

Superalbundant Family Love

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What's It All About

Some years ago, there was a popular song, "What's it all about, Alfie?" This is the wonderful, simple yet deep question of life: What's life all about? What are the deepest questions of life? The answer -- that is, God's answer -- is that it's all about family and family love. For that is why God created us, to participate in His family life.

Oh yes, the God we worship is a Family -- a Trinity of persons loving one another, deferring to one another, delighting in one another. As one mystic says, "From all eternity, the Father looks at the Son and the looking becomes beholding; from all eternity, the Father beholds the Son, and the beholding becomes loving; from all eternity, the Father loves the Son, and the loving becomes delighting; from all eternity, the Father delights in the Son and the delighting becomes celebration; from all eternity, the Father celebrates with the Son and the celebration becomes creation." Let us create man and woman in our image and likeness, so male and female, God created them.

Placed in the Family

When you and I were born, God did not place us in a courtroom because God is not above all a judge; nor did He place us in a classroom because He is not above all a teacher. But He did place us in a family because God is, above all, a Family. Yes, He placed us into a set of relationships in which we are mothered, fathered, brothered, sistered, aunted, uncled and cousinsed. When we were baptized, He placed us into His covenanted family, the Church. God became our Father, Mary became our mother and we all became brothers and sisters to each other.

St. Paul

St. Paul expresses it this way: "It is for this reason that we kneel before the Father from whom every family, both spiritual (the Church) and natural (the home) takes its name ... so that we could experience the length, the breadth, the height and the depth of God's marvelous love for us and, at last, be filled up with God Himself" (Eph 3:14-19).

The Covenants

As family, God swore certain oaths and gave us certain covenants. I will be your God, and you will be My Family, was the essence of all of them. The first covenant, the marriage covenant, He made with Adam and Eve. The household covenant He made with Noah and his wife. The third covenant, the people covenant, He made with Abraham and Sarah. The national covenant He made with Moses. The kingly covenant He made with David. The

priestly covenant He made with Ezra. And the universal, or Catholic covenant, He made with Jesus.

Each of these covenants had a single male head who imaged God the Father's primary role -- to protect, to oversee and to lead. Nevertheless, it was the woman, especially the eternal woman, Mary, who became the heart of each covenant. And the lifeblood of each covenant was open, loving relationships with God and with one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The Way of Family Love

Pope John Paul II uses the expression, The Way of Family Love. Not only is Jesus the Way, but also covenanted family love is the way. And so Christ founded a covenanted people who would be His mystical body -- the Church. Into this people He poured His Spirit, His Holy Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness and purity -- all relational virtues. To His people He gave the command, love one another as I have loved you.

This special inspired love is called in the Scriptures, agape love. It is an inspired love. It is a gift from the Father to the son by the working of the Holy Spirit. The height of this love is that it comes from God. The depth of this love is that it loves the unlovable, touches the untouchable and forgives the unforgivable. The breadth of this love is that it is universal -- it loves everyone. And the length of this love is that it is not taken back but goes on into eternity.

The power of this love is that it flows from the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the sign of this new universal covenant, just as the rainbow was a sign for the covenant with Noah, circumcision the sign of the covenant with Abraham, and the Passover was the sign of the covenant with Moses. Each of the seven covenants had such a sign. Because God is one, God wished this covenanted family to be one. Because God is holy, He gave to this family all the means of becoming holy. Because God's love is universal, He made this family to be Catholic or universal. And because God is love, diffusive of itself, He made this family to be apostolic.

I've Come to Bring You Life More Abundantly

So Jesus came not to create a group of Pharisees, because He is not primarily a lawgiver. Nor did He come to make a classroom of fundamentalists, because He is not primarily a teacher. But He did come to bring us life more abundantly because He is above all the source of life. He is the source of life because He constantly receives His life from His Father, the primary source of life. When we unite ourselves with Him, therefore, we become the source of that life to one another in what He calls His mystical body.

In the very beautiful song written by the monks of Weston entitled, *Wherever You Go, I Shall Go*, there is this spoken verse: "When the time of our particular sunset comes, our thing, our accomplishment won't really matter a great deal. But the clarity and warmth with which we have loved others will speak with vitality of the great gift of God we have been for each other." St. Paul and St. John, as well as Jesus, all teach that the most essential virtue is love -- a love that is inspired by the spirit and that is sensitive, caring, forgiving, thoughtful and kind.

Stages of Growth

When we are young, we receive all the love of mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, aunts, and uncles. This enables us to be beloved sons and daughters. This love received becomes the love we share with our brothers and sisters and each other. When this love is not given, we speak today of a father wound or mother wound.

As we go through our teenage years, we tend to become more independent and see real excitement not so much at home, but outside the home in the neon lights. Sooner or later most children leave the home and journey into that perceived exciting world that seems to offer such promise of happiness. But usually, because we come to see that world in its artificiality, or because we have a religious experience, or because of the death of a loved one ... most of us come home in the sense that we realize what was really most important all along was what we had right before our eyes.

Real conversion takes place when we realize that there are only two important things in life - God and family.

A Family of Our Own

As people marry and create families of their own, they find themselves saying so many of the things their fathers and their mothers said to them. Be loving and kind, forgive each other, take quality time to enjoy each other, don't work so hard, and so forth. It is in family love that we learn our ABCs: always Affirm, Be your deepest self, and see Christ in one another.

It is also within the context of establishing a home of our own that we realize how important the Church is to safeguarding family values and how important our spirituality is to fostering them. With this in mind, I would like to list ten ideals for fathers, ten ideal for mothers and ten ideals for children.

Ten Ideals of a Father

1. Develop an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus, allowing Him to forgive you, talk to you, heal you and guide you. Then, trust the Holy Spirit in all things. Trust Him to provide everything you need, including financial help.

2. Get your priorities in order -- JESUS first, wife second, children third, work fourth, etc. Develop a weekly schedule, blocking out quality time for the Lord, your wife, each child, and so forth.

3. Realize that you are the priest of the home. It is your prime responsibility to oversee the TV and its influence, as well as the books and the magazines that come into your home. You must stand firmly against all evil influences, asking constantly for God's strength and guidance to lead your family in living a pure, holy and non-violent lifestyle. Get in the habit of blessing your children with your wife before they go to sleep at night or before they leave the house in the morning.

4. Make sure you know what your children are being taught regarding morals and values at school. All teachers teach "in your place." If objectionable subjects are being taught, you must stand strong. The primary place for Christian values and morals to be taught and practiced is in your home. This is an awesome responsibility.

5. Pray with your wife. Try to share your spiritual journal with her. Trust the Lord to guide, purify and sanctify your relationship. She is the heart of the home. Reverence her. Love her with Christ's love and affection. Support her decisions whenever you can. Share her burdens, sorrows and joys. Ask the Lord for the strength to love her with His love and purity.

6. Spend quality time with each child. Treat each in a unique, individual and personal way. The power of a father's affirming love is overwhelming. Let each child share his or her ideals, feelings, fears, and problems. Share with your wife your insights concerning each child. Listen to her discernment, as well. Dare to discipline with love and firmness.

7. Consecrate your home to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Set up an altar in your home for family devotions. On it place a Bible, a crucifix, statues of the Sacred Heart and Mary, and a book of family devotions and prayer. A good time for family prayer is right after supper. The family rosary is a powerful prayer. If the children are little, say only a decade, or vary it with the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

8. Do not let sports or outside activities become more important to you or to your children than Christ and the family. Spend fun time at home. Do things together as a family. This calls for creativity and planning.

9. Pray that each one of your children may answer the call that Jesus has on their lives. Never ask your children, "What do you want to be?" Rather ask, "What do you think Jesus is calling you to be?" Help them discern their call in life.

10. Try to go to Mass often and take your family to Sunday Mass as a family, if at all possible. Make Sunday the Lord's Day and a day of family togetherness -- a day of relaxation, prayer and fun. Once again, this calls for imagination and planning with your wife. Try to go to confession frequently with your family.

Ten Ideals of a Mother

1. Develop an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus. He is your primary love. Allow Him to love you, forgive you, speak to you, guide you, heal you, and fill you. Always keep a spiritual journal of the messages and insights you receive from Him.

2. Keep your priorities in order -- Jesus first, husband second, children third, etc. The best thing you can do for your husband is to love Jesus, and the best thing you can do for your children is to love their father, just as he loves the Lord. Do not work outside the home. If you do work, try to make sure that work does not interfere with your primary responsibilities. Develop a weekly schedule setting aside prime time for Jesus, your husband and each child.

3. Realize that you are the heart of the home. It is your prime responsibility to work with your husband and to support him with your love. Love is your greatest gift. Affirm, Affirm, Love. Affirm, Affirm, Affirm.

4. Let your husband know the problems and difficulties...

you and your children are experiencing in living a Christian life. Work with God and your husband toward solutions. Life is problematic because of the amount of violence and promiscuity. Decide with your husband which television programs you will allow the family to watch. Sports, talk shows, soap operas, and film stars have become false gods in America. Work toward balance in what you allow the family to watch.

5. Pray with your husband. Share your insights with him. You keep a journal, share that with him. Allow the Lord to sanctify and purify your relationship with him. Ask the Lord for the strength to love him with His love and purity.

6. Spend quality time with each child, supporting, affirming and loving them. There is nothing like a mother's love. You will intuitively know their needs and problems. Share openly with them and allow them to be open with you. You should know their fears, worries and temptations. Pray for guidance and wisdom. Dare to discipline with love and firmness.

7. Support your husband in setting up a place in the home for family devotions. Encourage your family to place everything in God's hands -- their worries, fears, doubts, difficulties, and temptations. God is really their Father. Mary is really their mother. The Holy Spirit is really present to each of them. Jesus lives in their hearts, speaking, loving and forgiving.

8. Try to set the tone in living a simple, humble, non-violent lifestyle. This is a challenge in a materialistic, pleasure-seeking, individualistic culture. You are often called to heroism. TV heroes, movie stars and sports heroes are generally not the best role models. Watch over the songs your children are listening to and the posters they hang in their rooms. This calls for real wisdom.

9. Try to discern with each child the call of the Lord upon their lives. All are called to put Him first and to serve Him with all their hearts. This is difficult and heroic in today's world.

10. With your husband make Sunday the Lord's Day and a day of family togetherness. Encourage your family to frequently receive the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

Ten Ideals of Children.

1. Realize that you are a child of God, fearfully and wonderfully made, created in God's image and for a distinct purpose here on earth. Therefore, prayer should be an important part of your life.

2. Realize that Jesus lives in your heart. He is there to inspire you, console you and guide you each step of the way. Try to receive Him in Holy Communion at least every Sunday and to go to confession at least once a month.

3. Be open to the Holy Spirit, especially as He guides you through your parents, priests and teachers. They are God's instruments for love, direction and protection. Don't forget their birthdays.

4. Be careful of the TV programs you watch and the kind of music you listen to. So much of it is filled with violence, immorality, arrogance, and selfishness. As one young person said, "Garbage in, garbage out. Jesus in, Jesus out."

5. Realize that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that your sexuality is a great gift from God. Pray to our Blessed Mother to keep you pure and loving. Be modest in the way you dress. Watch out for the language you use.

6. Often tell your mother and your father how much you

love and appreciate them. Try not to take them for granted. As you grow older you will appreciate how much they sacrificed for you.

7. Be loving and kind to your brothers and sisters. Remember how sensitive you are when someone hurts your feelings. Treat them the way you would like them to treat you.

8. Be selective of your friends. "Birds of a feather flock together." Choose friends who have good character and high morals.

9. Set aside an hour or so for study each evening and enlist the help of your parents and older brothers and sisters.

10. Learning is a lifelong process. We are always learning. In the years, every family is a home school. Home schooling, by the way, is a wonderful opportunity.

11. Ask God to show you what He wants you to be as you grow older. Trust Him to put it in your mind and heart, for He will show you the way He works. It says in the Bible, "If you really love to know what God wants you to do, simply ask Him and He will gladly tell you" (James 1:5).

Prayer

In my own family, we had a prayer that my wonderful and holy father memorized and taught to his five children and 20 grandchildren. Although my father has gone home to be with God, we, to this day, still recite this prayer whenever we gather together as family.

God Made Us a Family. We need one another. We love one another. We forgive one another. We work together. We play together. We worship together. Together we use God's Word. Together we grow in Christ. Together we love all men and women. Together we serve our God. Together we hope for Heaven. These are our hopes and ideals. Help us to attain them, O God, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Amen.

A Masterpiece

Each child is a unique irreplaceable masterpiece of God. Formed in His mind even before time began, we are each personally created by a distinct action of God. Each one of us possesses individual, God-given gifts, graces and talents. We are chosen for freedom, holiness and love, to be formed in the crucible of family life so that we can grow in wisdom holiness and grace before God and man.

It is precisely in family that each person should experience their unique, individual greatness, and the reality that their heavenly Father loves them with both a paternal and maternal love. In the heart of the home, each individual should be affirmed as special, one-of-a-kind, never-to-be-duplicated masterpiece of nature and of grace. Because of this, each child should never be compared unfavorably to another other but must be given the love and acceptance to grow not only in uniqueness but in social virtues, as well.

Thus, the home not only is the fulfillment of the temple, but a foretaste of heaven, as well, where all of us eternally shall be loved as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in the everlasting family that we now call the Trinity.

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Talk by Anne Ryder,

Anchorperson, Channel 13—Philadelphia

Spiritual Rally—Second Annual Convention

Catholic Campaign for America

Anne Ryder, anchorperson for Philadelphia's Channel 13, gave a truly marvelous talk at a spiritual rally at the Core Spectrum on September 22, 1996. For sometime now, Anne has struggled with trying to dress up the bad news presented through the media. She went to her producer and asked if she could develop something more uplifting and inspirational. Her producer agreed. She was so successful that people began to write into the studio with positive and even glowing remarks.

So she went to her producer and asked if she could do a documentary on Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Her producer was willing but mentioned to Anne that others, such as Dan Rather, had been refused. Undaunted, she went home and prayed with her husband. Lo and behold, Mother Teresa said "yes" and invited Anne to come to Calcutta for the interview.

When she was about to leave, she learned that she was pregnant. She and her husband had longed for a child for 13 years and now that the door to Mother Teresa was opened, she discovered she was pregnant. She said to God, "Lord this is wonderful, but your timing is so bad." However, when she went to Calcutta, she found that it was precisely this news that had opened all the doors. And she received a personal, hands-on blessing from Mother Teresa for her child and herself.

She filmed the documentary, *In the Arms of Mother Teresa* and was given a half-hour with the living saint herself that she incorporated into the video. Anne shared ten simple but fantastic things that she had learned from Mother Teresa.

10. Expect miracles. Mother Teresa said that miracles are all around us. But so often, it seems that like Elijah the prophet, we look for them only in the big things but not in the small whispers of life. Miracles happen in ordinary ways if we only have eyes to see. The birth of her child and even the timing turned out to be a miracle upon a miracle.

9. Be spiritually empty of control in order to be filled with the Spirit. We have to die to self in order to let the Spirit work. If you offer to God a thimble, He will fill the thimble. If you offer an ocean, He will fill the ocean. And if you offer everything, He will fill everything.

8. Get out of your comfort zone. When she went to Calcutta, she was given access to all the ministries of the Missionary Sisters of Charity—their home for the homeless, their home for the dying, their home for those with AIDS, their home for orphans, and to their home for the retarded. It was precisely a home for the retarded that Anne was asked to bathe a woman who had never been bathed before. She was one of many of Mother Teresa's volunteers. The woman that she approached was very broken. When Anne poured water

upon her, the woman screamed. When she poured a little more water the woman screamed again. So she asked the Lord what she should do. And the Lord said, "Just hold her." So Anne held her, and after a few minutes, the woman allowed her to wash just a part of her shoulder. With many, many more smiles and much patience, she finally washed the woman. However, it took about 45 minutes, much longer than the average. It was then she learned the seventh lesson.

7. It is not how much you do that matters, but how much you love. Success is not determined by Mother Teresa by the quantity but by the quality of your love.

6. Use your hands and not just your eyes and money. Christianity should be a hands-on religion with hands reaching out to hold, to embrace, to help to support, and to love.

5. Keep it simple. Simplicity is a whole way of life for Mother Teresa. That is why they live the life of poverty because material things can easily become an obstacle in the path of God or others. You have to be free to move simply.

4. Make Matthew 25—the Last Judgement, where Jesus tells us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, to visit the sick—the philosophy of your life. This is the guiding philosophy of Mother Teresa: *whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me.* Her whole life is feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, visiting the sick, assisting the dying, and so forth.

3. The rich cannot only learn from the poor, but the rich are more often the poorest of all. Although in Calcutta there is horrendous poverty, Mother Teresa says the poorest country on the face of the earth is the United States of America. You can solve the problems of Calcutta with food and water, but it is much more difficult to reach the hardened with the spiritually poor hearts of Americans.

2. Judge not lest you be judged. Anne was surprised to learn that the volunteers turned out to be not only Catholics, but Protestants, Moslems, Jews, Hindus, even Agnostics. One lady, who was so sensitive to helping others, turned out to be an Agnostic. She wasn't sure whether God existed, but she knew that what she was doing was very, very good.

1. Find the Lord in the silence of your own heart. Pray, pray, and pray. Prayer fuels the work of Christ. Mother Teresa says, *It is not possible to engage in the direct Apostolate without becoming a soul of prayer.* We must be aware of oneness with Christ as He was aware of oneness with His Father. Our activity is truly Christian only insofar as we allow Jesus to work through us with His wisdom, His love, His power. When Anne asked Mother Teresa how she prayed, Mother Teresa said, I talk and then I listen.

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