



Seek First the Kingdom

Parents in Partnership with God – Sharing Faith with Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

PARENT ADVICE FROM POPE FRANCIS -- PART 4 of 6

The Joy of Love (Apostolic Exhortation), Chapter 4: “Love in Marriage”

Generosity in thought and deed is a hallmark of loving relationships and one of the elements of love that St. Paul praised in his letter to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 13: 4-7). Pope Francis’ reflection on this scriptural passage forms chapter four of *The Joy of Love*. In this Apostolic Exhortation Francis suggests what love looks like in marriage and in the family.

LOVE IS GENEROUS

Generous people share freely of their time, talent or money for the good of others. They expect nothing in return. They delight more in giving than in receiving. They know that “*generously serving others is far more noble than loving ourselves.*” (#101)

Christian generosity balances care for others with self-care, recognizing that authentic self-love is “*a psychological prerequisite for being able to love others.*” (#101)

Jesus called us to love others as we love ourselves. If we have a Godly sense of self-love we will thrill to love others, that is, to do the best for others even at the cost of personal sacrifice. “Self” can be spelled with a capital “S” or a lower case “s.” Capital “S” self is made in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, chooses whatever leads the soul to a closer imitation of Jesus. Lower case “s” self, however, represents the “Me, Myself, I” attitude that yields to selfish interests at the expense of the true good for others and our own true selves.

Parent Ponder-Points:

- Spontaneously identify observed behaviors as “Capital S” or “Small S.” Ask: “Was that capital or small S?” “Which self was that?”
- Introduce your family to the Generosity Prayer that is often attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola: “*Lord, teach me to be generous: to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to look for any reward, save that of knowing that I do your holy will.*”

Reflection Questions:

1. When do you find it easy to be generous, and when it is most difficult.
2. Recall a life-incident that affirms this thought: “It is in giving that we receive.”
3. Read *The Joy of Love*, # 101-102. With what thought do you most resonate?

LOVE REJOICES WITH OTHERS

Love looks for the best in others. Love supports the dignity and uniqueness of individuals. Love takes pride in the interests and efforts and experiences of the loved one. Members of a Christian family are like cheerleaders for each other. Rather than be threatened by the accomplishments of spouse, child or sibling, a loving person is quick to express appreciation and affirmation of efforts, abilities, and good works without comparing and competing.

Christian love experiences joy for the success of others and cultivates empathy when they fail. Love values effort more than results and is quick to offer compassionate, constructive feedback when results are unsatisfying. *“If we fail to learn how to rejoice in the well-being of others, and focus primarily on our own needs, we condemn ourselves to a joyless existence.”* (#110) The world of “me, myself, and I” is isolated and lonely.

The family home must be a supportive shelter – both physically and psychologically – where, *“when something good happens to one of its members, they know that others will be there to celebrate it with them.”* (#110)

Parent Ponder-Points:

- What makes your home a supportive shelter rather than merely a place to eat and sleep?
- Determine an icon for celebrating efforts and achievements that marks the place where the person sits at the food table. For instance, a special dinner plate or a table figurine that holds balloons or a congratulatory sign/symbol, or a miniature trophy cup, etc. Use it to honor effort or achievement, not only for big, public accomplishments but also for character effort – whether or not it had a successful outcome.
- It is human nature for a person to want to spare a child or spouse from failure by taking over the task. Resist that urge. It is counterproductive to the goal of encouraging effort and enjoying the fruits of success.

Reflection Questions:

1. When do you find it easy to rejoice with another person’s success and when is it most difficult?
2. Do you compare your children? Do you hold one child up as a standard for a second child? Have you ever been compared? How did comparison affect you?
3. For each member of your family identify two qualities that are unique to that member and worthy of celebrating. (Do not repeat qualities.)
4. Read *The Joy of Love*, # 109-110. What thought(s) most speak to your heart?