

Resources for Preaching for World Marriage Day: Considerations to Assist Homily Preparation

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Sunday February 9, 2014

Reading 1: Isaiah 58:7-10

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Reading 2: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

Readings available online here: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020914.cfm>

Preparation

- *Background Reading:*
 - Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Preparatory Document *Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of the New Evangelization* (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20131105_iii-assemblea-sinodo-vescovi_en.html).
 - *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan* (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/love-and-life/upload/pastoral-letter-marriage-love-and-life-in-the-divine-plan.pdf>).
 - *Preaching the Mystery of Faith: The Sunday Homily* (<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-life-and-ministry/upload/usccb-preaching-document.pdf>).
- *Pray, Meditate, Contemplate the Word*
- *Come Holy Spirit*

The Word of God

- The readings and Gospel for this Sunday all speak in various ways of the light that the Lord brings into our lives, particularly the light of Christ crucified, and the mission to proclaim this light and to actually become *the light of the world, the salt of the earth*. These readings are particularly providential on this Sunday, which is being celebrated as World Marriage Day during this National Marriage Week (Feb. 7-14).
- The word of God leads us to the heart of what it means to be the Church, and therefore also to the heart of what it means to be a Christian family: For the Church and our families to be light, we must be centered on Christ and imitate Him, going out to the peripheries to bring the Gospel. Thinking about marriage and family couldn't be more timely as Pope Francis has called for a synod or meeting of bishops in October on the topic of the family and evangelization.
- In light of the upcoming synod, the homily for this Sunday might emphasize the family as the domestic church. A question could be posed near the beginning of the homily: Where might the word of God be leading us when it comes to our family life?

Points Connecting to Marriage and the Family, with Emphasis on Family as Domestic Church

- ***Marriage and family concerns everyone:*** Each of us comes from a family. Each of us is a son or a daughter. In God's plan every child is meant to be the fruit of his or her mother's and father's love for each other in the sacred bond of marriage. This is why conversations about marriage and the family in the public square concern all of us, and this is why the Church's teaching on marriage and family is important for all of us.
- ***Acknowledging the experience and pain of broken marriages and families:*** Sadly, many of us have experienced or know family or friends who have experienced the pain of a broken marriage and family. Each experience is unique, and the Lord's mercy is great. Even for those of us who find our family situation difficult – and that probably includes all of us at one time or another! – we each have a role to play in God's vision of the family. Ultimately, all of us are part of the perfect family – God's family – as beloved sons and daughters of God the Father.
- ***“Domestic Church”:*** Very early in the life of the Church, the Christian family, founded upon the covenant of marriage between husband and wife, together with any children they were blessed with, became understood as the *domestic church*. This understanding has profound implications.
- ***Considering particular aspects of the family as the domestic church:*** What does it mean to call the family the domestic church? We might also ask: What does it mean to consider the family as the salt of the earth and the light of the world? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of the family as the place where one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous—even repeated—forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life. (CCC, nos. 1656-57).
- A particular aspect(s) of the domestic church might be highlighted. Concrete stories or examples could assist as well. Here, let's take three of the points mentioned in the Catechism as it relates to the family: love, forgiveness, and prayer.
- ***Family as school of love:*** First, family life is where we are meant to learn to love. The family has its foundation in the promise of lifelong, faithful and fruitful love between husband and wife. In good times and in bad, in sickness and health, married love gives an exceptional witness to the fact that love has a language, and that language is the gift of self. Spouses live and learn this daily and hand it on to their children. The home is the school of love, where we learn to counter selfishness with self-giving, and rejection with acceptance. No marriage and family are perfect. The key is in constantly striving to love, taking the risk to love, every single day. Such love always bears fruit, even if we don't immediately see its results.
- ***Family as school of forgiveness:*** Second, the family, as the domestic church, is called to be a school of forgiveness. Every day, we are reminded that we are far from perfect. We are all sinners in need of mercy, forgiveness, and healing. Imagine how different our society would be if every home was truly a school of forgiveness! But this is the great task of the family, which begins with the husband and wife, father and mother. Spouses who regularly forgive each other, and seek to love each other more fully, hand on a precious gift to their children

and to those around them. True forgiveness does not overlook the evil committed—it accounts for it but then introduces something new: mercy, healing and a renewed beginning.

- ***Family as school of prayer:*** And now for the third point, on prayer: to love and to forgive in the way that Christ calls us requires the Lord’s grace. We cannot be salt of the earth and the light of the world without God. Only by prayer—itsself a grace—do we keep the Lord at the center and recognize our need for Him. We’ve likely heard the line from Fr. Patrick Peyton: The family that prays together stays together. This isn’t a formula for a life of ease. Difficulties will still come. It is rather a promise of hope. For every difficulty we face, we do so in the light of the Cross and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. A family that prays together makes room for God and for His grace and mercy. As a domestic church, the family is called to be a school of prayer, keeping the Lord at the center of the home, so that His light will shine brightly throughout the home, into the neighborhood, the community, and the world.

Suggestions for Concrete Encouragement and a Conclusion

- On this World Marriage Day, we thank our heavenly Father for the gift and blessing of marriage and the family. As we strive to live our particular vocations and respond to the Lord’s grace in our lives, let’s also consider how we might dedicate renewed prayer and attention to marriage and the family. As a start, here are possible areas we might consider:
 - We begin with prayer: First, let’s pray for the Synod and for our Holy Father and Bishops as they prepare for it. Let’s also make an effort to pray for marriages and families throughout our nation. A great way to do this is to join our Bishops who are promoting a nationwide Call to Prayer for Life, Marriage, and Religious Liberty (see www.usccb.org/pray).
 - Second, let’s reclaim Sunday as the Day of the Lord and a day of the family. We are already doing it now by participating in the celebration of Mass. But is there something more the Lord is inviting us to when we go back home? Praying together, or spending some time together in leisure, or having dinner together as a family...
 - And third, let’s consider how our homes, families and parish are places of hospitality and welcome. How might the Lord be calling us to become more generous? Maybe we will find renewed ways to shine the light of Christ to others. This could include reaching out to those who are lonely, or sick, or are suffering because they don’t have family members to care for them.
- Lastly, let us stay close to those who are hurting from difficulties in their families and let them know they are loved. This is where families can reach out with love to others in need. Ultimately, the Church is the “family of God” and all are welcomed with joy by God the Father. All of us are beloved sons and daughters of God. As domestic churches, Christian families witness to the promise of Christ through his Church that no one is ever alone.
- May the Lord be glorified in all our words and deeds, and may our families be the salt of the earth and shine with the light of Christ for all to see. Amen.