



Diocese of Corner Brook and Labrador

August 11th, 2021

Re: Year of the Family Reflection

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To follow up on my letter on the Year of the Family, dated March 2nd, 2021, I would like to continue my reflections on the gift of family to each one of us.

In his Apostolic Exhortation on the family, Pope Francis reflects on families as instruments of God's grace in each one of our lives. While cautioning us against idealizing family life to the point of putting undue burdens and expectations on its members, the Pope calls on each one of us to take the necessary time to reflect upon our own experiences of family, and the role family plays in our lives, in order to draw on the graces and call to holiness that can be found there.

It is important to note that most of Jesus' life takes place in the quiet obscurity of family life. Little is recorded of these formative years; little is noteworthy or worthy of remark. And, yet, so much of his ministry, so much of his public life, is an outward manifestation of his formative years in Nazareth. Far from solely being the true reflection of his Father's love and mercy, Christ also reveals the face of Mary and Joseph, under whose care he grew in obedience and wisdom.

How true that is of us as well, created in the image and likeness of God, but equally formed in the image and likeness of our families of origin, each one of us is formed in the crucible of family life. So much of our lives, a reflection of the hidden years, the imprint of what was shared with us.

In an effort to work towards greater holiness in our family we can spend an inordinate amount of time focusing on faults, failings and shortcomings, thus becoming a source of judgment and discouragement, and very little time on the work of God's Spirit present in the day-to-day interactions and moments of encounter. Rather than decrying the shortcomings that may exist in our family, we are called to support that which is good, life-giving and worthy of praise. The ability to reflect on each day in the light of prayer and God's Spirit among us can bear great fruit over time. So too, the opportunity for couples and families to come together in shared reflection and support.

The Church, too, must come to understand its role as one of service towards the family. It is only when she orients herself to the role of Christ as Servant, and responds to the legitimate needs of the family and its members, that she calls forth what is from God in each household and points them towards Christ.

The parish is the ideal place where families come together to share, in a spirit of mutual love and concern, to support and strengthen one another. Gathered around the Table of the Lord, and drawing on the wisdom of the Holy Scriptures, the Family of God acknowledges Christ to be the head of the family, who holds us together in a spirit of forgiveness, reconciliation and mercy.

Parishes, far from becoming obsolete, must find creative ways to help families live the Joy of the Gospel. A joy that is accentuated by the beauty and sanctity of life, the hope of redemption -- even when things seem hopeless, and the love that has its true source in Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection. Rather than imposing a burden or placing restrictions on the family, parishes, as Bearers of Good News, point to an ever greater hope that far surpasses the particular difficulties and challenges that families may face.

During this Summer, I encourage you to take the time you have together, and the time you are apart, to reflect on the gift of family in your life. Take the time to reflect back on the beauty of what was shared, in both the joys and the struggles that were there. Take the time to connect to those members you may have not have talked to for a while, and ask God to bring healing where it is needed. Most of all, celebrate the gift of family, both as family and as parish. God's Church is a family of families, at the heart of which he dwells.

As always, I would like to impart my blessing on your family and families around the Diocese.

May the Lord, who chose to be reared in a family much like yours, bless the love that you have for one another and multiply it a hundredfold. May the prayers of Mary and Joseph, who struggled to do God's Will, in all that was being asked of them, support and strengthen you day by day. And may God, One in three, the perfection of all families, bless you now and always. Amen.

Fraternally in Christ,

+ *Bart van Roijen*

Bishop Bart van Roijen

Bishop of Corner Brook and Labrador

