

The Domestic Church

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Welcome to the first issue of the *Domestic Church*, a newsletter dedicated to serving the family. Our title indicates what we are about, but what is the "domestic church" and how does an ordinary family come to be one?

It's really quite simple: the family needs a home, and the domestic church is a home inspired to a heightened view of its holiness and its mission within the larger Body of Christ. This type of home is a sanctuary for its family members; it is a place to originate from and a place to return to. It is a haven of comfort and rest founded on the love of Christ. It is the "Church at home," the Domestic Church.

Pope John Paul II tells us that the term "domestic church" is as old as Christianity itself. "From the very beginning . . . the meaningful term 'domestic church' was applied to the family" (*Letter to Families*, p. 8).

This journal hopes to convey a deep sense of the dignity bestowed upon the family from these historical beginnings through the sacramental life, and primarily through the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. The journal also hopes to edify the domestic church through a series of feature articles that will further define what it is (*Gifts of the Magisterium*, *Holy Conversations*), inspire it to grow (*Spiritual Fatherhood*, *A Pious Perspective*, *KinderCatholic*, *Growing in the Faith*), and offer it practical ideas and helps (*The Family Altar*).

The *Domestic Church* looks forward to helping you form your home into an extraordinary place!

Ruth Andreas
Editor

Inside: Don't miss this issue's conversation with Mount Angel Seminary's professor John F. Brehany as he discusses the Christian Family in today's society.

Holy Conversations

With Professor John F. Brehany

Ruth Andreas:

In a time when concepts of family are being redefined, how does the magisterium define the Christian family?

I think another way to approach this question is: How is the magisterium responding to attempts to redefine the family?

Professor Brehany:

I think people are trying to redefine the family for a couple of reasons. First, I think there is an honest attempt to redefine the family in one way of responding to the fact that many people no longer fit the traditional definition. And yet, it's thought that people will feel bad, or perceive themselves in a very negative light if they don't fit.

Another reason that people want to redefine the family today is because, quite frankly in principle they don't want to fit in the family and they want there to be other socially recognized forms of living together, whether it's the heterosexual couple living together without the benefit of marriage or the homosexual couple or something else. So there are valid reasons or certainly understandable ones and ones we would find less defensible.

And how is the church responding to this? Very much, especially to the people who are in broken families the church is responding pastorally by reaching out to them in every way possible. The Church has, much more

than in recent years or in times past ministries to the divorced, and single mothers. They are trying to reach out to people who have fallen through the cracks.

The Pope, I know at the end of *Familiaris Consortio* says that the church is the family to those who have none. So, at a pastoral level the church is certainly responding to the breakdown of the family and attempts to redefine the family because they, in principle think there should be other equally valid ways of living together, the church continues to defend the traditional definition of the family. And, we can find this in the Catechism #2202, where it says, "A man and a woman united in marriage together with their children form a family. It, the family should be considered the normal reference point by which the different forms of family relationships are to be evaluated." We know we've had some homosexual rights ordinances proposed in Oregon. They've had similar things in Europe, and the Pope has specifically fought having homosexual unions classified as marriages or at the same level of marriages. So, at a theoretical level, at the level of definition the magisterium continues to define the family the same way it always has, and it has rejected attempts to come up with a new definition."

Ruth Andreas:

Can you explain the family's relationship to society as understood by the magisterium?

Professor Brehany:

Yes, this is a complex relationship and there are a couple of things to say. But first and foremost we can say that the family is prior to society. In fact, as the *Catechism* says in #2207, "The family is the original cell of social life." So the family is what comes first. It is the basic unit upon which society is built. So, in a very important sense the family is prior to the state.

And how is it related? Well, the only way that we'll have healthy societies is if we have healthy families, because society is nothing other than, for the most part people who are people who are in families. And if they are not currently in families they are people who have come from families. And if they have not entered into families, if they are not yet married, they are on their way onto new families. So, the state depends on healthy families if it's going to survive, and not only survive but flourish.

And I think we can see all around us signs of family breakdown. Many, of the problems of our youth today, from teen suicide, to the teen crime rate to the teen pregnancy rate and even the drinking rate and the drunken driving rate is tied to breakdowns in family relationships.

Another way that the family is related to society is that the family needs society in order to protect it. To enter into a family, to stay with a family, to raise children are very hard tasks. It usually takes a division of labor.

Continued on next page

But there are tremendous strains involved. There are tremendous challenges that the family faces as it tries to survive financially today with very high tax rates and a very high standard of living to keep up with. There is a tremendous amount of peer pressure that is hard to fight.

And so the Church has always said that the state owes the family protection. It must help the family with tax policies, with economic policies, and in various ways it must work to shore up the family.

Liberal divorce laws are not the way to do it.

And on the other hand, as we started off with, the family is prior to the state so there is an extent to which the state should go, but no longer meddle in the families business. It should not try to replace the family.

And this is the principle of subsidiarity, that a smaller unit should never be interfered with or absorbed by a larger unit. It is very important to understand the relation of family to state, in terms of what the limits of the state's powers are.

There are many people today with the best of intentions who think that government can solve things, can solve problems; who think that the state should get involved more and more.

But ultimately, we harm the family when the state becomes too involved. And maybe one quick example of this is single mothers, teenagers who get pregnant whom the state sets up on welfare. This makes a father dispensable. This sets the woman up for a long term dependency situation which is not good for herself or her children.

Spiritual Fatherhood

Mark Andreas

What does it mean to be a father?

To understand this we must see fatherhood in the context of the Sacrament of Marriage. During the liturgical rite, the man agrees that he will stand for Christ, and the woman for the Church. When a man consents to this, it means that he must be willing to sacrifice himself for his bride, even as Christ sacrificed Himself for His Bride, the Church! This is no small thing, but rather an awesome and sacred responsibility which the man takes upon himself. He is saying that he will image Christ in a sacramental covenant with his wife, therefore becoming the spiritual head of a newly formed family.

As the "Christ figure" for our wives and children, we must do

as Christ did. We must be prayerful, loving, just, and help our wives teach the Faith to our children. To leave this sacred duty of spiritual formation to our wives alone is a betrayal of our responsibility and dignity as true fathers. Our families need to see us striving to be godly men. We must strive to be who God created us to be. Only then do we realize our true dignity as men, and only then can our wives, sons and daughters realize their full dignity as family.

If Christ had not been who He was, the Church could not have become what she is! Search the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church. Live the Sacraments that have been given to us by Christ. In the bosom of our Holy Mother, the Church, we find the strength

we need for this great task.

When one considers the rise of radical secular feminism, a person is left wondering "what happened?" Why so much anger, even hatred toward men? Perhaps the reason for this and other social ills in our society is directly related to the absence of spiritual fatherhood. Angry women were most often abused in some way by men. A father who refuses to be Christ for his children, who refuses to give them their dignity as children of God who are created in His image and likeness, abuses his children. Spiritually impoverished children so often grow up to be insecure, angry adults.

Pope John Paul II said "Families, be who you are!" May all fathers be what God has made us.

Gifts From the Magisterium

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Part III

Section Two: The Ten Commandments

Article 4: The Fourth Commandment

I. The Family in God's Plan

The nature of the family

2201

The conjugal community is established upon the consent of the spouses. Marriage and the family are ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation of children. The love of the spouses and the begetting of children create among members of the same family personal relationships and primordial responsibilities.

2202

A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family. This institution is prior to any recognition by public authority, which has an obligation to recognize it. It should be considered the normal reference point by which the different forms of family relationship are to be evaluated.

2203

In creating man and woman, God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution. Its members are persons equal in dignity. For the common good of its members and of society, the family necessarily has manifold responsibilities, rights, and duties.

The Christian Family

2204

"The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church*" (*Familiaris Consortio* 21; *Lumen Gentium* 11). It is a community of faith, hope and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament (Ephesians 5:21-6:4; Collosians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7).

2205

The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task.

2206

The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all from the members'

respect for one another. The family is a *privileged community* called to achieve a "sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing" (*Gaudium et Spes* 52.1).



Growing in the Faith

The Baltimore Catechism

The Purpose of Man's Existence

(answers on page 6)

- 1) Who made us?
- 2) Who is God?
- 3) Why did God make us?
- 4) What must we do to gain happiness in heaven?
- 5) From whom do we learn to know, love, and serve God?

A Pious Perspective

Father Pius X Harding, O.S.B.

I believe that it can be said, that in order for a priest to fully appreciate the tremendous gift which he has received in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, he must first appreciate Holy Matrimony.

First of all, where is it that a priest learns how to make a life commitment of complete self-sacrifice for another? He learns this great lesson of life from his parents. He lives for several decades in the domestic church, where he witnesses first hand, the love of spouses who hold nothing back in their love for one another. He also receives unconditional love from his first and greatest teachers:

his parents.

Our Holy and Venerable Faith is handed on from parent to child. What a holy vocation it is to transmit Sacred Tradition from one generation to the next! Parents have a great responsibility to form a catholic and orthodox faith in their children, for when their son receives Holy Orders he will preach and teach, sanctify and govern, based on the faith he was given in the heart of the domestic church.

A priest must give himself daily in sacrifice with Christ for the salvation of souls. He must clearly know the sacrifice he makes when

he accepts the grace to live the celibate life of a priest. In the faithful love of spouses, we see the love shared between Christ and His Church. In Holy Orders we see this image once again in the *Alter Christus*, the priest, and his immaculate bride, the Church.

He must love Her with an unfailing passionate love which bears great spiritual fruit.

It seems, according to anecdotal evidence, that instances of marital and clerical infidelity rise and fall together. This should tell us something: married couples and priests must image sacrificial love for each other.

The Family Altar

Mark Andreas

When I was a boy, I remember my father telling us kids the story of how the Feast of *Corpus Christi* was celebrated in the small town where he grew up. The priest would carry the Body of Christ through the streets of Gervais, Oregon for all to see and adore.

During this special time people would place family altars outside their homes, and the priest would bless those altars as he passed by carrying the precious Body of Christ.

I had recently become an altar boy when my father told us this story. Back then, our parish still had a majestic altar made of marble, and as a child of only ten years, it left a lasting impression in my memory . . . images of the "Holy Sacrifice of the Mass," the place where the miracle of transubstantiation occurs during the canon.

Sometimes I thought about how neat it would be to have an altar in our home. Well, it remained just that, a thought, until about ten years ago when I dedicated the top of my entertainment center as a place where prayer was offered in my home. I was a single parent and my daughter had just come to

live with me. I wanted to be more than just a Sunday Catholic dad, so it seemed like a fitting way to encourage us to pray together more often. The "altar" started very simply. I hung a crucifix over the entertainment center, placed two candles on either side of it and put a prayer card with the *Morning Offering** in the middle. I didn't think of it then, but what I had begun was a subtle, silent evangelization of our home and guests in the Catholic Faith. Every time people came in they noticed it. Not everyone asked questions about it, but for those that did, I had an opportunity to tell them about the altar in a simple and straightforward manner. It remained a silent witness to everyone who visited our home, and most importantly, it helped my daughter and I to grow together spiritually.

I am now married with three children, and we have converted a short bookshelf into our "family altar." We're adding a few sacred objects to it as time goes by. The altar serves as a rallying point around which we gather in prayer.

We know that this part of the house is set aside for something special, and it ever continues to be a source of evangelization

to friends and family alike.

Why a family altar? Why not? If our homes are in truth "domestic churches," shouldn't they reflect that truth by conveying to others a sense of "church" when they enter our homes? A church without an altar simply isn't a church. We all need a reminder which calls us to prayer and to a sense of holiness apart from church on Sunday. And now, more than ever, we need to turn our homes into sacred refuges, and to reclaim our families as the basic cells of society! The family altar can help us do that.

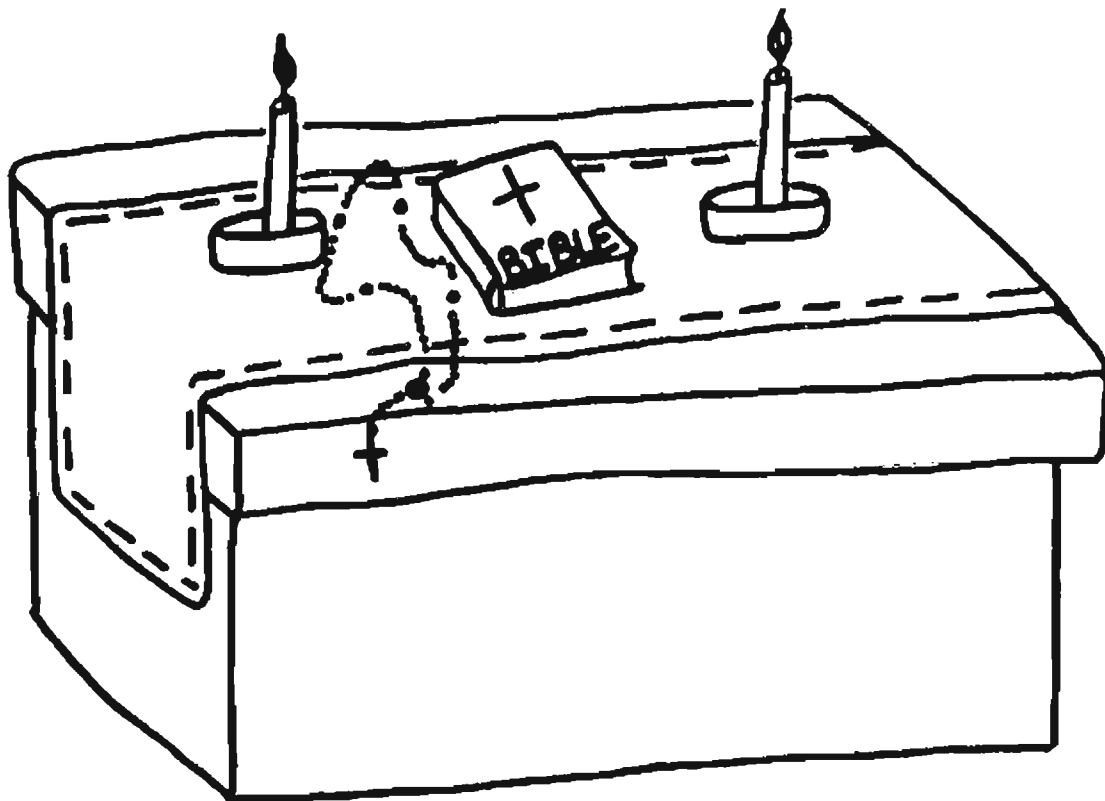
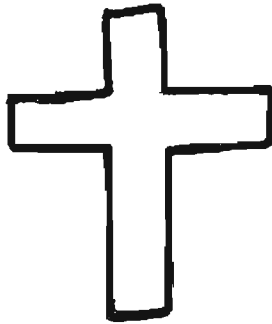
A wise priest I met, said that every Christian home should have a family altar, and on it a Bible, a rosary and a statue of Mary with a crucifix hanging above it. Give it a try. I guarantee that it will bless your family. Pax Christi.

*O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, (here kiss your brown scapular) and in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass being offered throughout the world, I offer you all my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day in reparation for the offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for my sins and the sins of the whole world.

Answers to *Growing in the Faith*

- 1) God made us.
- 2) God is the Supreme Being who made all things.
- 3) God made us to show forth His goodness and to share with us His everlasting happiness in Heaven.
- 4) To gain the happiness of Heaven we must know, love, and serve God in this world.
- 5) We learn to know, love and serve God from Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who teaches us through the Catholic Church.

What does having a "family altar" say about our family?



Mission Statement

*Founded in January 1995, Saint Joseph's Center for the Domestic Church
is a Catholic apostolate dedicated to serving the family.*

*Our mission is to help families recognize their role
as the "domestic church," the Church at home,
and to re-establish the home as a sacred refuge.*

Saint Joseph's Center for the Domestic Church
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