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The secret of married happiness

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Children and family life

When I think of Christian homes, I like to imagine them as being full of the light and joy that were in the home of the Holy Family. The message of Christmas is heard in all its forcefulness: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will" (Lk 11:14). "And may the peace of Christ triumph in your hearts" (Col 3:15), writes the Apostle. It is a peace that comes from knowing that our Father God loves us, and that we are made one with Christ. It results from being under the protection of the Virgin, our Lady, and assisted by St Joseph. This is the great light that illuminates our lives. In the midst of difficulties and of our own personal failings, it encourages us to keep up our effort. Every Christian home should be a place of peace and serenity. In spite of the small frustrations of daily life, an atmosphere of profound and sincere affection should reign there together with a deep-rooted calm, which is the result of authentic faith that is put into practice.

Christ is Passing By, 22

Influencing society

Take the case of a large family. The mother's work is comparable to that of professional teachers and in many cases leaves them in the shade. A teacher manages to educate a number of boys and girls more or less successfully in the course of his or her life. A mother can give her children a solid set of values and shape their character, and can make them, in their turn, other teachers, thus setting up an uninterrupted chain of responsibility and virtue.

In these matters it is easy to be misled by mere numbers and to think that the work of a teacher, who sees hundreds of people pass through his or her classes, or that of a writer who reaches thousands of readers, is more valuable. That is all very well, but how many people are really formed by that teacher or writer? A mother has three, five, ten or more children in her care and she can make of them a true work of art, a marvel of education, of balance and understanding, a model of the Christian way of life. She can teach them to be happy and to make themselves really useful to those around them.

Conversations, 89

Children and generosity

I shall never tire of repeating that marriage is a great and marvellous divine path. Like everything divine in us, it calls for response to grace, generosity, dedication and service. Selfishness, in whatever shape or form, is opposed to the love of God which ought to govern our lives. This is a fundamental point which one must always bear in mind with regard to marriage and the number of children.

Conversations, 93

Integrity and honesty in married life

The number is not in itself the decisive factor. The fact of having few or many children does not on its own make a family more or less Christian. What matters is the integrity and honesty with which married life is lived.

Conversations, 94

Family life, the material to be sanctified

Husband and wife are called to sanctify their married life and to sanctify themselves in it. It would be a serious mistake if they were to exclude family life from their spiritual development. The marriage union, care and education of children, the effort to provide for the needs of the family as well as for its security and development, relationships with other people who make up the community, all these are among the ordinary human situations that Christian couples are called upon to sanctify.

Christ is Passing By, 23

The joy of the home

But they mustn't forget that the secret of married happiness lies in everyday things, not in daydreams. It lies in finding the hidden joy of coming home in the evening, in affectionate relations with their children, in the everyday work in which the whole family cooperates; in good humour in the face of difficulties that should be met with a sporting spirit; in making the best use of all the advantages that civilisation offers to help us rear children, to make the house pleasant and life more simple.

Conversations, 91

Living with others

Bring out your spirit of mortification in those nice touches of charity, eager to make the way of sanctity in the midst of the world attractive for everyone. Sometimes a smile can be the best proof of a spirit of penance.

The Forge, 149

May you know how to put yourself out cheerfully, discreetly and generously each day, serving others and making their lives more pleasant.

To act in this way is to practise the true charity of Jesus Christ.

The Forge, 150

You should make sure that wherever you are there is that good humour — that cheerfulness — which is born of an interior life.

The Forge, 151

Make sure you practise this very interesting mortification: that of not making your conversation revolve around yourself.

The Forge, 152

Freedom and responsibility

Parents can, and should, be a great help to their children. They can open new horizons for them, share their experiences and make them reflect, so they do not allow themselves to be carried away by passing emotional experiences. They can offer them a realistic scale of value. Sometimes they can help with personal advice; on other occasions they should encourage their children to seek other suitable people such as a loyal and sincere friend, a learned and holy priest or an expert in career guidance.

Advice does not take away freedom. It gives elements on which to judge and thus enlarges the possibilities of choice and ensures that decisions are not taken on the basis of irrational factors. After hearing the opinions of others and taking everything into consideration, there comes a moment in which a choice has to be made and then no one has the right to force a young person's freedom.

Parents have to be on guard against the temptation of wanting to project themselves unduly on their children or of moulding them according to their own preferences. They should respect their individual God-given inclinations and aptitudes. If their love is true, this is easy enough. Even in the extreme case, when a young person makes a decision that the parents have good reason to consider mistaken and when they think it will lead to future unhappiness, the answer lies not in force, but in understanding. Very often it consists in knowing how to stand by their child so as to help him overcome the difficulties and, if necessary, draw all the benefit possible from an unfortunate situation.

Conversations, 104

Becoming your children's friends

The parents are the first people responsible for the education of their children, in human as well as in spiritual matters. They should be conscious of the extent of

their responsibility. To fulfil it, they need prudence, understanding, a capacity to love and a concern for giving good example. Imposing things by force, in an authoritarian manner, is not the right way to teach. The ideal attitude of parents lies more in becoming their children's friends — friends who will be willing to share their anxieties, who will listen to their problems, who will help them in an effective and agreeable way.

Christ is Passing By, 27

What it means to raise children

When I praise large families, I do not refer to those which are the result of mere physiological relations. I refer to families founded on the practice of human virtues, which have a high regard for personal dignity and know that giving children to God consists not only of engendering their natural life but also undertaking the lengthy task of their upbringing. Giving of life comes first, but it is not everything.

Conversations, 94

The generation gap

The problem is an old one, although perhaps it arises now more frequently or more acutely because of the rapid evolution that characterises modern society. It is perfectly understandable and natural that young and older people should see things differently. This has always been the case. The surprising thing would be if a teenager were to think just as an adult does. We all felt a tendency to rebel against our elders when we began to form our own judgement autonomously. But we have come to understand, with the passing of the years, that our parents were right in many things in which they were guided by their experience and their love. That is why it is up to the parents to make the first move. They have already passed through this stage. It is up to them to be very understanding, to have flexibility and good humour, avoiding any possible conflicts simply by being affectionate and farsighted.

Conversations, 100

Trust

It is a question of trust. Parents should bring up their children in an atmosphere of friendship, never giving the impression that they do not trust them. They should give them freedom and teach them how to use it with personal responsibility. It is better for parents to let themselves 'be fooled' once in a while, because the trust that they have shown will make the children themselves feel ashamed of having abused it — they will correct themselves. On the other hand, if they have no freedom, if they see that no one trusts them, they will always be inclined to deceive their parents.

Conversations, 100

Communicating piety to your children

Experience shows in all Christian environments what good effects come from this natural and supernatural introduction to the life of piety given in the warmth of the home. Children learn to place God first and foremost in their affections. They learn to see God as their Father and Mary as their Mother and they learn to pray following their parents' example. In this way one can easily see what a wonderful apostolate parents have and how it is their duty to live a fully Christian life of prayer, so they can communicate their love of God to their children, which is something more than just **teaching** them.

Conversations, 103

Setting an example

Children should see in their parents an example of dedication, sincere love, mutual help and understanding. The small trifles of daily life should not be allowed to hide from them the reality of a love that is capable of overcoming all obstacles.

Conversations, 108

Spend time with the children

Listen to your children. Give them your time, even the time that you have reserved for yourselves. Show them your confidence; believe whatever they tell you, even if sometimes they try to deceive you. Don't be afraid when they rebel, because, at their age, you yourselves were more or less rebellious. Go to meet them half-way and pray for them. If you act in this Christian manner, they will come to you with simplicity, instead of trying to satisfy their legitimate curiosity by taking it to some rough or vulgar friend. Your confidence, your friendly dealings with your children, will receive an answer in their sincerity in dealing with you. Then, even if there are quarrels and lack of understanding, they will never amount to much; and this is what peace in the family and a truly Christian life mean.

Christ is Passing By, 29

Social aspects

Agreed: you do better work with that friendly chat or that heart-to-heart conversation than making speeches — 'spectacular' speeches — in public before thousands of people.

Nevertheless, when speeches have to be made, make them.

The Way, 846