

Homily  
December 31, 2017  
Feast of the Holy Family  
Saint Bernard Church  
Deacon Tim Sullivan

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF A HOLY FAMILY

As many of you know, this year we are honoring the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Blessed Mother's appearances at Fatima, in Portugal. In her appearances, Mary spoke about many dangers, Russia, Communism, a new world war, attacks on the Church, and so on.

But according to Sister Lucia, one of the three children who witnessed Mary's appearances at Fatima, and I'm quoting directly from a letter Sister Lucia wrote, "The final battle between the Lord and the kingdom of Satan will be about Marriage and the Family...Whoever works for the sanctity of Marriage and the Family will always be fought against and opposed in every way, because this is the decisive issue."

As the Cardinal who received Sister Lucia's letter wrote, "The family is the pillar of creation. If the foundational pillar is damaged, the entire building collapses and we're seeing this now, because we are right at this point and we know it."

We don't have time this morning to talk about a comprehensive strategy for restoring the pillar of society that the family is meant to be. So I will use the few moments we have to emphasize what I think are some of the most important principles of Christian marriage.

1. Marriage is a vocation. It is intended to be a path to holiness. If a husband and wife choose to follow God's plan for marriage, they will grow in holiness, a process that is ongoing.
2. Marriage is a mystery. The meaning and function of man and woman are a mystery, as most married people well know. To succeed in marriage requires the acceptance of mystery.
3. Part of the mystery is believing and understanding that one's spouse is the one chosen by God to be an instrument for conforming us to Christ, to help each married person become more like Christ. So what is annoying or worse about our spouse is part of God's plan to help us grow closer to Jesus.
4. God's basic plan for evangelizing the world is the family. The plan calls for a man and woman to love one another and to love God. The man and woman are

then to love the children that they are given and teach the children about God's love and about God's ways, His expectations for us. Then the family shares their love for God with the community outside their home. Each member of the family has a specific meaning and purpose in building up the kingdom of God. The primary role of parents is to equip their children for this role and help them to discern how God wants to use them.

5. The guiding principle of marriage is self-sacrifice. In every aspect of married life, including the sexual act, the husband and wife should be imitating the example of Jesus at the Last Supper, when he said, "This is my body which shall be given up for you." So the husband and wife should be competing with one another to see who can be the most generous to the other with respect to the most important issues and needs of life.

6. The husband is to be the spiritual leader of the home. I know of a teen-age girl who became Catholic just because it was so powerful for her to see men kneel. So when we husbands kneel, do we mean what we are doing? Do we accept that God is in charge of our lives and that our greatest desire is to be obedient to him? Saint Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:3 that "Christ is the head of every man." Our wives and children will trust us only if they believe that we have surrendered our will to God. Are we equipped to be the spiritual leaders of our homes? How well do we know the Bible and the teachings of the Church? How real and deep is our relationship with Jesus?

7. Prayer is an essential element of family life. We should be addressing our needs to Jesus and attentive to how our prayers are answered. More importantly, we should be listening to how God communicates His will to each member of the family. The Bible says that "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The vision for the direction of the family has to come from God.

8. Marriage and family life should be an adventure. It should be dynamic, never dull. There should be a constant freshness as we try to grow as human beings and children of God. If marriage and family life become dull, it's because we're not listening, not listening to God's word in the Bible, not listening to the wisdom of the Church, not listening for God to communicate his specific will for us through the Holy Spirit.

9. Christian marriage should be characterized by unity. A husband and wife should think of themselves as one, each of them constantly asking the question, "What am I doing to promote unity between me and my spouse?" And then, there is the issue of the parents and their children being unified, the whole family having a sense of being one, at the same time respecting and honoring the individuality of the family members.

Some people say that the Catholic Church's teachings on marriage and family life are an unattainable ideal. That is false. The Church's teachings on marriage and family are a rich treasure that lead families to a beautiful, rewarding life that transcends the imperfections of the parents and children.

All that is required is humility, generosity and obedience. The rest is all grace, and God pours out His graces on those who strive to be faithful.