

“It is only the rock of total, irrevocable love between a man and a woman that can serve as the foundation on which to build a society that will become a home for all mankind.”

Pope Benedict XVI, 5/11/2006

Marriage: At the Heart of Social Justice

What matters more than children? The French poet Charles Péguy gets at this truth, describing a father's thoughts concerning his sons (though this clearly applies in similar ways to mothers and daughters as well):

It's never the child who goes to the field, who tills and who sows, and who reaps and who harvests the grapes and who trims the vine and who fells the trees and who cuts the wood.

For winter.

To warm the house in winter.

But would the father have the heart to work if he didn't have his children. If it weren't for the sake of his children.

His children will do better than he, of course.

And the world will go better. Later. He's not jealous of it. On the contrary.

Nor for having come to the world, as he did, in an ungrateful time.

And to have no doubt prepared for his sons a time that is perhaps less ungrateful.

What madman would be jealous of his sons and of the sons of his sons.

Doesn't he work solely for his children.¹

The future depends on love because the future depends on children. Without children, cultures die, nations die, the human species dies. Nothing is more fundamental to the common good than children. And nothing matters more for the well-being of children than the health of marriage and family life.

The struggle for the common good is more urgent than ever: the innocence of our children is threatened by the hook-up

culture, which is reinforced by Planned Parenthood-style sex ed. Abortion and embryo-destructive research are destroying the most powerless human lives, whom Blessed Mother Teresa called “the poorest of the poor.”

We are made for love, so we must seek social justice, which is to have the common good as the horizon of all our actions. And social justice requires above all that we safeguard and strengthen marriage and family life.

Promote Peace by Promoting the Family

When Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, she was asked what people can do to promote world peace. Her answer was profoundly countercultural: “Go home and love your families.” Justice can only arise from the human heart, and habits of the heart are first learned in the family.

Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly pointed to the same truth. His Message for the World Day of Peace 2008 emphasizes the irreplaceable role of the family in “humanizing” individuals: “Indeed, in healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of



authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness, or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them. For this reason, the family is the first and indispensable teacher of peace.² Who can replace a mother's care in teaching her child to be unselfish? Or a father's concern to see his children treat one another fairly? Without healthy family life, selfishness and injustice will corrode society.

As a result, the pope has strong words for those who would undermine the family: “everything that serves to weaken the family based on the marriage of a man and

a woman, everything that directly or indirectly stands in the way of its openness to the responsible acceptance of a new life, everything that obstructs its right to be primarily responsible for the education of its children, constitutes an objective obstacle on the road to peace.”

Sex and the Common Good

In marriage, love and life transform the world. The nobility of the vocation to true love must be communicated in a compelling way to our children, who are being drawn away by the dehumanizing hook-up way of life. “Friendship with benefits” destroys the happiness of everyone involved, but our young girls are especially victimized. With innocence destroyed, our children are finding it harder and harder to grow up to love with that openness of heart necessary to welcome the future in life-long and life-giving marriage.

Intimate relationships between adults can also be unjust, even when the people involved consent to being treated badly. Pope John Paul II never tired of reminding us that sexuality is meant to express lifelong and life-giving love. Anything less is lying with our bodies. We owe it to other people to respect their dignity, which is inseparable from how we treat their bodies. We must not exploit them for our own pleasure. And we are owed the same respect.

Conversely, when sexuality is an intimate expression of lifelong, life-giving married love, it serves the common

“Peace and war begin at home.
If we truly want peace in the world,
let us begin by loving one another in our own families.”

Mother Teresa⁴

good of all. The weakest among us—the elderly, the disabled, the unborn—are cared for in stable and loving families. Mother Teresa said, “The greatest destroyer of peace is abortion,” because it injects violence into the most intimate human relationships, that between parents and children. The loving commitment of marriage opens the spouses to the children that result from their union. Just and loving relationships flow outward from the family into the larger community and serve the common good.

Love and Money

In our individualistic culture of consumerism, with its focus on the economic calculation of private advantage, it is very difficult for us to act always with the common good of society as our horizon—to treat family values as more basic than economic values. It is very countercultural indeed to point out that sex is not a private matter.

Even economically speaking, however, marriage must be recognized as crucial.

Marriage is a wealth-building institution. If we want to raise the economic status of the disadvantaged, we need to promote marriage. Minorities have suffered from the breakdown of marriage and the family disproportionately. The life-long commitment of a husband and a wife is one of the most significant factors in the economic health of the individuals involved, especially women and children. As one sociologist puts it, the sociological data indicate that “the preferential option for the poor begins in the home.”³

We are the ones that must communicate this social sensibility to our children, pointing out, for example, why cohabitation not only causes broken hearts but also damages the common good. It all begins in the home: in marriage and family life. Whatever attacks the integrity of love in the home undermines society and social justice at its root. The future depends on the lifelong and life-giving love of marriage.

¹Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, trans. David Louis Schindler, Jr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 12, 18. ²Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2008, www.vatican.va. ³B. Wilcox, *The Facts of Life & Marriage*, Touchstone, Jan/Feb 2005, cited at <http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/societyeng.shtml>. ⁴Mother Teresa, *In My Own Words*, ed. Jose Luis Gonzalez-Balado (Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 1997), p. 47

