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NEW ORLEANS

Office of Marriage and Family Life

Family Day 2019, Sunday, September 22

“The Mission of the Family: Love is Possible!”

The purpose of Family Day is to promote and strengthen all families and the parish family. It is an opportunity to hold up the sacredness of the family even in the midst of the mess that it often is. It is an opportunity to celebrate and cultivate appreciation for the gift of family as well as provide formation for the growth of families in your parish. It is also a chance to allow families to joyfully interact with one another in connection with the Sunday Mass and in the context of the greater parish community.

The **enclosed resources** are aids to assist your parish in planning for Family Day:

- Introduction to ***“The Mission of the Family: Love is Possible!”****
- Liturgical Helps for Family Day Celebration/Suggestion for Prayers of the Faithful
- Family Blessing*
- Handouts/Bulletin Inserts*

* These handouts can be copied and distributed to parishioners via the parish bulletin and school newsletter, in classrooms and at organizational meetings. **Check our website nolacatholic.org/mfl, or call (504) 861-6247 with your plans for Family Day or for more information on ministering to/with families in your parish.**

The Mission of the Family: Love is Possible!

Family Day: September 22, 2019

The family is the place where human life *really* happens, and for this reason, it is the most influential factor in every aspect of human development. In comparison to life at home, everything else is just a show; everything else involves only a fraction of who we really are. So, in a world where broken marriages, split families, division, and isolation have become the norm, the need for families to cultivate and then provide witness to the reality of love within the walls of their homes has become more vital than ever.

Only in the context of the mess of a real family can we come to understand whether love is actually possible and whether a relationship with God actually makes a difference. Sermons and isolated experiences of faith and community can only go so far without an experience of how it all works at home.

Families must be challenged and given guidance for maturing in their unity with one another and in their understanding of God as present and active in the concrete details of their lives at home. Then, they must be called to witness this reality to their parish community through their presence at Mass and other gatherings, to those who do not know what intact family life feels like through inviting them into their homes for meals and celebrations, and to their community through their involvement in it.

In a world where love is so desired yet so misunderstood, the witness and experience of families, especially families who are connected to the Heart of Christ, is needed more than any program, strategy, or development.

Homily Suggestions for Family Day, Sunday, September 22, 2019

Reading 1 [AM 8:4-7](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8](#)

Reading 2 [1 TM 2:1-8](#)

Gospel [LK 16:1-13](#)

Our temptation as families is to make our obligation to provide for our material needs and security more of a priority than it should be. When we focus more on business than on individual persons, we will cause suffering. At the very least, our families will suffer as a result of our putting more time and energy into work than into our relationships. When we over-prioritize our material needs, human life, the lives of those in our families, new lives that do not yet exist, and the lives of those in our communities are easily seen as either a burden to us or an opportunity for personal gain. At its worst, we will “trample the poor” and be completely blind to those to whom we are called, as families, to share ourselves: our own spouses, children, and extended family; those from broken families who have not experienced unconditional love; and those who cannot “keep up” socially or financially. We cannot serve two masters—we will either serve our own material progress, our security, or we will trust God enough to spend ourselves in love for the people He gives to us.

Our first step is to evaluate our schedules. What does it actually look like to take an honest assessment of the time we spend? We cannot do this alone. We cannot be objective about how our decisions affect others without the input of those we affect. This is why it is necessary to include our spouses in the evaluation process and even our children if they are old enough. We must ask ourselves (and them), “Are we satisfied with the amount of time we spend together? With the way we spend that time? Is time at work or at social obligations (including sports) getting in the way?” And, then, “To whom might God be calling us to open our family, to allow them to share in what we have and who we are?”

Let’s face it, we are all limited in our ability to see the value of each person in our homes, much less outside of our homes, especially when we are tired, stressed, and weakened by habitual sin. It feels like too much *because it is too much*. Without God, we are incapable of being who we need to be for our families and those who depend upon us. The good news, though, is that God has promised his very presence, even in the midst of our hidden, messy lives at home, and to give us what we need in order that we may give of ourselves more than we ever could on our own. Love is possible!

If we are willing to fight for time for personal prayer and work through the obstacles to praying with Scripture, and if we are willing to overcome the walls between us in order to pray with our spouses and as a family, God *will* respond. He will give us more than we can ask or imagine, including the courage to take small, concrete steps that may have before seemed impossible. And, He will give us the energy to allow others, those who need it most, to share in the gift of His presence in our family.

Prayers of Intercession:

- For world leaders that they may prioritize families as the sacred foundation of human development.
- For the Church, that our pastors may work to guide families to understand their great mission and to receive the mercy and help that God provides.
- For all families, that we may be moved to give ourselves without fear in love for one another.
- That families who are deeply wounded by brokenness, abuse, and neglect, that they may experience the healing and hope that only God can provide.
- That those who are isolated and in need may experience security and love through the openness of families from our parish community.

Family Blessing:

We bless your name, O Lord,
for sending your own incarnate Son
to become part of a family,
so that, as he lived within its sufferings and its joys,
he would be present and provide newness of life
to all families.

We ask you, Lord,
to protect and watch over these families,
so that in the strength of your grace
and in the depth of your mercy
their members may enjoy prosperity,
possess the priceless gift of your peace,
and as the Church alive in the home,
bear witness in this world to your glory.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen

[adapted from the Book of Blessings]

The Mission of the Family: Love is Possible!

Home is the place where we are most ourselves. It is where we are least “made-up”, least afraid of getting fired, least on display or on our best behavior. The relationships are more real (for better or for worse), and the decisions we make at home more accurately reflect who we really are and what we really want.

Home is basically where the rubber meets the road: if it is not real for us at home, then it’s *not real*. For example, we may express the belief that family comes first, that God is real and He loves us, and that eating healthy is important, but it’s what we do at home when no one is watching that tells us how much we *really* believe any of this stuff to be true. And, it’s for this reason that home is the place where we most deeply learn what life is *actually* all about.

Even the youngest of children sense that our actions, especially our actions at home, speak louder than words. We know down deep that love is only love when it is tested in the fires of the mess of the family, where no one else is watching, where there is no escaping each other, and where long-term trials and dead end relational dynamics wear us down to our most raw selves. We all know this too well from our experiences of brokenness in families.



When love breaks down at home, no amount of positive affirmation, success, friendship, or kindness outside the family can reach the depth of the hole that it leaves in each person involved. Other people can certainly help, but when we experience brokenness in the family, it can be very difficult for us to believe that real love is possible. We feel that if love is not possible in the most real, most hidden relationships, then it is certainly not possible anywhere else.

On the other hand, our experiences of love at home, especially when things are rough, give us a foundation of security and confidence that love is real. When we experience self-giving, merciful love at home from imperfect people in imperfect situations, it gives us deep, foundation-level hope that life is good and worth living even when things are difficult and painful.

It should not surprise us then to hear from people who grew up in broken homes that time in the home of a friend or relative whose family was intact was vital in their coming to believe that love is more than just an ideal and that they could have hope for their own future. Even people who grow up in a relatively happy family express the value of getting to see “behind the veil” in the homes of *other* families who deeply loved one another despite their messes. Every one of us knows that love is what makes life worth living, and so each one of us feels a deep need to know in reality whether the love that we yearn for is actually possible. This puts a lot of pressure on families to be who they are for the world!

The good news here is that we already feel this pressure naturally. It is the pressure all parents feel to love their children well, and the guilt they feel when they don’t. We all handle this pressure differently, but our task to grow in love in our families is nothing new, and the desire to get better at it is written into our nature by God. And, thankfully, He certainly knows that we need help.

None of us can escape the feeling of being overwhelmed at the task of loving our families well, the feeling of not having what it takes to really give what is needed. And, unfortunately, most of us are not sure how to take advantage of God's help, and so we feel like it's all on us. So, we often distract ourselves from this gnawing feeling of discouragement by staying busy, and we try to make ourselves feel better by comparing ourselves to others. None of it helps. Meanwhile, our spouses, our children, and those who could benefit from the witness of a loving family are left with very little. But, it doesn't have to be this way!



God does not expect perfection from us, nor is he waiting for us to become like those people at church who seem to have all the time in the world and no struggles with prayer. He is ready to help, and honestly, He's the only one who can, since He's the only one who knows what is really going on at home in our hidden lives. He has promised to meet us there and be present in the "unholy" mess; we just have to give it a shot. We have to try, despite our cringing and doubts, to speak with him for a short time every day, to read just a little bit of Scripture, to pray just a short prayer with our spouse and with our kids. It doesn't sound like much, but if you have tried it, you know how huge a step it is to begin praying at home when you don't do it very often. But, like a father to a child, God is very patient

with us when we don't know what we are doing. He will respond!

God won't make us perfect, but if we can begin to understand how He can possibly be present and do real, concrete things in our homes, can you imagine what that would do for the faith of our children? And, for the faith of those who are exposed to our families? If we do not experience that God is real at home, it will be very difficult to believe that He's *really* real at all. However, if even a few families fight to overcome the obstacles to real prayer as individuals, couples, and families and begin to see how God can be present and active in the nitty-gritty mess, imagine the difference that family can make for an entire parish, and beyond!

- **Choose a book of the Bible, and take at least five minutes by yourself each day to read one paragraph and pray with it. Yes, it will be harder than you think, but it will also bear more fruit than you think!**
- **Before bed, stop your family and pray one prayer that you know (Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.), and ask each person to say what they are thankful for from the day. Doesn't take more than a few minutes!**
- **Ask God to reveal to you who needs your family right now. Who needs an experience of *real* love, *real* togetherness, even if it's imperfect? To whom is God calling you to open your home, even if just for a little while?**