

Bulletin Article Series on the Family - Week 8 - Conclusion: The Family in Today's World

As we conclude our reflections on marriage and family life, today we will offer a few considerations on how to navigate the many difficult situations that families face today. Obviously, I cannot possibly cover all circumstances, so I can only offer here a few general principles.

1. Jesus came to call sinners back to the Father. But in order for sinners to receive His mercy, we need to be willing to repent. Jesus did not come to tell everyone “you are fine as you are, do whatever feels good.” Yes, God loves us as we are, and nothing can change that. But He loves us too much to allow us to hurt ourselves, which is what sin does.

2. *It is possible to genuinely love someone and not agree with them on all of their lifestyle choices!* This is not a popular idea today, but it is true! And it is true because love is not primarily an emotion, but a choice—an act of the will. I can will your good even if I don't agree with you.

3. The admonition to “judge not” (cf. Matthew 7:1) does not mean we can make no judgment calls whatsoever. A good rule of thumb is that we can judge what we can see: concrete actions in light of moral standards given to us by God. But we cannot judge what we cannot see: a person's soul and their intentions.

4. Sexual sins are not the only grave sins. Others include evil thoughts, theft, murder, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly (cf. Mark 7:21-22). But an education in chastity is critical because sexual sins have such long-lasting, far-reaching consequences (beyond just ourselves).

5. As I have written before, we need to *very prayerfully discern* how to act when a family member is living in a way opposed to God's will. While we always want to love (will the good of) others, I think in general most people today are too quick to unreflectively (i.e. act without deeply considering the consequences) give the impression that they support sinful lifestyle choices (if not outright endorse them!). This may come from the usually good impulse of wanting to support others. *But true love cannot support every choice that a person makes, especially if the choice is hurting their immortal souls and hurting others around them* (again, see #2 above).

6. Similarly, the preservation of the innocence of children needs to be the first priority when dealing with family members that are living lifestyles contrary to God's will. This can be deeply painful, as it may even mean not associating with certain people for a time in serious cases. We cannot shield children from everything, but it is violence to a child's developing mind, for example, to suggest or expose them to the idea that a person's sex/gender is “fluid.”

7. When offering someone a loving word of correction, we need to always check our own motives first, and make sure our concern isn't coming from a place of pride, anger, etc., but from genuine Christian love, and also make sure that we don't have any "planks in our own eyes" that we need to attend to first. The goal of fraternal correction must never be to be proven right, but that a sinner comes home to their heavenly Father.

There is no doubt that we are living in difficult days, dealing with things that our ancestors would have never dreamed of. It would be nice if there was a guidebook with concrete answers to every issue we face, but that just isn't the case. Scripture and the wisdom of the Church can guide us to make prudent applications of unchanging moral norms. But we also need a lot of prayer for wisdom to know how to act, what to say, when to say it, and when to just be quiet and trust in God's providence. We need to pray for the conversion of hardened hearts, beginning with our own. For families to truly be a "school of love," we need to be there for each other and authentically love each other, knowing that there is no such thing as a perfect family on earth, and it is exactly in our brokenness that God comes to meet us and heal us with His saving love.