

A reading about the family as God's design for love; from the writings of Saint Paul VI. ¹

As holy scripture teaches us, before it is a sacrament marriage is a great earthly reality: *God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God: he created them man and woman.* We always have to go back to that first page of the Bible if we want to understand what a human couple, a family, really is and what it ought to be. Psychological analyses, psychoanalytical research, sociological surveys, and philosophical reflection may of course have a contribution to make with the light they shed on human sexuality and love; but they would blind us if they neglected this fundamental teaching which was given to us at the very beginning: the duality of the sexes was decreed by God, so that together man and woman might be the image of God and, like him, the source of life: *Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it.* Attentive reading of the prophets, the wisdom books, and the New Testament, moreover, shows us the significance of this basic reality, and teaches us not to reduce it to physical desire and genital activity, but to discover in it the complementary nature of the values of man and woman, the greatness and the weaknesses of conjugal love, its fruitfulness and its opening on to the mystery of God's design for love.

The Christian knows that human love is good by its very origin; and if, like everything else in us, it is wounded and deformed by sin, it finds its salvation and redemption in Christ. Besides, isn't this the lesson that twenty centuries of Christian history have taught us? How many couples have found the way to holiness in their conjugal life, in that community of life which is the only one to be founded on a sacrament!

Love one another, as I have loved you. The ways in which they express their affection are, for Christian husband and wife, full of the love which they draw from the heart of God. And if its human source threatens to dry up, its divine source is as inexhaustible as the unfathomable depths of God's affection. That shows us the intimacy, strength, and richness of the communion which conjugal love aims at. It is an inward and spiritual reality, transforming the community of life of husband and wife into what might be called, in accordance with the teaching authorized by the Second Vatican Council, "the domestic Church," a true "cell of the Church," as St. John the Twenty-third already called it, a basic cell, a germinal cell in the ecclesial body.

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Such is the mystery in which conjugal love takes root, and which illuminates all its expressions. The rapture which moves husband and wife to unite is the carrier of life, and enables God to give himself children. On becoming parents, the husband and wife discover with a sense of

¹ reprinted in *Meditations on the Sunday Gospels: Year A*; introduced and edited by John E. Rotelle, Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995, pp. 26-27

wonder, at the baptismal font, that their child is from now on a child of God, *reborn from water and the Spirit*; and that the child is entrusted to them so that they may watch over its physical and moral growth, certainly, but also the opening out and blossoming in him of *the new nature*. Such a child is no longer just what they see, but just as much what they believe, “an infinity of mystery and love which would dazzle us if we say it face to face” [in the words of Emmanuel Mounier]. Therefore [the] upbringing [of children] becomes true service of Christ, according to his own saying: *whatever you do for one of these little ones, you do for me*.

12/31/18

THE NATIVITY KERYGMA from a book by Thomas Merton¹

In its prayers, the Church plunges us into the Light of God shining in the darkness of the world, in order that we may be illuminated and transformed by the presence of the newborn Savior, and thus that he may be born and truly live in us by making all our thoughts and actions light in himself. What joy, then, that he who dwells eternally in the inaccessible light and peace of the Father has left the throne of his glory and descended to be one of us! Or rather, without leaving the bosom of the Father, veiling the too brilliant light of his glory in the cloud of human nature, he who is enthroned above the cherubim takes up his abode among us in a poor manger. This Child who the shepherds, dazzled by the brilliance of the angelic host, can scarcely see in the darkness of the cave lit by Joseph's lantern, this Child is (by his divinity) the Ancient of Days, the Creator and Judge of Heaven and earth, of whom the prophet Daniel wrote: "I beheld till thrones were placed and the Ancient of Days sat, his garment was as white as snow, and the hair of his head like clean wool; his throne like flames of fire: the wheels of it like a burning fire. A swift stream of fire issued forth before him: thousands of thousands ministered to him and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him." This, is Daniel's vision of the divinity of the Word Who, in his human nature, lies here helpless in the dark. But the Son of Man, who is here born, is himself the Word, consubstantial with the Father. To this only-begotten Son, who is equal to the Father in all things as God, but less than the Father in so far as he is human, all power is given by the Father. So, Daniel says again: "I beheld therefore in the vision of the night, and lo one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and he came even to the Ancient of Days and they presented him before him, and he gave him power and glory and a kingdom, and all peoples, tribes and tongues shall serve him, his power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away and his kingdom that shall not be destroyed." This, then is

¹SEASONS OF CELEBRATION by Thomas Merton (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, NY 1965) pp. 108-08.

the King promised from the beginning of the world and of whose Kingdom there shall be no end.

Do not be afraid of him. God has emptied himself and come to us as a child, in order that we who have not been saved by fear, but only destroyed by it, may now take heart and be saved by confidence. In "Emptying himself" and taking the form of a servant the Lord laid aside his majesty and his divine power, in order to dwell among us in goodness and mercy.

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01.01.2019

A READING ABOUT MARY, THE FIRST ONE TO BE FULLY HUMAN,

from a homily by Nicholas Cabasilas.²

When the moment had arrived for a human nature to meet the divine nature and to become so intimately united with it that the two constitute only one person, each nature had of necessity to manifest itself already in its integrity. God, on his part, had revealed himself in a way that was suitable to God; and the Virgin was the only one to bring to light the human nature. And so, when Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, came into the world, the two natures of which he is constituted were both already clearly manifested.

In the beginning God had made the spiritual creature and after that the material creature. After that he had created human beings which were composed of two elements. Likewise, the Incarnate God was brought into the world at the end of the times whereas God existed from the beginning, and we had but recently appeared in the last ages. It seems, therefore, that if God has united himself to the human nature not from its origin but in the evening of the ages, it is because that nature was not yet fully born before this moment whereas now it has appeared for the first time in its integrity...

All this is what we have come to celebrate with solemnity today. The day of Mary's birth is also that of the birth of the whole world, for on that day has been born the first one to be fully human. Now, the "earth has" truly "yielded its fruits," that earth which, from all time, had produced only the corruption of sin, together with brambles and thorns. Now heaven knows that it has not been built in vain, because humanity, for which it was made, has seen the light of day....

That is why all creation addresses endless praises to the Virgin, why every language unanimously sings her glory, why humanity and all the choirs of angels ceaselessly create hymns to the honor

²Homily for the Birth of the Mother of God, 16.18: Patrologia Orientalis, vol 19, "Byzantine Marian Homilies," pp 482-484; trans CR V p 294.

of the Mother of God. We too sing to her and all together offer her our praise; a praise that falls below the honor we owe her or what we have the intention to give her with our lips. Great remains our debt in this respect!

It belongs to you, Virgin worthy of your praise, and to your love for us, to estimate the gift of grace we have acquired not by ourselves but through your generosity. Chosen from among all people of our race as a gift offered to God, you have adorned the rest of us with beauty. Sanctify our heart, therefore, which conceived the words we address to you, and prevent the field of our soul from producing any evil, through the grace and goodness of your only Son, the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ. To him is due all glory, honor, and adoration, as also to his eternal Father and to the most holy Spirit, all-good and life-giving, now and always, for all ages. Amen.

01SN0203

01.02.19

A Discourse on the Monastic Life by St. Basil ¹

First and foremost, the monk should own nothing in this world, but he should have as his possessions solitude of the body, modesty of bearing, a modulated tone of voice, and a well-ordered manner of speech. He should be without anxiety as to his food and drink, and should eat in silence. In the presence of his superiors, he should hold his tongue; before those wiser than he, he should harken to their words. He should have love for his equals, give charitable counsel to his inferiors, and keep aloof from the wicked, the carnal, and the officious. He ought to think much but speak little, be not forward in speech nor given to useless discoursing, not easily moved to laughter, respectful in bearing, keeping his eyes cast down and his spirit uplifted, not answering contradiction with contradiction, docile. He should work with his hands, be ever mindful of his last end, joyful in hope, patient in adversity, unceasingly prayerful, giving thanks in all things, humble toward everyone, hating pride, sober and watchful to keep his heart from evil thoughts. He ought to heap up treasures in heaven by observing the commandments, examining himself as to his daily thoughts and actions, not entangling himself in the occupations and superfluities of the world. It ill befits him to concern himself about those who lead careless lives; he should emulate the life of the holy fathers, rejoicing with those who are successful in the practice of virtue and not envying them. He must sympathize with the suffering and weep with them, sorrowing deeply for these, but not on any account should he condemn them, nor upbraid him who has renounced his sin, nor ever justify himself. He should, above all, confess before God and men that he is a sinner. It is his duty, moreover, to admonish the undisciplined, encourage the faint-hearted, minister to the sick, wash the feet of the saints, and be mindful of the duties of hospitality and fraternal charity. He must preserve peace with the members of the household of the faith, shun the heretic, read the canonical Scriptures. He should spend his time in good words and deeds. He should converse without deceit, speak no word against anyone, and neither gossip nor take pleasure in listening to gossip. He should not be quick to trust evil report of anyone, nor be mastered by ill temper nor overcome by despondency. He ought not to become angry with his neighbor without cause, nor nurse wrath against anyone, nor return evil for evil. It behoves him to be reviled rather than to revile, to be struck rather than to strike, to be wronged rather than to do wrong, to be despoiled rather than to despoil.

He must not grow weary in observing the precepts of the Lord to the best of his ability, but he should await reward and praise from Him, continuing in his desire for the enjoyment of

¹The Fathers of the Church - vol. 9 - St. Basil Ascetical Works - New York - 1950 pg 33

everlasting life. Moreover he should love God as a son, with his whole heart and strength and mind and with all the power that is in him; but as a servant he should reverence, fear, and obey Him and work out his salvation in fear and trembling, fervent in spirit, girt about with the full armor of the Holy Spirit.

But, over and above all this, he must be mindful of the words of the Apostle: "For the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us".

TM-CHR07

01.03.19

From The Hymns on the Nativity, by St.Ephrem the Syrian.³

Praise to you, fair Child of the Virgin!

Joseph caressed the Son

as a babe. He served Him

as God. He rejoiced in Him

as in a blessing, and he was attentive to Him

as to the Just One - a great paradox!

"Who has given me the Son of the Most High

to be a son to me? I was jealous of Your mother

and wanted to divorce her. I did not know

that in her womb was a great treasure

that would suddenly enrich my poverty.

David the king arose from my race

and put on a crown. Great ignominy

have I attained, for instead of a king

I am a carpenter. A crown has found me

for in my bosom is the Lord of crowns."

With rival tones Mary was aglow.

She, too, sang: "Who has granted

to the barren one to conceive and give birth

to the One Who is also many, to the small Who is also great,

³Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns Ephrem the Syrian, tr.Kathleen E.McVey, Paulist Press CWS. 1989. Hymn 5 p.108-9.

Who is fully present in me yet fully present in the universe.

"The day when Gabriel entered
my poor presence, he made me immediately
a free woman and a servant; for I am servant
of your divinity, but I am also mother
of Your humanity, my Lord and my son.

Suddenly a handmaiden has become daughter of the King
by You, Son of the King. Behold, the lowly one is
in the House of David because of You!

O son of David, behold, the daughter of the earth
has reached heaven by the Heavenly One. - *over*
Indeed, how much I am amazed that an aged Babe
is set before me - One who lifts His gaze
entirely to heaven without ceasing.

The murmuring of His mouth - how it seems to me
as if His silence were speaking with God!

Indeed, who has seen a Babe who gazes
entirely everywhere? He gazes
as the Director of all creation
above and below. He looks as
the Commander of the universe.

How shall I open the fount of milk
for You, the Fount? How shall I give
sustenance to You, the All-sustaining,
from Your own table? How shall I approach

with swaddling clothes the One arrayed in streams of Light?

01SN0402

01/04/19

HOW GOD LEADS US IN THE WAY TO TRUE PEACE AND LIVE, by Elizabeth Seton⁴

How often have I felt my soul awakened by thy Light and warmed by the fire of thy Love--then I approach thee--I find Thee--but Alas instantly after I lose thee--often I think myself received--then fear I am rejected--and in this continual change of interior dispositions I walk in darkness and often go astray--I desire and know not how to desire, I love, and know not how to love,--nor how to find what I love.

Thus my soul loses itself without ceasing to hope in thee--It knows by its own experience that it desire much, and is unable to do anything--you see its trouble O lord--and in that happy moment when fatigued with so many vicissitudes it falls at last into entire diffidence of itself then you open its eyes and it sees the true way to Peace and Life--it knows you were nearer than it imagined--you instruct it all at once without Voice or Words, it thinks only of what possesses it, abandoning all things else it then possesses Thee--It sees without knowing what it sees, it hears, and is ignorant of what it hears, it knows only Who he is to whom it is attentive, it contents itself with loving HIM, it loves Him continually more and more--Words cannot express, nor the mind comprehend what it receives from THEE O MY GOD even in this place of Banishment.

How happy is that moment O divine Jesus! how pure is that Light, how ineffable is that communion of thy Blessings! You know O Lord how precious that gift is, and thy Creature that receives it knows also--Ah! if it were faithful, if it never departed from Thee--if it knew how to preserve the Grace it had received, how happy would it be! and yet this is but a drop of that infinite Ocean of Blessings which thou art one day to communicate to it--

O Soul of my Soul--what is my Soul and What Good can it have without possessing you--Life of my Life! What is my Life when I live not in you--Is it possible that my Heart is capable of

⁴RICHER FARE, Ed. by Gail Ramshaw (Pueblo Publishing Co. NY 1990) pp. 116-117.

possessing you--of enjoying you all alone--of extending and dilating itself in you--can thy creature thus be elevated above itself to repose in thy Breast, and after that depart from you? bury itself in the Earth?--Ah Lord I know not what I ought to say to You: but hear the voice of your love and of my misery; live always in me, and let me live perpetually in You and for You as I live only by You.

Enlighten me, O Divine Light! Conduct me, O supreme Truth! Raise me again, O uncreated Life! Separate me from every thing that displeases Thee. Suffer me to remain at thy Feet!

01SN0503

01/05/19

St John Neumann, Bishop ⁵

Born at Prachitz in Bohemia on March 28, 1811, John Neumann was the third of the six children of Philip, a German, and Agnes, a Czeck. He early showed signs of considerable intellectual ability, coupled with a wish to become a religious. He went to school in Budweis, and then to the diocesan seminary in 1831. He continued his theological studies at the Charles Ferdinand University in Prague, where he went in 1833, but on completion of his studies he was not ordained to serve his home diocese because of the great number of clergy there.

For this reason he determined to leave Europe and set out for the New World as a missionary. Soon after his arrival in New York, he was accepted for ordination and was promptly ordained by Bishop James Dubois on June 25, 1836. He spent four years of pastoral work in and around Buffalo before joining the Redemptorists. For a short time he was in charge of the American vice-province of the Order, though for most of the time he returned to parish work where his chief care was for the establishment of schools.

In 1852 Pope Pius IX appointed him Bishop of Philadelphia, and this office gave him yet more scope for his efforts to increase the system of parochial schools. To staff them he attracted to the diocese a number of orders of teaching brothers and nuns, so that in a short time the population of his schools increased twenty-fold. He also erected a large number of new parishes, introduced the devotion of the Forty Hours, and began the building of the cathedral. Despite all this activity he still found time to write, including, usually anonymously, articles for newspapers. His most important works, however, he composed in German, his preferred language for composition even though he had a thorough grasp of seven other modern languages. The two catechisms he produced were, in 1852, given the approval of the entire American hierarchy, and continued in wide use in the United States for most of the rest of the century.

He died, renowned for his sanctity and for his pastoral work, on January 5, 1860, on a street in Philadelphia. He was canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1977

⁵Butler=s Lives of the Saints - Revised edition - ed. Michael Walsh - Harper -

San Francisco - 1991 - p. 5