

## **Adult Catechism November 28, 2016**

### **My Family Home: A Place to Encounter the Living Christ**

#### **Summary and Conclusion**

#### **Scripture Verses:**

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7:** Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

**1 Timothy 5:8:** But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

**1 John 4:19:** We love because He first loved us.

**Psalms 127:3-5:** Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

**Genesis 28:14:** Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Introduction: Strong, faith-filled families are the foundation of our parishes, our Church and society. The Eparchy of Saskatoon is committed to helping parents and grandparents pass on the faith to our children and youth. This is a lifelong process. It is a great responsibility, but an even greater joy.

With Great Gifts Comes Great Responsibility: We want our children to have a faith that is vibrant and that will help them navigate the challenges of life. They need to understand that God wants a close relationship with them. God has a plan and purpose for their lives. The foundation for this kind of faith begins at home. "Everything I learned about church, about Christ, the ambience where I learned to pray — before I met a priest for the first time — was my home, my family," said Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk in an interview with the Catholic News Service, October 13, 2014. In order to pass on a life of faith parents are primary; they are the ones who must pass on this gift of faith. Parish and School can help with in this work, but Parents are the first and most important people in forming the faith of their children.

Living the Liturgy: If we as parents are to be the 'fire' that will empower and lead our children to a life of faith, hope and lasting joy, that will not fail them regardless of the challenges they may face in life, we must work on our own relationship with God. As it is God who gives us life, our relationship with Him is central to everything we are and do. Patriarch Sviatoslav reminded us in his visit to Saskatoon in 2013, our desire for God

should be as strong as our desire for our next breath. If we ask for that kind of faith—God will give it to us.

Truth and love: A winning combination All of our kids will ultimately make their own choices. Regardless of those choices we need never stop speaking the truth in love. Likewise, we can never stop believing that through our love and prayers our children will turn back to the love and life offered through Jesus Christ. Even if it seems that we have failed, perseverance is the key. We must never give up on God and on loving our kids. Our God is faithful and has an abundance of mercy and desire to win our hearts with love. Growing closer to Christ means growing in the ability love. This is a lifelong journey. A life of love is central to what it means to be a Christian and fundamental to Christian family life. LOVE NEVER FAILS! (1 Cor.13:8)

From the Apostolic Exhortation “The Joy of Love” written by Pope Francis “Children, once born, begin to receive, along with nourishment and care, the spiritual gift of knowing with certainty that they are loved. This love is shown to them through the gift of their personal name, the sharing of language, looks of love and the brightness of a smile. In this way, they learn that the beauty of human relationships touches our soul, seeks our freedom, accepts the difference of others, recognizes and respects them as a partner in dialogue... Such is love, and it contains a spark of God’s love!” Every child has a right to receive love from a mother and a father; both are necessary for a child’s integral and harmonious development. As the Australian Bishops have observed, each of the spouses “contributes in a distinct way to the upbringing of a child. Respecting a child’s dignity means affirming his or her need and natural right to have a mother and a father”. We are speaking not simply of the love of father and mother as individuals, but also of their mutual love, perceived as the source of one’s life and the solid foundation of the family. Without this, a child could become a mere plaything. Husband and wife, father and mother, both “cooperate with the love of God the Creator, and are, in a certain sense, his interpreters”. They show their children the maternal and paternal face of the Lord. Together they teach the value of reciprocity, of respect for differences and of being able to give and take. If for some inevitable reason one parent should be lacking, it is important to compensate for this loss, for the sake of the child’s healthy growth to maturity.

The sense of being orphaned that affects many children and young people today is much deeper than we think. Nowadays we acknowledge as legitimate and indeed desirable that women wish to study, work, develop their skills and have personal goals. At the same time, we cannot ignore the need that children have for a mother’s presence, especially in the first months of life. Indeed, “the woman stands before the man as a mother, the subject of the new human life that is conceived and develops in her, and from her is born into the world”. The

weakening of this maternal presence with its feminine qualities poses a grave risk to our world. I certainly value feminism, but one that does not demand uniformity or negate motherhood. For the grandeur of women includes all the rights derived from their inalienable human dignity but also from their feminine genius, which is essential to society. Their specifically feminine abilities – motherhood in particular – also grant duties, because womanhood also entails a specific mission in this world, a mission that society needs to protect and preserve for the good of all. “Mothers are the strongest antidote to the spread of self-centred individualism... It is they who testify to the beauty of life”. Certainly, “a society without mothers would be dehumanized, for mothers are always, even in the worst of times, witnesses to tenderness, dedication and moral strength. Mothers often communicate the deepest meaning of religious practice in the first prayers and acts of devotion that their children learn... Without mothers, not only would there be no new faithful, but the faith itself would lose a good part of its simple and profound warmth... Dear mothers: thank you! Thank you for what you are in your family and for what you give to the Church and the world”.

A mother who watches over her child with tenderness and compassion helps him or her to grow in confidence and to experience that the world is a good and welcoming place. This helps the child to grow in self-esteem and, in turn, to develop a capacity for intimacy and empathy. A father, for his part, helps the child to perceive the limits of life, to be open to the challenges of the wider world, and to see the need for hard work and strenuous effort. A father possessed of a clear and serene masculine identity who demonstrates affection and concern for his wife is just as necessary as a caring mother. There can be a certain flexibility of roles and responsibilities, depending on the concrete circumstances of each particular family. But the clear and well-defined presence of both figures, female and male, creates the environment best suited to the growth of the child.

We often hear that ours is “a society without fathers”. In Western culture, the father figure is said to be symbolically absent, missing or vanished. Manhood itself seems to be called into question. The result has been an understandable confusion. “At first, this was perceived as a liberation: liberation from the father as master, from the father as the representative of a law imposed from without, from the father as the arbiter of his children’s happiness and an obstacle to the emancipation and autonomy of young people. In some homes authoritarianism once reigned and, at times, even oppression”. Yet, “as often happens, one goes from one extreme to the other. In our day, the problem no longer seems to be the overbearing presence of the father so much as his absence, his not being there. Fathers are often so caught up in themselves and their work, and at times in their own self-fulfilment, that they neglect their families. They leave the little

ones and the young to themselves”. The presence of the father, and hence his authority, is also impacted by the amount of time given over to the communications and entertainment media. Nowadays authority is often considered suspect and adults treated with impertinence. They themselves become uncertain and so fail to offer sure and solid guidance to their children. A reversal of the roles of parents and children is unhealthy, since it hinders the proper process of development that children need to experience, and it denies them the love and guidance needed to mature.

God sets the father in the family so that by the gifts of his masculinity he can be “close to his wife and share everything, joy and sorrow, hope and hardship. And to be close to his children as they grow – when they play and when they work, when they are carefree and when they are distressed, when they are talkative and when they are silent, when they are daring and when they are afraid, when they stray and when they get back on the right path. To be a father who is always present. When I say ‘present’, I do not mean ‘controlling’. Fathers who are too controlling overshadow their children, they don’t let them develop”. Some fathers feel they are useless or unnecessary, but the fact is that “children need to find a father waiting for them when they return home with their problems. They may try hard not to admit it, not to show it, but they need it”. It is not good for children to lack a father and to grow up before they are ready.

We also do well to remember that procreation and adoption are not the only ways of experiencing the fruitfulness of love. Even large families are called to make their mark on society, finding other expressions of fruitfulness that in some way prolong the love that sustains them. Christian families should never forget that “faith does not remove us from the world, but draws us more deeply into it... Each of us, in fact, has a special role in preparing for the coming of God’s kingdom in our world”. Families should not see themselves as a refuge from society, but instead go forth from their homes in a spirit of solidarity with others. In this way, they become a hub for integrating persons into society and a point of contact between the public and private spheres. Married couples should have a clear awareness of their social obligations. With this, their affection does not diminish but is flooded with new light. As the poet says: *“Your hands are my caress, The harmony that fills my days. I love you because your hands Work for justice. If I love you, it is because you are My love, my companion and my all, And on the street, side by side, We are much more than just two”*.

No family can be fruitful if it sees itself as overly different or “set apart”. To avoid this risk, we should remember that Jesus’ own family, so full of grace and wisdom, did not appear unusual or different from others. That is why people

found it hard to acknowledge Jesus' wisdom: "Where did this man get all this? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" (Mk 6:23). "Is this not the carpenter's son?" (Mt 13: 55). These questions make it clear that theirs was an ordinary family, close to others, a normal part of the community. Jesus did not grow up in a narrow and stifling relationship with Mary and Joseph, but readily interacted with the wider family, the relatives of his parents and their friends. This explains how, on returning from Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph could imagine for a whole day that the twelve-year-old Jesus was somewhere in the caravan, listening to people's stories and sharing their concerns: "Supposing him to be in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey" (Lk 2:44). Still, some Christian families, whether because of the language they use, the way they act or treat others, or their constant harping on the same two or three issues, end up being seen as remote and not really a part of the community. Even their relatives feel looked down upon or judged by them.

A married couple who experience the power of love know that this love is called to bind the wounds of the outcast, to foster a culture of encounter and to fight for justice. God has given the family the job of "domesticating the world and helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters. "An attentive look at the everyday life of today's men and women immediately shows the omnipresent need for a healthy injection of family spirit... Not only is the organization of ordinary life increasingly thwarted by a bureaucracy completely removed from fundamental human bonds, but even social and political mores show signs of degradation". For their part, open and caring families find a place for the poor and build friendships with those less fortunate than themselves. In their efforts to live according to the Gospel, they are mindful of Jesus' words: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Mt 25:40)". In a very real way, their lives express what is asked of us all: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed" (Lk 14:12-14). You will be blessed! Here is the secret to a happy family.

By their witness as well as their words, families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, they arouse a desire for God and they reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope. Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God's love present in society.

The nuclear family needs to interact with the wider family made up of parents, aunts and uncles, cousins and even neighbours. This greater family may have members who require assistance, or at least companionship and affection, or consolation amid suffering. The individualism so prevalent today can lead to creating small nests of security, where others are perceived as bothersome or a threat. Such isolation, however, cannot offer greater peace or happiness; rather, it straitens the heart of a family and makes its life all the more narrow.

First, let us think of our parents. Jesus told the Pharisees that abandoning one's parents is contrary to God's law (cf. Mk 7:8-13). We do well to remember that each of us is a son or daughter. "Even if one becomes an adult, or an elderly person, even if one becomes a parent, if one occupies a position of responsibility, underneath all of this is still the identity of a child. We are all sons and daughters. And this always brings us back to the fact that we did not give ourselves life but that we received it. The great gift of life is the first gift that we received". Hence, "the fourth commandment asks children... to honour their father and mother (cf. Ex 20:12). This commandment comes immediately after those dealing with God himself. Indeed, it has to do with something sacred, something divine, something at the basis of every other kind of human respect. The biblical formulation of the fourth commandment goes on to say: 'that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you'. The virtuous bond between generations is the guarantee of the future, and is the guarantee of a truly humane society. A society with children who do not honour parents is a society without honour... It is a society destined to be filled with surly and greedy young people".

There is, however, another side to the coin. As the word of God tells us, "a man leaves his father and his mother" (Gen 2:24). This does not always happen, and a marriage is hampered by the failure to make this necessary sacrifice and surrender. Parents must not be abandoned or ignored, but marriage itself demands that they be "left", so that the new home will be a true hearth, a place of security, hope and future plans, and the couple can truly become "one flesh". In some marriages, one spouse keeps secrets from the other, confiding them instead to his or her parents. As a result, the opinions of their parents become more important than the feelings and opinions of their spouse. This situation cannot go on for long, and even if it takes time, both spouses need to make the effort to grow in trust and communication. Marriage challenges husbands and wives to find new ways of being sons and daughters.

Relationships between brothers and sisters deepen with the passing of time, and "the bond of fraternity that forms in the family between children, if consolidated by

an educational atmosphere of openness to others, is a great school of freedom and peace. In the family, we learn how to live as one. Perhaps we do not always think about this, but the family itself introduces fraternity into the world. From this initial experience of fraternity, nourished by affection and education at home, the style of fraternity radiates like a promise upon the whole of society”.

Growing up with brothers and sisters makes for a beautiful experience of caring for and helping one another. For “fraternity in families is especially radiant when we see the care, the patience, the affection that surround the little brother or sister who is frail, sick or disabled”. It must be acknowledged that “having a brother or a sister who loves you is a profound, precious and unique experience”. Children do need to be patiently taught to treat one another as brothers and sisters. This training, at times quite demanding, is a true school of socialization. In some countries, where it has become quite common to have only one child, the experience of being a brother or sister is less and less common. When it has been possible to have only one child, ways have to be found to ensure that he or she does not grow up alone or isolated.

In addition to the small circle of the couple and their children, there is the larger family, which cannot be overlooked. Indeed, “the love between husband and wife and, in a derivative and broader way, the love between members of the same family – between parents and children, brothers and sisters and relatives and members of the household – is given life and sustenance by an unceasing inner dynamism leading the family to ever deeper and more intense communion, which is the foundation and soul of the community of marriage and the family”. Friends and other families are part of this larger family, as well as communities of families who support one another in their difficulties, their social commitments and their faith.

This larger family should provide love and support to teenage mothers, children without parents, single mothers left to raise children, persons with disabilities needing particular affection and closeness, young people struggling with addiction, the unmarried, separated or widowed who are alone, and the elderly and infirm who lack the support of their children. It should also embrace “even those who have made shipwreck of their lives”. This wider family can help make up for the shortcomings of parents, detect and report possible situations in which children suffer violence and even abuse, and provide wholesome love and family stability in cases when parents prove incapable of this.

Finally, we cannot forget that this larger family includes fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law and all the relatives of the couple. One particularly delicate aspect of love is learning not to view these relatives as somehow competitors, threats or

intruders. The conjugal union demands respect for their traditions and customs, an effort to understand their language and to refrain from criticism, caring for them and cherishing them while maintaining the legitimate privacy and independence of the couple. Being willing to do so is also an exquisite expression of generous love for one's spouse.