

WORSHIP AND FAMILY LIFE

To write on worship and family life is nearly as great an undertaking as to outline the world-wide process from its coming out from God in creation to its return to Him in praise and love. For God created the world that He might be worshipped and praised in an unending hymn of love by His creatures, of whom the highest in this world is man. Man is not only the figurehead of creation; he is, with the divine assistance, the continual promoter of this same creation; and it is in the family, above all, that he exercises this noble right to co-operate in the work of God. The family is in a sense the hub of creation, and the very *raison d'être* of creation is worship. Even the natural family has an intimate touch of the divine in it, for does not God co-operate by an immediate act of creation in the production of every human soul? The first unmeaning cry of the newly-born child is in reality a cry of praise for the Omnipotent Creator.

We are concerned here especially with Christian marriage and Christian family life in which all the natural aspects of divine worship, voiced consciously or unconsciously by these co-operators in God's creative act, are raised to a higher order and united by grace to the worship offered by the only-begotten Son of God, made Man that He might harmonize the discordant notes and restore to God a perfect Hosanna and Alleluia.

There is scarcely any need to follow the general didactic rule of beginning with definitions, of outlining what is meant by worship and what is meant by family life. Attention should be called, however, to the derivation of our word 'worship,' since it was originally connected with what was 'worth while,' with 'worthiness,' so that the act of worship is the recognition of what is worthy and, above

all, the recognition of that which is ultimately the only worthy thing, namely God, the supremely worshipful. If the family is the essential unit in human creation, the family must recognise the *worth* of God and pay Him that generosity of worship which creation calls for. This must be the primary business of the family as such, as well as of the individuals that make up the families.

The foundation stone of Christian family life is laid when the man and woman stand at the altar rails and, with God's blessing and grace, become two in one flesh. Marriage was raised by Christ to the status of a sacrament, giving special supernatural aids for special needs of family life. God is, as it were, the divine sculptor, fashioning an image of Himself in stone, and He uses different kinds of tools for different parts of the work, seven differently shaped chisels to work on men's souls. One of these is Matrimony.

As a Sacrament, marriage stands with Holy Orders as one of the two structures supporting the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. Indeed, from the time of St. Augustine the Church's teachers have constantly drawn attention to the parallel between these two sacraments, because they both produce something permanent in the soul which is a constant title to grace and both, in different ways, work for 'the edification of the body of Christ,' as St. Paul called the building and development of the Church. At his ordination the priest has a character stamped on his soul which, if he is well-disposed, will be a constant source of grace enabling him not only to enter fully into the worship of the Masses he offers, but also to assist other people in their ascent, by worship, to God. But the priest can also abuse this character; he can stifle its activity as regards his own personal sanctification, as a miser abuses the wealth he amasses. So, too, in the sacrament of matrimony, a title is given to those graces specially required in family life; but it is above all a sacrament of unity of husband and wife, unity of the family, expressing itself in a united

and continuous act of worship, just as the Church is wholly and completely joined to Christ and with Him offers the One Sacrifice to God.¹ But this source of grace and worship in the family can be abused, neglected, stifled, so that it becomes inoperative.

In this sacrament is found the source of unity between husband and wife, but the effects of matrimonial grace are not used up in simply welding these two together like some spiritual cement causing the two parts to adhere and become static, content with the initial unity it has achieved. The sacrament of matrimony is far more dynamic; it gives a grace which is intended to blossom into family life and activity in the family; a life and activity, therefore, not of two separate people but of a unit. And the primary activity of this unit, as brought into being by the sacrament, is the praise and worship of God in the supernatural order. This dynamism of family grace is, of course, to be found above all in the chief goal of marriage, without which family life is a truncated life, namely the birth and upbringing of children.

Marriage, as a sacrament, is a safeguard for the continuation of the Church, since it binds the Christian family into one with the view to bringing forth and bringing up children to praise and worship the Creator. The Christian mother and father co-operate in providing more mouths to sing the praises of God in spirit and in truth. This is one of the fundamental bonds between worship and family life.

Perhaps we may be permitted to quote at some length from the Encyclical on Christian Marriage: 'Amongst the

¹ St. Thomas says: 'Matrimony at least in its signification touches this sacrament (the Eucharist) in so far as it signifies the union of Christ with the Church, of which union the Eucharist is a figure; hence the Apostle says "This is a great Sacrament, but I speak in Christ and in the Church."' (Eph. v, 33); (III, 65, iii).

blessings of marriage the child holds the first place . . . God wishes men to be born not only that they should live and fill the earth, but much more that they may be worshippers of God, that they may know Him and love Him and finally enjoy Him for ever in heaven; and this end, since man is raised by God in a marvellous way to the supernatural order, surpasses all that eye hath seen, and ear heard, and all that hath entered into the heart of man. From which it is easily seen how great a gift of divine goodness and how remarkable a fruit of marriage are children born by the omnipotent power of God through the co-operation of those bound in wedlock. But Christian parents must also understand that they are destined not only to propagate and preserve the human race on earth, indeed not only to educate every kind of worshipper of the true God, but children who are to become members of the Church of Christ to raise up fellow-citizens of the saints, and members of God's household that the worshippers of God and Our Saviour may daily increase.'

Thus the sacrament of marriage, if God should bless it with children, must be used to bring up these children as true children of Christ in the Church, as perpetuating in the highest degree the hymn of thanksgiving, propitiation and praise sung by the heavens and by all creation. This all-embracing worship of God the child learns not only by word of mouth at its mother's knee, but from the example given to it in the whole life of the family; and it is here that God's grace should be given the fullest opportunities. 'The foundation of the child's new life in Christ is posited at the instant when the parents bring the child to receive holy Baptism,' as Karl Adam has written,² 'with the day of Baptism likewise begins the enjoyable task of leading the little ones to Christ. This is lay-priesthood in its most glorious form.'

However ideal and, perhaps, impractical this may seem,

² *Orate Fratres*, March, 1935.

yet it is the doctrinal basis on which the Christian family must be founded and by which it is truly orientated to Christian worship. All worship has a central act, more perfect and more complete than any other, and that is the offering of sacrifice, which is the very heart of religion and religious worship. Consequently the more sacrificial our acts become the more truly do we worship God, and since sacrifice is the offering of self through some visible sign, the more we give ourselves the more worshipful, the more 'religious' we become. That is why those who take the three Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience are called 'Religious.' They have given their possessions, their bodies and their wills as an act of worship, of religion to God. Obviously the Christian family cannot dedicate itself by the three religious, worshipping vows; on the contrary, the family must preserve its possessions, its use of marriage and its independence of will. But the *Virtues* corresponding to these three Vows must nevertheless be the keynote of every Christian family and the most characteristic expression of the graces of matrimony. The true Catholic family may be likened to a Religious Order in miniature; for it cannot exist without the religious spirit of poverty, chastity and obedience whereby God is praised from the hearth as from the cloister. One may say that without exception every Catholic working family is poor, but perhaps only a moderate percentage of them will be using that often unhappy and irksome state as a true sacrifice offered to God with a grateful sigh at being spared the insidious dangers of wealth. It may at first sight seem an impossible ideal to be free from attachment to the goods—money, food, clothing—of this world when the husband can never be sure whether he can feed his wife and children on the morrow. Yet the grace given in matrimony can, in the best sense, make a virtue of this necessity, giving those who thus suffer the courage and generosity to offer it to Christ, the poor workman of Nazareth, to be joined with His supreme sacrifice, enabling them to become less absorbed

and swamped by earthly cares, more confident in God's mercy and providence. This would lead to a true Christian poverty in the family, not a resentful or stoical acceptance of social evils, but a sacrifice doing precious honour to God.

Similarly, Chastity must hold a central position in family life, a supernatural Chastity springing from the married love divinized by the sacrament. There is no greater solvent of the natural bond between man and wife than that of self-indulgence, an unrestrained use of the physical side of marriage. The man or woman who looks upon his or her partner in marriage simply as a means of satisfying passion, or even regards matrimony as a licence to passion, has aimed a grievous blow at family life and the unity of marriage. The family, to be a true Christian family, must be built up on self-giving not on self-seeking, self-giving in a pure love that seeks to unite to the other for mutual joy and benefit and is based on the divine love of Charity. The love of passion is individual self-love; chaste love is one that brings God into the family circle, and recognises the sanctity of marriage relations. It naturally tends to be sacrificial, since it is the offering of self to the other in the sight of God. 'Husbands love your wives,' says St. Paul, 'as Christ also loved the Church' (Eph. v, 25).

A chaste love, constructed on the basis of Charity, involves almost continual sacrifices of one type or another. It demands the cutting off of all unchaste thoughts and desires, all those that are incompatible with the sanctity of marriage; as Pius XI wrote: 'in order that the sacred bonds of marriage may be guarded absolutely inviolate, He (Christ) forbade also even wilful thought and desire of such things; "But I say to you that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."' It may mean a large family or the self-imposed restraint of continence, and it certainly means the bridling of passion. All these things are, or involve, very real sacrifices only possible by the as-

sistance of God in the grace of this sacrament, which makes every chaste act in the family a worship and praise of God.

The third Religious virtue, that of Obedience, evidently plays a large part in family life both in its internal economy and in its relation with the outside world. The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and His Church, and St. Paul has shown in detail what this implies. 'Let women be subject to their husbands *as to the Lord*; because the husband is the head of the wife; as Christ is the Head of the Church . . . Therefore as the Church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be subject to their husbands in all things . . . Children obey your parents *in the Lord*, for this is just' (Eph. c. v, 6). The family is the Mystical Body in miniature and therefore it is built up on loving obedience, as is the Church herself. This Obedience is essentially a supernatural virtue, ultimately performed for God's honour. 'As to the Lord . . . in the Lord,' says St. Paul. This obedience must therefore arise not merely from human devotion and natural instincts, but from the grace of the sacrament and the love of God that is called Charity. Then, too, the whole family is subject in obedience, in different ways, to the State and the Church. The laws of the land must be obeyed, the word of the Pope, the Bishop and the Parish Priest, must be attended to in their varying degrees of authority, willingly and submissively.

The virtue of obedience lies at the foundation of all worship, for it is the very stuff of which sacrifice is made. Christ's unique act of worship was inspired by obedience 'unto death, even the death of the Cross,' and expressed by His prayer in Gethsemane: 'Nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt.' The giving of one's will to God in obedience is the lifespring of sacrifice and worship, as St. Thomas points out.³

³ Cf. *Summa*, II-II, 104.3.

The obedience of family life, binding the individual members of the family together and the whole family to the State and to the Church, thus calls for continual self-sacrifice, and self-sacrifice of such a degree that only the grace of God can give to the members the strength to maintain the heroic submissiveness required of them in the face of unending difficulties and temptations. But that grace is freely offered; and in using it the family as a whole offers to God high honour and worship, and this, not through the involuntary praise given by dumb creation following the laws and general plan mapped out for them by the Creator, but in the willing and generous submission of a citizen of the City of God to the Lord and King.

The possibility of the worship of God in poverty, chastity and obedience may, however, easily be missed in practice. 'To work is to pray' often provides a ready excuse for dispensing with prayer. The sacrifices entailed by poverty, chastity and obedience in the family become occasions for complaint and an unwilling acceptance which removes the true spirit of sacrifice from them. Above all, when the sacramental grace of marriage is repudiated by sinful acts destroying the harmonized unity of marriage, wrecking the mutual love rooted in divine charity, the worship implicit in Christian family life turns to a blasphemy. It is precisely this disintegration of the family by an attack on the sacramental union that the spirit of the modern world brings about. Modern life is armed with a hundred sharp weapons to split open the compact whole joined by God. Not all of these disintegrating influences are sinful, but they all make the exercise of a supernaturalized, sanctified family life increasingly difficult. The widespread encouragement of birth control, or 'family planning' as it is now euphemistically called, in all sections of society is naturally the most insidious element of disintegration making a mockery of the marriage sacrifice and turning mutual love into self-indulgence; and to this must be added the facility for divorce

recently increased under the specious excuses provided by a spurious humanitarianism.

But the modern attack on the family is perhaps more venomous where less apparent, as in the inevitable results of the industrial civilisation, exemplified in the invention and extensive distribution of now common articles, in themselves sheer luxuries, which have developed into a type of necessity, such as the radio, the cinema, the motor-car. These pseudo-necessities often empty the family purse so that the family becomes a burden to itself, children a curse instead of a blessing, the hearth a kind of prison of poverty instead of an altar of joyful sacrifice. Again, more and more families are being huddled into flats where even the pretence of family life cannot persist; the worker must be prepared to march from one factory to another, to take up his bed and walk from one tenement to another, and he and his children become precariously bound together without the material, external bond of a permanent home; and, worst of all, in the words of Pius XI, 'even the mother of the family to the great harm of the house is compelled to go and seek a living by her own labour.' Family union is stretched to breaking point, since children are an embarrassment, the wife's wages become distinct from her husband's, the home becomes at best a hotel, at worst only a doss house. Finally from the continual flow of propaganda against the unity of the family from so many sources—from the Communists and humanitarians who lament real evil yet seek false remedies, from the incessant evil example of 'society'—the whole atmosphere is charged with overpowering forces inimical to the very essence of the sacrament of Matrimony.

The more the external, material supports are dragged away by the anti-family spirit that is abroad, the more imperative does it become that the Catholic family should make use of the interior supernatural graces of the sacrament to maintain its vitally important unity. In order to preserve this unity of the family, in order to strengthen

it against the insidious influences of its present-day environment and to give scope for the religious virtues and sacrifices whereby God is honoured in the every day life of the family, the conscious corporate action of all members is required, inspired by the grace of the sacrament, and constituting a splendid act of worship of God.

But this conscious corporate action must find its expression in formal prayer, prayer of the family as such. The family is one and it should pray as one, just as in a community of monks or nuns, where all the members say their prayers together, worship as one. The family is a religious community, since it grows out of a religious sacrament. Father, mother and children must pray together, as an accepted part of their daily family life. Religion must be common to the whole family, something shared by them all openly, with a mutual encouragement which will be found most effective in communal prayers. There is no opportunity here to outline the nature of these family prayers, but they should be fashioned on the liturgical style, beginning by praising and thanking God, asking that His Will be done, and concluding by petitions for the particular needs of the family.

Such prayers, however, will not survive the oppression of opposing custom and laxity unless they are joined to some fundamental act of devotion and worship which will use and consume all the family's powers of adoration. This is the one central act of worship that Christ left us as an unfailling and perfect means of self-oblation to His Father—i.e. the Mass. All the prayers, be they the individual prayers of the father or mother or children, or the united prayer of the whole family, all these must be centred in the Mass, leading up to it in preparation and away from it in thanksgiving. The sacrifice of the Mass is in fact the central point of the theme of worship in family life. All the aspects of worship hitherto recognised, the sacrifices, the virtuous poverty, chastity and obedience of Christian wedlock, the work in and for the family, all need the great

act of self-surrender implicit in true participation in the Mass. For in every Mass the unique act of self-surrender of Christ on the Cross is brought really before us. It was the central point of His whole life, which led up to it as a continual preparation; and if the faithful are to take part, to assist in the sacrifice, they must do likewise, surrender themselves, link up their whole life with this one act, making it the completion of all those family acts of worship and their interpretation.

Sacrifice is the external offering of a victim, signifying the internal offering of the whole being of the offerer. Thus in the Mass the faithful give themselves to God together with the external, outward Gift, which is Christ Himself, Who became a Victim by willingly accepting what His Father had decreed for Him, that self-surrender expressed in the Garden and on the Cross, the spirit of all sacrifice, the total surrender of the will to God. And that is the *Mass*.

The family as a whole must surrender itself to God at Mass and unite this act of self-surrender with the offering of the divine Victim. The total self-surrender of husband and wife to one another, which St. Paul implies is the external sign of Christ giving Himself to the Church on Calvary, may thus be linked up with Calvary as brought before them in the Mass, and can itself take on a sacrificial character. The daily sacrifice and sufferings, the hardships and labours, the poverty and anxiety which are present in every family life, are taken as God's Will for the family, brought to Calvary at the Mass and laid at Christ's Feet. This is specially true of those sacrifices which are demanded by a faithful following of the Christian ideal in family life—the struggle to bring up the children in the true faith, to preserve them from the immoral influences of the godless people around them, the rearing of a large family rather than following the unchaste way of the world, the forgoing of many small luxuries as a consequence, as well as the willing acceptance of the undoubted sacrifice

implied in a faithful adherence to family prayer and family attendance at Mass when the members pray and offer, not as separate individuals, but as a corporate unit, externally as well as internally one in mind, heart and action.

The family in Christ, offered in Christ and offering with Christ, will be the true Christian family united in the bond of sacramental worship, with Our Lord, the Head of the Mystical Body, in the presence of His Father. The Divine Father looks on the family as a single unit representing His beloved Son in something of the same way in which He regarded the Holy Family of Nazareth, as three with only one will, His Will. That is the ideal of the Christian family, the ideal aimed at from the earliest times in the Church, crystallized in the well-known passage from Tertullian, written in the second century: 'Who can tell the happiness of that marriage which is brought about by the Church, confirmed by the oblation (of the Eucharist), sealed with the benediction which the angels proclaim, ratified by the Heavenly Father? Henceforth there is between the two but one flesh and one spirit. They pray together, they prostrate together, they fast at the same time, they instruct one another, exhort and support one another. Together they go to Church, they take their place side by side at the banquet of God, they are united in trial, in persecution, in joy. They sing psalms and hymns together, each striving to excel the other in singing the praises of God. To them may Christ send His Peace. Whenever two are united there is He also present.'⁴

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⁴ *Ad uxorem*, 11.9.