of charity; every fresh act makes the heart more ready to break forth into a further act; and as this exercise becomes more and more habitual, there is every now and then an act of special fervency that floods the heart. This point of exercising charity, of performing acts of love, is highly important to us. We have to *preserve* the love of God, which was infused as an endowment or habit into the soul at baptism; but we also have to *develop* it. We *preserve* it by avoiding all mortal sin. We *develop* it by performing good works, by practicing acts of love. Certainly the more we love God, the better for us.

Charity or perfection is open to unlimited development. One should readily see that there is a great difference between perfection first infused into the soul of the child and that of the mature saint after a long life spent in the practice of every virtue or good work. The wise and thoughtful individual will be mindful of that fact. He must save his soul, of course; otherwise all is lost. But he should not be satisfied with that. He should keep himself keenly aware of the fact that it is in his power to determine the degree of his glory in heaven—that the capacity for heavenly happiness in his soul is determined by the degree of perfection of charity attained in this life, and that this degree very largely depends upon the diversity and intensity, the duration and number of good works.

The second part of the law of love—the love of neighbor—is also very important insofar as the family is concerned. By neighbor we, of course, do not just mean the person living next door. We should first of all mean those of our own household—husband, wife,

brother, sister, parent, child. In its full meaning, of course, it extends to all mankind, everyone without exception.

Let us recall our definition of Christian love. It is a virtue by which we love God above all things for His own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. Love of neighbor, therefore, is like love of God, a theological virtue, if we love God Himself in our neighbor—in other words, if we love our neighbor for God's sake. It would *not* be genuine charity if we loved our neighbor only for his own sake, or because of the services he may render us. Only when we see God in him can we give him a love that is supernatural. Only when we see the interests of God and the will of God in our neighbor can we love him with a love that is "like unto" the love we owe God.

We can see, then, why, in speaking of the theological virtue of love, we include both love of God and of neighbor. The two are most closely associated, and the love of fellowman is second in importance only to the love of God. We love God for His own sake, because He is what He is—ininitely good, just, merciful, etc. We love our neighbor for the sake of Christ. We believe that Christ is in him. As Holy Writ tells us, "As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for Me."

Needless to say, the rightly constituted family is a great source of love. Indeed, one may well ask, where, for the great majority of mankind, is there fuller opportunity for the fulfillment of the great fundamental Christian law of love than precisely in the family circle. It is safe to say that by far the greatest amount of love and unselfishness in this world is found in that divinely constituted well-spring of love, the family. For family life calls for innumerable daily compromises and sacrifices, for the constant shouldering of responsibilities and hardships for the common good of the whole group. And if that sacrifice of self for the good of those around us in the home is done out of love of God, then indeed we have the fulfillment of the great Christian law of love. The members of such a family are well on their way to working out their eternal salvation.

We need not go into detail here regarding opportunities for the practice of charity in the home. With only a little care, those who live a family life will undoubtedly recognize many opportunities. Let me just add that both the positive and negative must be kept in mind if genuine charity is to be kept alive in the family circle.

Courtesy to all the members of the family, a spirit of cheerfulness while in the house, cooperation in making the home an attractive and pleasant place in which to live, proper respect and consideration for the older members of the family, a spirit of peace and real kindness—these are the things on the positive side that should characterize life in the Christian family. On the negative side, there should be the elimination of all nagging and bickering and disputes, of rivalries and jealousy and discord, and of strife and sullenness and dissension. In a word, charity should be the very center of all the virtues of the home. And when that is the case, society generally will also eventually be much influenced by it.

## VII. THE MORAL VIRTUES

In the foregoing we discussed, very briefly it is true, the theological virtues—faith, hope and charity. Next we shall turn to what are known as the moral virtues. There are many of these. Outstanding among them are, for example, the following: prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, humility, obedience, filial piety, religion, patience, meekness, truthfulness, chastity or purity. We cannot discuss all of these. Hence let us devote what time we have to a brief examination of these four: humility, temperance, fortitude, patience.

### HUMILITY

We may very fittingly begin with the moral virtue of humility, since it is recognized as the very foundation of all the other virtues or of Christian perfection. Without humility there is no solid virtue. With it, all the other virtues grow in depth and perfection. We know that without grace we cannot even begin any supernatural act of virtue. But grace demands humility. As we read in Holy Writ (St. James, iv, 6): "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." That is really to say that it is impossible to develop, or even to preserve, the habits of virtue without humility.

What is humility? It is, in a word, a recognition of our limitations. Take God from the picture and what have we? Surely nothing except sin. That should make us truly humble. The term "humility" comes from the Latin word *humus*, which means ground. It suggests, therefore, nearness to the ground or lowliness. An accepted definition is this: "humility is a moral virtue that inclines man to form a lowly opinion of himself, and to desire that others should also think lowly of him." On the basis of this definition, a distinction may be made between a *humility of estimation* and a *humility of affection*. The former is an acknowledgment of our own nothingness, based upon our utter dependence on God and our own depravity; the latter is a desire that others should think little of us.

We might add that humility does not require that we ignore the good that is in us, that we divest ourselves of all self-regard. What is required is that we do not claim the good that is in us as our own. It is not our own. It is God's gift.



Perhaps it will further clarify the meaning of humility to refer to its opposite vice; namely, the capital sin of pride. Pride is, substantially, forgetfulness of our dependence on God, coupled with a conceited, self-sufficiency. The practical Christian will always keep himself carefully on guard against pride. He will constantly bear in mind that pride comes before a fall, that God resists the proud and gives His grace to the humble. He will cultivate a distrust in himself and a dependence on God.

And the practical Christian will go further. He will practice acts of humility. He will patiently and cheerfully accept humiliations that come his way. He will not be too eager to excuse himself when found fault with or blamed. He will willingly perform humble tasks that are assigned him. He will not seek the praise of others, but will rejoice when others are praised.

Parents should teach their little ones humility. There are a number of ways in which this can be done.

First of all, they should reprimand with fitting severity any indication of pride or haughtiness in their children. Speaking unkindly to others, taking a mean pleasure in their embarrassment, humiliation, defects or deformities, or in any other words or actions intended to show off imagined superiority, should not be tolerated.

Another way of curbing pride and encouraging humility in the children is to discourage the spirit of undue criticism. Those who tend to criticize set themselves up as superiors.

Still another way is to urge the children to accept little humiliations that come their way. They may make an embarrassing mistake. Somebody may make a disquieting remark about them or their family. These and other unpleasant occurrences can be made means of keeping us humble. They can be made stepping stones to profound Christian virtues.

There are also opportunities for grownups to practice humility in the home. Poverty can keep them humble. Lowliness or humble circumstances often produce marvels of virtue among the poor. An eternal striving to keep up with the Joneses smacks more of pride than of humility.

Let me just say yet in concluding our consideration regarding this virtue, that there are great lessons in humility in the acknowledgment of our faults, in the confession of our sins. The family whose members regularly approach the sacred tribunal of penance



will be an humble family. And it will be all the better if they approach the tribunal together—on the same day.

### TEMPERANCE

One of the cardinal virtues is temperance. It is a virtue that disposes us to control our desires, our appetites, our inclinations. And there is question here not only of denying ourselves that which is wrong or offensive to the virtue of temperance, but also that which may be entirely innocent in itself and permissible. It is because pleasure is enticing and easily lures us beyond the proper limits that temperance should lead us to mortify ourselves, even in regard to some of the things that are permissible, in order to assure the control of reason over passion.

Let us contrast that now with the sins of intemperance, with the vices contrary to the virtue of temperance. These are gluttony and lust. Both are known as capital sins. The former refers to excess in eating and drinking, the latter to abuse and disorder in matters of the flesh. In God's designs, man does not live to eat and drink. Rather is it the other way around. He eats and drinks to live, to keep up his health and strength so he can fulfill his duties in life. In God's designs, too, sex is not given man for mere selfish gratification. It is given him for a high social purpose, for the propagation and conservation of the human race. The use of this faculty, therefore, is lawful only within the bond of marriage, and then only when it furthers or at least does not interfere with the primary purpose of marriage; that is, the procreation of children. It is in going counter to this that we see so many of the sins that are committed in married life today.

Closely related to this cardinal virtue of temperance, which relates to the control of our appetites for food and drink and sex, are such virtues as meekness and humility, the former relating to the control of the emotion of anger, the latter to the control of the inclination to pride.

It cannot be denied that the sin of intemperance carries with it evils which, directly or indirectly, have very detrimental effects upon family life. Practically all cases of serious family trouble have their source in some form or other of intemperance. The sad disorders in family life that result from excessive drink are well known. Sexual disorders may be much more hidden, but are nonetheless exceedingly harmful too. Some lead to open strife between the spouses. All stamp in selfishness, which is the enemy of the co-

operation and teamwork so essential to successful family life. They gradually kill real love, or even turn it into hate. There is no question that this is a basic factor in much of our dreadful divorce today.

Of course the zealous Catholic will aim much higher than merely trying to keep his home from destruction through intemperance. He will constantly be guided by the fact that the more he disciplines and denies himself by a spirit of mortification and genuine Christian self-control, the closer will he come to the realization of the Christian ideal in his family life, and in life generally, and that the more he gives in to selfish indulgence, the farther will he drift away from it.

#### FORTITUDE

Next, let us turn to the moral virtue of fortitude. It happens also to be a cardinal virtue. What does it mean? Fortitude is a virtue that disposes us to do what is good in spite of any difficulty. It urges us on in the face of trying circumstances. It moves us to act without either cowardice or rashness. The practice of the virtue that was just considered, namely, temperance, certainly calls for a measure of fortitude. It is not an easy thing to sacrifice oneself, to deny or mortify one's appetite.

There is, of course, such a thing as a merely human or a natural fortitude. There are many individuals who possess a natural bravery. For instance, there are those who do great things on the basis of likes and dislikes. But we are interested in the supernatural virtue of fortitude, in acting on the basis of supernatural principles. For instance, a person disciplines himself out of love of God. He bravely faces, out of love of Him, the innumerable obstacles on the road to virtue and to perfection. He suffers, willingly and patiently, for God's sake, the innumerable trials He sends. He bears, from the same spiritual motive, the hurts and sufferings and calumnies that come his way. Such an individual practices the supernatural virtue of fortitude.

No small measure of fortitude or moral courage is needed on the part of those who live a genuine family life today. Rearing a family is not a joyride. It is a job. And not infrequently straitened circumstances or other difficulties—a special cross, for instance, that God may send the parents—make it doubly difficult. Then there is the constant example of those who take the easy way out, simply shirk-

ing their obligations. There is also the ridicule heaped at times upon parents of large families. Nevertheless, in the face of all of this, parents can, strengthened by God's grace, faithfully fulfill all their duties under the moral law. And nothing less than that, of course, is expected. But it will not be accomplished without a real measure of the virtue of fortitude.

Parents should see to it that their home becomes a school for teaching the virtue of fortitude. The children should be made to face, and not be permitted to evade, the ordinary difficulties of life. Furthermore, they should be encouraged to practice voluntary mortification for God's sake.

I would point out in this connection that the saints are outstanding examples of the virtue of fortitude. Children should be made acquainted with their lives. Popular lives of the saints are available and should be in the home. The stirring lives of individual saints, at least occasionally heard on the radio, may very profitably be listened to. And what better practice in the home than telling children the stories of saints who were outstanding in Christian fortitude, and all the other virtues—such as patience and constancy—so closely linked with it. Surely the children are to be pitied whose only heroes are the movie stars.

#### PATIENCE

As a final virtue, let us consider the one just mentioned as being closely linked with fortitude; namely, patience. It is highly important for home life. It almost has to be the badge of successful parents.

We might define it as a moral virtue that disposes us to bear up under trials and difficulties. It has also been well defined as "a Christian virtue that makes us withstand with equanimity of soul, for the love of God, and in union with Jesus Christ, all physical and moral sufferings."

Suffering is the lot of all. Try as we will, we cannot avoid all of it. In fact, there are innumerable troubles that cannot be avoided. Now it is in the proper acceptance of these that the virtue of patience must be exercised. The true Christian will do this, not complainingly or in bitterness of heart, but from supernatural motives. He will accept them in acknowledgment of God's will in the matter, and in the hope of eternal reward. He will offer them up in union with Christ's sufferings, led on by the thought that if

our Savior, Who is innocence itself, suffered so much for our salvation, we should also willingly suffer for Him.

Patience, as I said, is a virtue that is closely akin to the cardinal virtue of fortitude. In fact, it has been described as the passive counterpart of fortitude. While fortitude is exercised in the active struggle with difficulties and dangers, patience is the passive acceptance of what is hard to bear. So, too, are voluntary mortification and the virtue of patience closely allied, if not even identical. The spirit of voluntary mortification finds its fullest practice in the virtue of patience. Patience, therefore, is hardly a striking type of virtue. It contrasts rather poorly with great or heroic acts of fortitude. Indeed, as it finds its place in home life, it is pretty much a commonplace and humdrum affair. Nonetheless, it is not in any sense an unimportant virtue. In fact, spiritual writers make much of it. It is very pleasing to God because it involves a complete surrender of our wills to His. Patient acceptance of trials and sufferings makes us like our Divine Lord. In His sufferings He never permitted a murmur to escape His lips. He accepted everything willingly because He knew that He was doing the will of His Father. Similarly we should accept willingly and gladly whatever happens to us.

There is much opportunity in the home for the practice of this important Christian virtue, particularly on the part of parents. There are difficulties to be faced and crosses to be borne in every family circle. The true Christian will face them calmly and will seek the necessary strength from Him who commanded us to take up our cross and follow Him, to bear them in the proper spirit. Ordinarily, it is the small things of daily family life that try patience most. Small in themselves, they are likely to add up and become very trying. This is particularly the case with the individual whose health is not just up to par, or whose nerves are taut. Patience in small things is not a thing to be spurned. It is pleasing to God and is at the same time a preparation for the time when bigger crosses will overshadow the individual.

There is a close relationship between the practice of patience in the home and the development of love between the family members. "Charity is patient," reminds St. Paul. Love is natural emotion; but it must be nourished and cultivated. It must be kept alive by kindness, thoughtfulness, courtesy. It calls for coolheadedness and graciousness, even when the individual is confronted with

trials and difficulties. It rules out scolding, bitter words, outbursts of anger—in a word, impatience in any shape or form. To have the courage to smile when things go wrong, to be ready with sincere and understanding affection at all times, to consider all things good when shared with the family, and crosses lighter when borne in unison—these are the things on which patience feeds and from which love waxes strong.

There is perhaps more inclination to show impatience within the confines of the home than is generally the case outside of it. At any rate, there are not a few individuals who are courteous and gracious outside the family circle, but impatient, sullen, and irritable within it. Yet, the fact is, nonetheless, that their family members have greater claim on them than have their extradomestic associates. One cause of this situation is undoubtedly constant close association with the same individuals. This association easily brings about an awareness of faults and failings which might otherwise lie hidden, or which might not become sufficiently obtrusive to irk us were the association not so close and continuous.

The well-trained Catholic will know of many little practices that will serve as helps to counteract inclinations to impatience. One such help will certainly be a sincere effort to imitate the Divine Model of patience and His home in Nazareth. Such an effort will gradually develop in the individual a fine appreciation of the virtue of patience and will be of genuine assistance whenever lowering clouds appear on the family horizon. Living consciously in the presence of God will also serve as a great inducement to bear patiently with the trials of everyday life. Constant reminders will be necessary here. A multiplicity of duties in the home, and too much attention to things about us, can easily make one forget he is living in His presence always. But proper training will enable the individual to recall that presence on a moment's notice. So, too, should a glance cast towards a crucifix or a sacred picture on the wall of the home serve as a helpful reminder in time of difficulty, and enable the individual to go on in patience in the fulfillment of his duties. Motivation is very important and helpful here. Bearing distasteful and unpleasant matters in expiation of our sins will go far in ruling impatience out of our lives. Uniting our sufferings with those of the souls in purgatory, in supplication for them, will have the same beneficial result. Again, a keen realization that not all faults are in others, but that we also have our share, should

do much to make us patient in our association and dealings with others, both in and outside the home. A real appreciation of the fact that others, probably just as sensitive as we are ourselves, must put up with our shortcomings and failings, will normally be an excellent help toward developing a spirit of both humility and patience. Undoubtedly, too, fair-minded individuals generally would be more given to the practice of the virtue of patience if they impressed upon their minds the fact that impatience is really never very reasonable, and that it goes very far in killing the spirit of give and take, which is so necessary for pleasant and satisfying living, whether it be in or outside the family circle.

Actually, there are many advantages linked with the practice of the virtue of patience. For instance, patience is a virtue that brings peace and tranquility to the mind. When the individual is thoroughly convinced that whatever happens is God's will and works to his good, it is hard to see how he will be much disturbed about anything. The things that really disturb and upset a person are those regarding which he cannot have his own way. If his will is so fixed on God that, whatever God wills, he himself wills, nothing can happen contrary to his own wishes. He will be perfectly satisfied and content.

Another advantage of this virtue is, of course, the fact that the practice of patience makes us pleasing to God. By accepting everything willingly as coming from Him, we give our wills to God. This is a thing that He requires of us above all things. It goes without saying that being pleasing to God is of even greater advantage to us than merely acquiring peace and tranquility of mind.

Still another great advantage that derives from the practice of patience is the fact that by means of it we can do much to satisfy for our own sins and those of our neighbors, and to gain graces for ourselves and for them. It was by willing acceptance of suffering that our Divine Savior redeemed the world. It is by patiently accepting our sufferings and offering them all to Him in union with His passion that we can take part in that work of Redemption. And what greater thing can be done in this life! What greater assurance of happiness in the next life can be given!

May one of the results of your retreat be to arouse at least enough interest in the virtues on your part to induce you to read and study in this field, and even meditate further on them for yourselves. It may well be repeated that, while accent on the great



evil of sin is essential, we must not overlook the more positive side of spiritual life, the practice of the virtues. And the family is one of the main mediums for the practice of the virtues. It is a great school of the virtues.\*

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\*The foregoing material on the virtues is taken from *The Family, a School of the Virtues*, a Family Life Bureau publication. A number of other virtues are treated in this brochure. Indeed its contents might well serve for a family retreat dealing with the virtues alone.



## VIII. THE RELIGIOUS FAMILY ANALOGY

There is a very considerable similarity between the human Christian family and the religious or monastic family. Thus, in religious communities of the Church we find such terms as "father," "mother," "brother," "sister" used quite as extensively as in the ordinary family. And a comparison of the two types of families will show a considerable basis for this. It will show many fundamental similarities between them.

Let us in this conference examine some of these similarities. It will not be an idle investigation. Indeed, it should do much to offset the fairly common notion that family life is something much lower in the eyes of the Church than religious life. And that, in turn, should help to give us a still truer appreciation of the real excellence of Christian family living.

In speaking of the religious family, in making the comparisons with the human family, the writer shall refer to the Benedictine monastic family. He will do this because he is most familiar with it, and also because its Rule repeatedly brings out the fact of the family analogy. However, what is said of the Benedictine religious family holds also in very great part of other religious groups.

### FINAL PURPOSE

If, first of all, we consider the ends or final purposes of the two types of family, the religious and the human, we will find them not only similar but exactly the same. The ultimate purpose of each is union with God, the attainment of the Beatific Vision in our heavenly home. The two merely constitute different ways of reaching that same goal. They make use of different means of reaching it.

According to the Rule of St. Benedict, the first test that is applied to a young aspirant when he presents himself for admission to a Benedictine community, is, as the Rule states it, "Whether he truly seeks God." There is the real ultimate purpose of religious life—to seek God, to work out one's salvation.

But that is also the real final purpose of marriage and Christian family living. As we saw before, the encyclical on *Christian Marriage* points out that the two partners in marriage are bound to help

each other in working out their eternal destiny. There must be under the sacred bond of marriage—to quote its words—“a mutual interior or spiritual molding of the two spouses, a determination and ambition to perfect each other spiritually.” The two must live a partnership that aims at an eternal goal. They must seek God together, hand in hand, as it were—and not alone as before marriage.

Again, the child, the primary purpose of the family is begotten for God. The attainment of the eternal mansions of our Father’s House is his destiny, his ultimate purpose in life. And that, indeed, is the ultimate purpose of all callings, whether the religious life, family life, or the single life in the world. However, the means of attaining it are somewhat different in these three callings or ways of life,

#### VOW AND SACRAMENT

With regard to what we might call the foundation stone of both the monastic and the human family, we also find very considerable similarity or analogy. Both are based on a sacred and solemn contract, the religious vows and the sacrament of matrimony, respectively. Both involve a solemn consecration of the individual. Both are intimately linked with grace.

Let us in this connection consider the human family first. It is founded upon an unbreakable promise, on a contract that is at the same time a sacrament or grace-dispensing institution, namely, the sacrament of matrimony. Again, through Christian marriage, husband and wife are solemnly dedicated to a new and joint office in the Mystical Body of Christ. Through it, they are bound in a union in which they must constantly strive to exemplify the highest relationships of love which they can conceive, namely, of Christ’s redeeming and sanctifying love for the Church.

As the Christian family is based on an irrevocable promise that constitutes the sacrament of matrimony, so the religious life of the professed Benedictine is based on a sacred and unbreakable contract, namely, on his solemn religious vows. Again, as the contracting parties in marriage are dedicated to a new joint office in the Mystical Body of Christ, so through his religious profession, the religious is totally consecrated to the service of God and the Church. One might say that, through his vows a religious is con-

secrated for the service of God much as a chalice or other sacred vessel of the Church is consecrated for His service. Then, too, as the sacrament of matrimony lifts an office of nature to the supernatural plane, so the vows of the religious supernaturalize all the acts performed in religious life that are in harmony with their purposes. Here again, then, we see much similarity.

#### BOTH LINKED WITH GRACE

Both the human and monastic families are also most intimately bound up with grace. Both are vitally spiritual societies. In that fact lies still further analogy.

Insofar as the married spouses are concerned, the two, let us recall, live constantly in a sacramental state. This implies a continuing title to the graces of the sacrament of matrimony. In other words, Christian marriage, the basis of family life, is as we saw, the union of two personalities throbbing with the Christ-life of grace. It is a life partnership of two beings suffused with grace, a union of two souls redeemed by Christ, destined for eternal union with God, and bound to work together toward that end.

The monastic family, too, is something vitally spiritual. While the religious vows do not constitute a sacrament, St. Thomas, great theologian of the Church, likens the monastic profession, in its (*ex opere operato*) effect to the sacraments. But, at all events, religious certainly live in a world of grace. Their lives are guided by the grace of vocation and they are surrounded in their communities by many and varied means of grace.

All in all, then, there is a very considerable similarity in what I have called the foundation stone of the two types of family. Both are built on solemn and sacred promises made to God and ratified in heaven. Both imply a solemn consecration. Both are linked most intimately to an abundance of the spiritual aid that is grace.

#### REPRESENTATIVES OF CHRIST

When we turn to what may well be called the capstone or keynote of the monastic and human familial structures; namely, the head, we find no less a striking analogy or similarity. In both cases the head is called "father." And, what is much more important, in both cases he is taken to represent Christ.

The term "father" has always been applied to the head of the

human family. The Christians kept the term that had already been used by the pagans before them, but brought about radical changes in the powers that the patriarch or father exerted over the family members. Under paganism those powers were often extreme, and were often abused. Under Christianity they were limited by a moral law that forbade their abuse.

Insofar as the monastic family is concerned, St. Benedict himself applied the term "father" or "abbot" to the superior or head. We find it used, for instance, in the special chapter in his Rule which discusses what manner of man the head of the community ought to be.

But much more important than the term used or the name applied to the head of the two groups is the fact that in both cases he represents Christ. You will recall that the teaching in this regard, insofar as the human family is concerned, is found in St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. Perhaps you will recall also the words of Pope Leo XIII, which I quoted in commenting on the scriptural text. "Since," he said, "the husband represents Christ and since the wife represents the Church, let there always be, both in him who commands and in her who obeys, a heaven-born love guiding them in their respective duties."

Similarly, the head of the monastic family is said to represent Christ. To quote the unmistakably plain words of St. Benedict: "The abbot is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery." And again: "Let the abbot, since he is considered to represent the person of Christ, be called Lord and Father . . . out of reverence and love of Christ." Then, there immediately follows this admonition: "Let him (the abbot) be mindful of this and show himself to be worthy of this honor." How fittingly that admonition should also be applied to the father of the family. He, too, should ever be mindful of the fact that he represents Christ at the head of his family, and should strive zealously to show himself worthy of that honor.

One might well think that St. Benedict, who showed such great familiarity with the Sacred Scriptures, definitely had the fifth chapter of St. Paul to the Ephesians in mind when he wrote about the abbot. At any rate, we have in his teaching here the key principle to the entire ordering of the monastic community. The abbot represents Christ in the midst of the religious members of the community or family; the latter are to submit to him as to Christ. It suggests the abbot's norm of conduct, his rule of life. He is, in

the measure possible to human frailty, to reproduce in his life and in the discharge of his official duties the person and actions of Jesus Christ. And it suggests, in turn, the norm that should guide the monks in their relationship with him. He represents Christ as their superior.

So, too, should the father of the family, then in the measure possible to human frailty, seek to reproduce in his life and in the discharge of his duties the person and actions of Jesus Christ.

We discussed at some length in another conference what was implied by the fact that the father was the representative of Christ at the head of the home. We found that it involved three offices, that of teaching his children their religion or their relations with God, that of mediating for them with God and that of sanctifying them. Those were the three great priestly offices of Christ; they are the offices of the father of the family as representative of Christ in the home.

Similarly are those three the offices of the superior of a Benedictine community. The abbot must see to it that his monks are trained in the religious life. Thus we find, that in his Rule St. Benedict refers to the monastery as a "School of the Lord's service." So, too, must he, as must the father in the home, pray for and sanctify his children, the members of the monastic family. He has pastoral care of them. Hence, it is not surprising that St. Benedict, in referring to the relations of the abbot to the members of the monastic family, constantly used such words as "pastor," "flock," "sheep."

#### ANALOGOUS RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Up to this point we have contrasted several important fundamentals of the human and the monastic families. There is no question that there is much similarity between the two with regard to them.

Next, by way of a further comparison between the two, let us briefly consider the religious customs and practices of the two types of families. You will recall that St. John Chrysostom referred to the home as a church in miniature. St. Benedict, who was almost a contemporary of his, used a very similar expression in speaking of the monastery. He referred to it as "the house of God."

And, in doing so, he obviously applied the term, not merely to the chapel or abbey church, but to the monastic institution as such.

The official or public worship of the Church—the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the recitation of the divine office, the administration of the sacraments, and the conduct of certain approved devotions—normally takes place in the church edifice rather than in the home or in the monastery. But there are also many religious practices and devotions suited to the family hearth. And similarly are there many that are suited to the monastic home. As a matter of fact, many are found in both today. Still others might very fittingly be there. Here again, then, we find a similarity between the two groups.

### THE SACRAMENTALS

Take, for instance, the large field of the sacramentals, or the so-called "little sacraments." We saw that many of these are used in the family home. But great numbers of these are also entirely in place in the monastery. Such are, for instance; the use of holy water; the making of the sign of the cross before beginning a task or prayer; the use of blessed medals; the presence of blessed evidences of religion such as crucifixes, pictures, and statues; the ordinary blessing given a house; the special blessing given it on Epiphany or within the octave of the feast.

Still more important, in this connection, are the church's blessings for individuals. Some of these, too, are in place in the monastery no less than in the human family. In speaking earlier of this regarding the home, reference was made, for instance, to the parental blessing. This consists of the practice of parents blessing their children, particularly before they retire in the evening and before they go on any considerable journey. The equivalent of this practice is far from unknown in monasteries. Thus, it is customary for the member of the community, whenever he leaves to go on a journey and when he returns to present himself to the abbot, or his more immediate superior representing him, to ask for the blessing. So, too, it is the custom, when the monastic family has completed compline and night prayers in chapel, for the abbot, after having accepted the aspergillum from one of the brethren, to sprinkle the assembled family members with holy water and give them the final blessing of the day.



## DAILY PRAYERS AND DEVOTIONS IN COMMON

Perhaps it is hardly necessary to state that there is also an analogy between the two types of families under consideration, insofar as a variety of prayers and devotions or other spiritual practices that can be said or performed in common are concerned. Prayers before and after meals, morning and evening prayers, prayerful remembrance of deceased members of the family, prayers for the absent members, the reading of the Scriptures or other spiritual books at table, are examples of this. Such practices are all in place no less in the "house of God" that is the monastery than in the "church in miniature" that is the family home. What differences may exist between the two are found in the extent of their use rather than in their suitability or unsuitability for use in either group. True, they may often take a somewhat different form in the two groups, but that does not detract from their fundamental likeness.

### HOME ALTAR OR SHRINE

The monastic family will, of course, have its chapel or abbey church, or both, for carrying out many of its religious exercises in common. It might be recalled here, that in past history there were families that had their own chapels and even their own chaplains and regular services in the home. As a matter of fact, some still have. But this is far more exceptional than common. What can be generally expected is that the family has at least a small altar or shrine in the home, a place for the family members to pray.

### FAMILY GROUP IN CHURCH

The family unit also deserves consideration insofar as religious services or devotional practices in the Church are concerned. As the members of the monastic family customarily participate as a group in devotions in chapel, so should parents and children participate together, insofar as that is feasible, in the services of their parish church. In the monastery, for instance, there is a daily conventual Mass. This is a community Mass for all the members of the monastic family. The members of a family, too, should assist at Mass and receive Communion as a unit. While this is actually



not a very common practice today, it is being encouraged and is happily showing some growth. It should be still further encouraged. The closer the resemblance between the human and monastic family in this regard, surely the better.

And so there are still other ways in which there is a considerable likeness between the monastic and the human family. For instance, mention has been made of the home as a school of the virtues. The same term could also well be applied to the monastery. There is constant opportunity in it for the practice of the virtues.

### ACTUAL PRACTICE

But, rather than pursue that subject further, let us turn our attention for a short time yet to the fact that, in spite of all the similarities that exist, there remains a rather noteworthy difference in practice; that is, in the actual living of the two types of families. Making due allowance for exceptions, I think it can safely be contended that, taking the two generally, monastic family life is being lived on a considerably higher plane today than is the domestic. And naturally the question arises, why is that the case? Why is there such dissimilarity in practice when there is otherwise so much and such similarity.

I think it very probable that the answer can in great part be found in several religious practices or customs that have not yet been mentioned. These are practices found in monastic families but not found, or only found to a limited extent, in human families today. One of these practices is the annual spiritual retreat. Another is the religious novitiate. A third is the renewal of the religious vows. These are quite universally found in religious life and have unquestionably proved their great value to that type of life. Hence another question presents itself: would not these practices also have value for the Christian family? There is no doubt whatever that the answer is in the affirmative. Introduced to family life, suitably adapted to its needs, they would undoubtedly serve to bring about a big advance in the elimination of the difference that exists in the actual living of the two groups.

### THE NOVITIATE

A novitiate is a sort of apprenticeship for religious life. As novices, candidates for a religious order are taught the principles

of ascetical life. They are also taught, both in theory and in practice the rule of life under which they are to live if they eventually become members of the community. In other words, the period of training and trial that it involves, implies a careful preparation for the life ahead.

Is it too much to say that something of this nature should also be provided for those who enter the married state? It need not be called a novitiate—though actually the word has at least occasionally been used in this connection. But it should be something reasonably equivalent to the period of preparation and training that is implied by that term. In other words, candidates for the sacrament of matrimony should receive a careful and thorough-going preparation for the state of life they are entering upon. Thus, they should be made thoroughly acquainted with the fundamentals of Christian marriage and family living. They should be given a grasp of the spiritual aspects of family relationships that should help them to make of their future homes schools of the Lord's service and of the Christian virtues. They should be taught the religious practices that would enable them to make of them churches in miniature.

The writer is, of course, not unaware that very substantial beginnings have been made in this regard. Marriage preparation courses and forums, showing among other things the spiritual aspects of Christian marriage, have been enjoying an increasingly rapid growth over the past two decades and more, both in and outside of school. But a still greater extension of these is needed. This is mentioned because the retreatants may be able to do something to help this cause, either through personal efforts in their own homes or through the promotion of organized efforts outside of their homes.

#### THE SPIRITUAL RETREAT

The spiritual retreat, the second practice referred to is also found universally in monastic and religious life. And, like the novitiate, it has also proved its genuine spiritual value. It is meant to be a spiritual refresher, a means for the consistent renewal of the spiritual life of the religious. That is, it affords the monk or friar or other religious a special opportunity to recall the spiritual aspects of the state of life to which he has vowed himself and to

renew his determination to keep his own life in religion ordered in accordance with the ideals that were his when he entered upon it.

Now, that is something that should not be denied the family, but that should regularly be provided for it where it is at all feasible. It might very fittingly be called, as we have called it here these days, a family retreat. And it should, of course be adapted to the family's peculiar needs. That is, it should focus the marriage partners' attention on the spiritual bases of married life, the divinely ordained purposes of marriage and the family, the deeper spiritual aspects of the relationships of family members, the virtues that can and should be practiced day by day within the family circle, and the religious practices that have been found particularly suited to the home. In a word, it should be made to serve as a medium through which the varied possibilities for sanctification through Christian family living can be clearly brought to their attention.

There is no question that there is need for this type of retreat for married couples today. Husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, no less than members of monastic or other religious families are tempted to grow lax. They are faced with the danger of weakening spiritually, of getting into a rut, of giving their attention perhaps too exclusively to temporal affairs. In other words, they need the repeated spiritual renovation that a family retreat offers them. Indeed, it is quite conceivable that a retreat may be a greater need for the married today than for religious. The attention of the former is almost necessarily taken up more with the cares of the world than is that of the latter. Furthermore the married are more directly and extensively than religious subjected to the distractions and temptations of the tumultuous world about them. Should anyone doubt the greater need on their part he might well recall the fact that many have in our day been misled by false doctrines and have been weakened and even swept off their feet by the selfish and perverted marriage ethics of the times. If any can in some way help meet this need, it will be a most useful thing to do so.

#### RENEWAL OF PROMISES

Finally, there is the third means of spiritual renovation for the married that was mentioned; namely, the renewal of the nuptial promises. It is customary for religious to renew their vows regularly. Particularly is this done in conjunction with their annual

retreat. Surely there should be no valid reason why married couples should not also renew their sacred promises to each other at regular intervals. On the contrary, there is every reason why they should do so. As a matter of fact, the practice has taken root of recent years and is presently enjoying a vigorous growth. You shall see what this renewal consists in when we have it at our closing family holy hour.

#### CONCLUSION

The religious family analogy is a reality. That stands beyond all doubt. But at the same time there is a real difference in practice between the two types of family, the monastic and the domestic. About that, too, there seems little room for doubt. All in all, the former is living at a lower spiritual level than is the latter. That presents a situation that clamors for correction. In fact, it might well be said that there is most pressing need in our day that husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, live more faithfully in harmony with the spiritual aspects of the Christian family pattern after which the monastic family is modeled. The practices we have just mentioned—careful preparation for marriage, the family retreat, the renewal of the marriage promises—should go far toward meeting that need. Hence their promotion should stand as a challenge to all who revere the Christian family. Retreatants who feel they can help further them in any way, might fittingly make a special retreat resolution to do so. They may rest assured they will be doing something that will be of a great help to others, and at the same time that will prove to the advantage of both Church and society.



