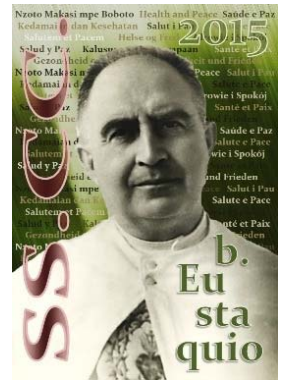


The desire for family

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In three months the Ordinary Synod on the family will take place. It will be a sort of a “part two” after last year’s extraordinary Synod. As you know, I have been called to be a member of the Synod as a member of the Union of Superiors General.

Thanks

In order to prepare to participate in the Synod, I wrote to the superiors of the brothers, the Superior General of the sisters and to the brothers and sisters who are coordinators of the Secular Branch, asking that they help me respond to the question, “What do you believe the Church should do or say at this time to help families live the joy of the Gospel?”

The reflections sent to me are proof of the diverse positions found in the Church on different questions concerning the family, especially as regards matrimony and the discipline of the sacraments.

I received responses from four sisters, six brothers and twelve communities or sectors of the secular branch. I thank them very much for their contribution and their help. Especially in the members of the secular branch, there is great interest in this topic that impacts their daily life so directly. Many groups had special meetings to speak about the question and prepare their input. Thank you!

The desire of the heart

There is “a desire for a family” inscribed on the heart of every person. No one wants to be alone, not having a significant connection to other people. From the moment of conception, we need the affection of parents and attachment to people who love us. We need that, as much as we need to breathe and eat. As adults, at the time when we are called to care for others, the heart still seeks to be protected.

The family is a covenant of persons intimately interconnected, who care for one another and where each one is irreplaceable. It’s not a “productive undertaking”, where what’s most important is each individual’s role so that things work or you reach some objective. What really counts in a family is that each individual be who they are, with his/her unique and irreplaceable face, and that the life of all the members and each member is created, develops and becomes more human.

In the family, life is expressed in terms of the two basic realities of sexual difference (man and woman) and the difference of generations (parents, children, grandparents...) There are very different ways to experience them, but those two differences shape us from within and touch the mystery of life at its core.

The family shapes us as persons. We carry it with us all through life, for good and for bad. Family ties are like the roots of a tree: even though they remain hidden underground, the tree really depends on them to keep standing.

The family is not just a concern for Christians but for all of humanity nor can it be reduced to the reality of marriage. Certainly, marriage is very important, but there are many families that do not include a married couple (widows, single parent families, unmarried couples etc.) and they are still families that beat with the desire to create a community of life and love.

We can assume that whoever sets out on the adventure of marriage and family, motivated by faith or not, desires at the outset that the bond last forever and that genuine love grow and grow stronger among the members. This is a desire that does not lie, for it responds to a legitimate aspiration of the heart; even though at times the desire is frustrated and becomes like the wounded man fallen by the side of the road. Marriage and family always point toward a horizon that is beyond them. They are a journey to be made, a house always under construction, a call to responsibility.

Our faith tells us that we are family because God has left his imprint in each one of us in creating us. God is family, Trinity, relationship, love. Each one of his sons and daughters is unique in his sight; no one is “surplus”; all are the objects of his loving care and all are called to the Father’s embrace.

To accompany

I believe that the main challenge that the Church faces in this Synod is how to accompany families, all families. When we say “Church” we are referring to the families that make up

the Church. The usual image identifies the Church mainly with the bishops, priests and sisters (in other words, those who do not marry, who do not “create” a family). It is they who offer a particular pastoral ministry to others. This is a clerical distortion that has to be overcome. In reality, the Church is a whole lot of families, a family of families, a community of families that exists to be at the service of the great family of humanity.

The Church is sister and, as such, becomes a companion to families she encounters along the way. The Church looks at families as friends, just as they are: joyful families that must be encouraged, families in difficulty that must be supported, broken families that must be comforted, families that are healing that must be helped to rebuild... Families are called to form a network, to support one another, to share resources that work (everything that helps to love more and take better care of individuals) and to warn one another about the dangers that threaten the covenant that is the basis of the family.

The Church is disciple, because it listens to its Lord and missionary because it gives witness to what it has received. The wisdom of the Gospel has much to offer human beings to help them realize the desire of their heart: the desire to be family, to create family and to be happy in a family. How can we offer that more effectively so that families can live the joy of the Gospel? That is the central question of the Synod.

And us?

What can we as SSCC contribute to this effort in behalf of families? I believe that our charism and our mission lead us to emphasize some specific ways of acting. I will indicate three:

- ◆ Introduce people to the love of God.

Everything we do to make God’s love known and to help people enter into that mystery will serve the family. The Father is the source of every family in heaven and on earth (cf. Eph. 3:14-15). Knowing that God loves me and learning to love as Jesus did, is the way to grow strong in that love. To know that I am loved by God and learn to love as Jesus did, is how we become grounded in that resilient and generous love that every family needs.

Many of the things we do try to accomplish that: ministry in parishes and schools, marriage preparation, family ministry etc. Also the encouragement of family prayer, as is done in the Enthronement and other things inspired by it.

- ◆ Reparation and reconciliation

Members of a family help one another, love one another... and also hurt one another. We could offer couples and families in difficulty a space for listening, modeling ways to forgive and heal and, when a rupture does happen, accompanying the individuals to get beyond the wounds and bitterness and to rebuild relationships.

We also need to be especially attentive to families that suffer and to those who have been separated from their families because of violence, emigration or persecution.

◆ Creating a home.

"...we endeavor to be agents of communion in the world" (Const. 6) and we develop relationships characterized by "simplicity and the family spirit." (Const. 7) We can do this practically by inviting families to form communities in which they find a spiritual home in the Church. It means forming and accompanying communities of families that can be a connection for all those Christians who seem to walk about alone in their faith and also for all those people who feel abandoned-without a family-in the wilderness of life.

When I say that, I think of the communities of the Secular Branch, Christian Basic Communities, family movements and other networks (confessional or not) that promote communion among people and organization for common action.

This list of possible activities is open so that all of you who accompany families in different ways can fill it out with your own experience. Let us pray for the upcoming Synod, that through it the light of the Spirit may shine in the Church, which is a family and serves families.

May the heartfelt desire of each human being, the desire to always be son or daughter, brother or sister, husband or wife, be guarded and promoted with mercy and truth, until the day when it is fulfilled and we are all gathered around the table of the Father.

