

“The Future of Families”

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I Timothy 5:1-4

Matthew 20:20-28

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On Mother's Day, I want to share some things that our Mothers teach us. These are not necessarily what my mother taught me.

1. My Mother taught me about ANTICIPATION...
“Just wait until your father gets home!” (Well, she did teach me this one.)
2. My Mother taught me about RECEIVING...
“You are going to get it when we get home!”
3. My Mother taught me to MEET A CHALLENGE...
“What were you thinking? Answer me when I talk to you! Don't talk back to me!”
4. My mother taught me about Justice...
"One day you'll have kids ...and I hope they turn out just like you...Then you'll see what it's like!"
5. My mother taught me about GENETICS...
"You're just like your father."

And what about families? Being parents? For those of you who have had children, do you remember the trip to the hospital?

First child: Every time we felt the slightest B&H contraction, we rushed to the hospital. I would carry my wife to the car and lay her down in the back seat surrounded by pillows.

Second child: We timed the contractions. By the time she had three in thirty minutes, we rushed to the hospital. She sat in the front seat, with it leaned back and a pillow behind her head and another at her feet.

Third child: I came home from the office as soon as she started having regular contractions. When they were five minutes apart and hard, we went to the hospital. I gave her a pillow to hold along the way.

Fourth child: When she called me at the office and told me that she was having contractions hard, and five minutes apart, I told her to drive to the hospital. I would meet her there as soon as I finished the set of correspondence I was working on. I reminded her not to forget the pillows.

Have you seen the New Yorker magazine, the May 5th issue? The front cover? It's called “Mother's Day Special.” A young woman in her 20's-30's is peering into a store window – with a huge smile on her face. She is delighted in what she is seeing. Several newborns are cooing and crawling around in the store window. The young woman's husband (boyfriend?) is holding her hand, but is as far away from the window as possible, not facing the window, and looking up as if wishing he was somewhere else.

Men. Fathers – ouch! (Wait ‘till Father’s Day for some vindication.)

But, it’s my guess most women (boy, I hope I’m not being sexist) readily relate to this woman’s joy.

A Family!

This morning I will only touch on the subject of the Family. I will leave more out, than in. I will not clarify all issues and concerns. But, I hope to pique your interest in where the family is today in our society, and consider its future. The stats I’m using are from a very recent publication titled, Understanding America; The Anatomy of an Exceptional Nation. The chapter on the family was written by two scholars of demography, and family specialists.

But before I regale you with fascinating stats, and with apologies to my dear late friend – Chuck – I want to quote from the then Cardinal Ratzinger (2004) in his book, Without Roots. I do take issue with his position on birth control, and family planning, but his great concern with Europe’s declining birth rate, and his take on why – resonates with me also. In fact all of Europe, as well as China, Japan and Russia, have fertility rates below the level necessary for replacement. In Spain, Italy and Greece, if nothing changes their population will fall by half within the next 50 years. (Russia is even worse, that is if you want a culture – nation to continue.)

At one point, the then Cardinal Ratzinger declared;

Europe is infected by a strange lack of desire for the future. Children, our future, are perceived as a threat to the present, as if they were taking something away from our lives. Children are seen as a liability rather than as a source of hope.

Friends, is there a correlation between families having children and the way we look to the future? Do we think, whether consciously or subliminally that the future is worthy of continuing?

The Future of Families.

Of course there are multiple family expressions today. We know what they are. If I may, married families – exhibit more positive traits.

The good news! (If you are inclined to want us to continue into the future, as I am.)

“Out of all developed countries, the United States comes closest to replacement levels.” (p. 324). Our level is 2.04 births. But, the reason we are in the positive, is due to immigration (please, nothing I’m sharing is meant to imply anything positive or negative regarding immigration policy.) These are just facts. Here’s an interesting fact. Who has the higher fertility rate in America, Catholics or Protestants? Protestants - 1.91! Catholics - 1.64! Who has the highest fertility rate (gauged by religion)? Mormons – 3.03.

The authors conclude:

“The United States is in the distinct position among developed societies of producing just about enough children each year to replace the population in the long run... healthy, well-educated children raised to young adulthood bring to the country in which they live (societal benefits). These children constitute arguable the most important asset of a developed society, and the benefits from these children accrue to all members of the society, not just those who raised them.” (pp 336, 338). Now, of course all of this is noted on a social cultural matrix. But, by all means our faith, religion, comes into play in terms of how we see the blessing of children, how we perceive our responsibility for our part of the world (where God has placed us), and what

we believe about the future!

My friends, as I have shared on numerous occasions, a primary belief in our Christian faith is - the future!

We are future oriented beings!

The Bible, through the Judeo/Christian tradition is very pro-family!

The paragraph I read this morning from I Timothy is full of information and challenge in interpretation. But, of great significance is the presupposition, the taken for grantedness, that “families” are to be the bearers of how to live, and they are to be responsible to those in the family. Concomitant with this “way of life” is that the early church thought of itself as an extended family. The young minister Timothy is getting his education from the author of this letter. He is learning about “Familial responsibilities”, as are those within the church.

Respect is to be given to your elder members. (By the way, Presbyteros” [GK] for elder, is used in this chapter three times. Does that sound familiar?) Widows, those in need, need to be care for. And here is a declaration that transcends time and all cultures (or at least most cultures?).

- Families are to care for each other!
- Families are to meet the needs of their family.
- Families need to “first learn their religious duty to their own family...”

“This is acceptable in the sight of God.” The future of families depends on families learning and doing their duty to their children, their parents, and their grandparents. Children learn more of their view of the world, their behavior and their morals, from their family!

Beyond the specific context of widow – the gospel message is declaring that families matter! How the family goes, so goes the society, the civilization. The health of the family will reflect the health of the nation.

Mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers - each function, should function - in inculcating values into their children – values of dignity, compassion, vision, commitment, and a host of other positive values. And our mothers are (as they always have been) on the front line! Thank God!

When thinking about the love and vision our mothers have for their children, I often think of the story of the mother of the disciples, the Zebedee boys. She has something definite in mind. She is resolute! She walks right up to Jesus. (By the way, notice her name is never mentioned. It’s my guess, the Zebedee boys were embarrassed and begged the writer to leave out her name.) But there she is, right in front of Jesus. She wants something. “What do you want?” inquires Jesus. Without hesitation mom declares” “Make my two sons your 2nd and 3rd in command! They’re good boys!” I imagine them cringing, trying to disappear. (Like when Robert on “Everybody Loves Raymond” is aghast when his mother, asks the director of the FBI to hire her son.)

Of course Jesus goes into a teaching mode about serving, instead of reigning. But isn’t this just like “Mothers,” proud of their children, wanting a wonderful future for each of them? Isn’t it?

My own mother, the greatest mother - would let certain things slide, but when it came to her children – “beware – mother on premises.” The same is true for my wife Shawn – the maternal instinct is strong! Thank God!

Again, I have left so much out! But, our families are extremely important on so many levels, from the personal to the societal! Our Christian faith has always uplifted the value of families.

Responsibility, commitment, teaching – reign high in living in a family! On this Mother’s Day – Give mom a hug! Tell her you love her. If mother has gone on to be with the Lord whisper a prayer of thanks to the God of families.

The Future of Families – is up to us, and what our children “learn” from us, about and their future.

Amen.