

Domestic Church

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* (CCC 2204).

The Church is a supernatural communion of persons, both human and divine; it is relational and Trinitarian. The Christian family is a unique reflection and realization of this. The Catechism expresses it best, when it states that, “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” (CCC 2205). The Domestic Church bears a true sacramental significance, particularly, since it is based on the sacrament of marriage, which is a specific, supernatural communion of man and woman, and an image of Christ and His Church (CCC 2685).

The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church (CCC 1661).

All families, properly speaking, constitute a natural communion of persons. Christian families, however, as members of the Church, share in a supernatural communion. The supernatural communion of the body of Christ is, as it were, brought home. This is the very reason that the family is a “specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion” (CCC 2204). The Domestic Church category, then, involves living out, in day-to-day life, the supernatural communion that is the Church.¹ The Christian family, as the Domestic Church, is where children receive their primary instruction in faith and morals, both in word and in example. The Domestic Church is “a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity” (CCC 1666). “Thus, the home is the first school of Christian life and ‘a school for human

¹ This particular expression of ecclesial communion (Domestic Church) arises from the sacramentality of marriage, but it is fundamentally dependent on the grace of baptism, which is each individual’s fundamental participation in the life and communion of the Church.

enrichment' (*GS 52§1*)" (CCC1657). As such, the Christian family is characterized by supernatural love, which is a sign, a sacrament to the world (John 13:35). In the words of Pope St. John Paul II:

"The family is the domestic church". The meaning of this traditional Christian idea is that the home is the Church in miniature. The Church is the sacrament of God's love. She is a communion of faith and life. She is a mother and teacher. She is at the service of the whole human family as it goes forward towards its ultimate destiny. In the same way the family is a community of life and love. It educates and leads its members to their full human maturity and it serves the good of all along the road of life. The family is the "first and vital cell of society". In its own way it is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church. The future of the world and of the Church, therefore, passes through the family.²

Analogously, one can say that "Just as the parish is a local church within the diocese, so the Christian family is a little church within the parish."³

The Christian family, then, finds its meaning and source in the Church, which "...is nothing other than the family of God" (CCC 1655). The Church may differ in certain natural ways from the Domestic Church, but it is a family nonetheless. In truth, the Church is a family in the fullest sense of the word because it is "the household of God" (1 Tim 3:15). All those who belong to the Church "...are no longer strangers and sojourners, but...members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19). It is no coincidence that so many passages in the New Testament use the language of marriage and family in reference to the Church and her members. Below are just a few examples.⁴

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matt 12:50).

For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (1 Cor. 4:15).

² John Paul II, *Homilies of Pope John Paul II (English)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014).

³ Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus, Volume Two: Living a Christian Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997), 611.

⁴ See also Eph 5:21–6:4; Col 3:18–21; 1 Peter 3:1–7, which parallels the relationship of husband and wife with that of Christ and His Church.

Love one another with brotherly affection (Rom 12:10).

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named (Eph 3:14-15).

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband (2 Cor 11:2).

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit (Jas 2:15-16)?

Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters (1 Tim 5:1-2).

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready (Rev 19:7).

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2)

Then came one of the seven angels...and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev 21:9).

In addition, priests are often referred to as father, monastics as mother and father, religious as brothers and sisters, and in general, the entire body of the faithful as brothers and sisters. The Church is the covenant family of God. God is our Father and His Son is our Brother. Christ is the bridegroom of the Church, and the Church is His bride (Matt 9:15; John 3:29; Rev 19:7; 21:2,9). The Church is also mother, the embodiment of which is the Mother of God.

There is a close identification, then, between the Domestic Church and the Church—the *parish family*. Many of the same struggles to love, to serve and forgive are present in both. The human condition is difficult, extremely difficult at times. These sufferings, and death itself, were never meant to be, but such is the reality of our existence. There are also many who are left alone, without family, often the elderly, and many people who, not by their own choosing, remain single throughout their entire life. These, and the many other difficulties of the human

condition, are the sufferings of the family that is the Church. *The domestic church and the parish church belong to each other, to the same ecclesial reality and communion.*

The category of the Domestic Church, however, includes everyone, even those who live alone. In the words of Pope St. John Paul II, “No one is without family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone” (FC, 85). The Domestic Church, as a planning category, is essential to the parish plan. A parish that is neglectful of the domestic church is a parish whose members are not living the faith at home, beyond the parish walls. Such a parish is where families are un-evangelized, un-catechized, failing to live the Gospel in day-to-day life and thus passing it on. The seriousness of this cannot be overstated. Very many Catholics have been overtaken by the values and worldview of secularism. A parish without a sense of the domestic church and its critical importance, is a parish that is failing to live out its mission and vision to be the Catholic Church in that place. It is a parish that is in the process of simply fading away.

Example Goal (what): Help families realize their mission as a Christian family

Example Objective (how): Introduce the Domestic Church Association to the parish and invite member family to give a parish presentation