

ALL INDIA BIBLICAL CONSULTATION CUM SEMINAR

Theme: Word of God, Source of Life in the Family

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Session VIII

The Word of God – Family Life Today

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Abstract

God's Word came into this world through a family to make His family. The Word of God is alive and active. It is the family album of the people of God, a bottomless well - refreshing water for all times. The renewed emphasis on The Word of God is the new spring time for the families and thus the Church. Down the centuries the essential needs of the family have not changed. So also the Word of God. The Bible has shown us that The Word of God has responded to the different needs of families in every civilization. The same Word of God has the potential to respond to the needs of families in our times. How, where and when we use the scriptures is important.

Introduction

Man is always in search of more. Down the centuries we see man in search of something that will give him meaning, importance and happiness. This is true from the very first pages of the bible, with the appearance of Adam and Eve's family (cf. Gen 4) to its very last page, where we behold the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb (cf. Rev 21:2, 9; AL8). The Bible is full of families, births, love stories and family crises.

Bible is the family album of the people of God; it expresses the faith of simple imperfect people very much like us. Bible is the account of salvation history it is God's revelation (through humans and other creations) and man's response throughout history. Bible is an expression of the covenant, a relationship between God and man. It is the bottomless well, refreshing water for all times, therefore bible is not an old book, infact, it is an on-going salvation history and I am a part of it. The basic need and experience of human beings who struggle and reach out to God is the same for all people in every time and place. The bible responds to the realities of modern human existence (Binz, 2007).

The concept of family has a special place in the Bible, both in a physical sense and in a theological sense. The foundation for family was laid by Father God when He made man and woman. He eventually sent them out with the commandment to "go forth and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (cf. Gen. 1.27-28). The family was of foremost importance to God and His plan was always for us to be fruitful. But the disobedience of our first parents

brought in sin and destruction. The loving communion in the Garden of Eden was broken by man's need for more. God and His plans were not enough. Their spiritual blindness prevented them from seeing the fullness of life they were gifted with, and they reached for the forbidden fruit (cf. Gen.3). Their legacy continues even now with families continuing to live in various degrees of spiritual blindness, feeling a sense of wanting, yearning and working beyond God's loving plan. Greed has resulted in neglect, wealth has led to spiritual poverty and the disruption of the peace of the world has indeed begun at home.

“The family, which is founded and given life by love, is a community of persons, of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives” (FC. 18), this essential building block of human society is disturbed by the individualistic culture.

Life in the family

Today's families are suffering on many fronts. The cultural decline has failed to promote love or self-giving. We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop (AL 39). The fast pace society, propels individuals to catch up with the pace dictated by the fast paced society around them. The faster we catch up with it, the more content we feel. But that comes with a price: fatigue. The quality of life suffers as fatigue carries on the next day. And life goes on. The family is no different. It bears the consequences of the worn out individual. The stress takes a toll on the family which militates against permanent decisions. As a result families are struggling to meet its ends and provide for their children. Unemployment and lack of steady work is another issue that plagues families.

An extreme individualism has weakened family bonds and has isolated family members from each other, in some cases leading to self-centeredness (Relatio Synodi 2014, 5). This has a bearing on the relationships in the family, leading to selfishness, lack of communication, disorder and the family develops a materialistic view of things as in the modern gadgetry.

The current “spread of pornography and the commercialization of the body, fostered also by a misuse of the internet, and about those “reprehensible situations where people are forced into prostitution” is on the rise. Marital problems are “often confronted in haste and without the courage to have patience and reflect, to make sacrifices and to forgive one another. Failures give rise to new relationships, new couples, new civil unions, and new marriages, creating family situations which are complex and problematic for the Christian life”. (Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Message, 18 October 2014.).

The no pain philosophy and politics of reproductive health has led to the decline in population, which has not only created a situation in which the relationship between generations is no longer ensured but also the danger that, over time, this decline will lead to economic impoverishment and a loss of hope in the future. (AL 42).

Migration not only affects the family but also the society and economy at large. The number of elderly persons is growing even as the birth rate declines; they can be regarded as a burden. On the other hand, the care that they require often puts a strain on their loved ones. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are serious threats to families worldwide.

Workdays are long and oftentimes made more burdensome by extended periods away from home. This situation does not help family members to gather together or parents to be with their children in such a way as to nurture their relationships each day”. (Relatio Finalis 2015, 14.)

In many cases, parents come home exhausted, not wanting to talk, and many families no longer even share a common meal. Distractions abound, including an addiction to television, smart phone and tablet. This makes it all the more difficult for parents to hand on their faith to their children. The effect of severe stress on families, who often seem more caught up with securing their economic future than with enjoying the present. This is a broader cultural problem, aggravated by fears about steady employment, finances and the future of children. (AL 50).

Drug use, alcoholism, other addictions and gambling are on the rise in families worldwide causing immense suffering and even breakup of many families. The verbal, physical, and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages that contradict the very nature of the conjugal union is also rampant. The absence of a father gravely affects family life and the upbringing of children and their integration into society. This absence, which may be physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual, deprives children of a suitable father figure” (AL 55). Today there is an increasing absence of God in a person’s life and fragility of relationships. There is also a general feeling of powerlessness in the face of socio-cultural realities that oftentimes end up crushing families... Families often feel abandoned due to a lack of interest and attention on the part of institutions. However, all is not lost. There is hope!

Word of God: its relevance

God is the mother who teaches the right principles as mothers do in our families (Deut 7-8). The text of Psalm 19, 7 reads

*“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.”*

The Word of God is strength for our faith, food for our soul and the pure and lasting font of spiritual life (DV.21). Word of God is transformative (DV.2). The Bible reveals God's attributes. It tells us that He is holy, sovereign, righteous, and just; that He is loving, merciful and kind. He is gracious, patient and faithful. We have no trouble trusting Him if we really understand who He is and how holy, loving and wonderful His purposes are for us. The Word of God is God's self-revelation: it is powerful, communicating the healing strength and saving authority of God (Ps 33:6; Isa 40:8; 35:10-11; Ps 119:105). The Word of God has taken roots in the life of human communities, so also can take roots in our lives, provided we are open to the Spirit of God cf. Jn.1: 1-14).

The Old Testament and New Testament together express the inspired Word of God; the Old Testament helps to understand the New Testament. The whole bible demonstrates the complete saving will of God for the world as it comes to its fullness in Jesus Christ.

Catholics studying the bible is essential for the on-going renewal of the church; today our liturgies have a special place for scriptures. In yesteryears, one can find sporadic efforts of individuals. Some important documents that gave impetus to biblical scholarship are *Providentissimus Deus* 1893 and *Divino Afflante Spiritu* 1943

A further emphasis to the Word of God came with the Vatican II, an era of new spring time for the church. The Second Vatican council urged the Christ faithful, to undertake new evangelization centring itself on the bible.

The bible was written of the people, by the people and for the people, a book of community of faith. The Holy Spirit who inspired the sacred writers, will inspire us to understand the Word of God in a personal way, a personal communication from God. Man, remaining docile to the Holy Spirit, will remain open to the true understanding of the Word of God and thus preventing private interpretation of the scriptures. The Holy Spirit guides us to make a true response to the Word of God, therefore praying to the Holy Spirit before reading the scriptures is important. The Word of God has the power to rejuvenate His people.

A good Christian family is one that lines up with biblical principles and one in which each member understands and fulfills his or her God-given role. The family is not an institution designed by man. It was created by God for the benefit of man, and man has been given stewardship over it. The basic biblical family unit is comprised of one man, one woman—his spouse—and their offspring or adopted children. The extended family can include relatives by blood or marriage such as grandparents, nieces, nephews, cousins, aunts, and uncles. One of the primary principles of the family unit is that it involves a commitment ordained by God for the lifetime of the members. The husband and wife are responsible for holding it together, the current attitude of our culture notwithstanding.

The Bible is full of verses relevant to family life. The family can always seek an answer to its problems in The Word of God. Following are a selected few references from the Bible which can be looked into in times of trouble/ various family situations:

Spousal relationship: Guidelines for husbands and wives in a Christian family (Ephesians 5:22–26).

Parental Guidance: Fathers are instructed to bring up their children in “the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). A father is also to provide for his family. If he does not, he “denies the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). So, a man who makes no effort to provide for his family cannot rightly call himself a Christian. This does not mean that the wife cannot assist in supporting the family—Proverbs 31 demonstrates that a godly wife may surely do so—but providing for the family is not primarily her responsibility; it is her husband’s.

Role of a Woman in marriage: Woman was given to man for the purpose of being her husband’s helper (Genesis 2:18–20) and to bear children.

Responsibility of children in the family: Children are given two primary responsibilities in the Christian family: to obey their parents and to honor them (Ephesians 6:1–3). Obeying parents is the duty of children until they reach adulthood, but honoring parents is their responsibility for a lifetime. God promises His blessings on those who honor their parents. “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12). My son, keep your father’s command and do not forsake your mother’s teaching (Proverbs 6:20). For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death (Matthew 15:4).’ A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother (Proverbs 15:20). Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching (Proverbs 1:8). Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord (Colossians 3:20).

Ideally, a Christian family will have all members committed to Christ and His service. When a husband, wife, and children all fulfill their God-appointed roles, then peace and harmony reign in the home. But, if we try to have a Christian family without Christ as Head or without adhering to the biblical principles the Lord has lovingly provided for us, the home will suffer.

Sanctification of Unbelieving Spouse: The unbelieving spouse is sanctified through the believing spouse, meaning, among other things, that the unbelieving spouse is in a position to be saved through the witness of the believing spouse (1 Corinthians 7).

Divorce: Although divorce is sought and granted much too easily in our society, the Bible tells us that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16).

Family to be generous: He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly (Acts 10:2).

Forgiveness in the family: Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you (Colossians 3:13).

Upbringing of children: Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it (Proverbs 22:6).

Serving God: But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Joshua 24:15).”

Number of children: Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court (Psalm 127:3-5).

Love in the Family: Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Fear of The Lord: But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children (Psalm 103:17).

Admonition for those bringing ruin on the family: Whoever brings ruin on their family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise (Proverbs 11:29). The greedy bring ruin to their households, but the one who hates bribes will live (Proverbs 15:27).

Role of a wife: She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks (Proverbs 31:15-17).

Sex and Sexuality: A Christian marriage, foundational to a Christian family, follows the biblical instructions concerning sex. The Bible counters the cultural view that divorce, living together without being married, and same-sex marriage are acceptable in God’s eyes. Sexuality expressed according to biblical standards is a beautiful expression of love and commitment. (Gen 1 & 2) Outside of marriage, it is sin.

Sexual perversion in marriage: “Marriage must be honoured by all, and marriages must be kept undefiled, because the sexually immoral and adulterers will come under God’s judgement” (Heb: 13:4). “The body is not for sexual immorality, it is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1Cor 6:13). “The desires of self-indulgence are always in opposition to the Spirit” (Gal 5:17).

Belongingness to God’s family: When we are born physically, we’re born into a physical family, but when we are "born again," we are born into a spiritual family. To use Pauline language, we are adopted into God’s family (Romans 8:15). When we are adopted into God’s

spiritual family, the Church, God becomes our Father and Jesus our Brother. This spiritual family is not bound by ethnicity, gender or social standing. As Paul says, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).

Benefits of The Word of God

Humans need rules and morality for their lives, which needs to be given by someone beyond us or else there would be confusion. Humans may have different opinions based on their thinking, emotions, perceptions and elements of their culture in which they reside. Truth cannot be developed based on people's opinions.

What is really true and good, clean and pure is what God says; for He has formed us in our mother's womb. "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (cf. Heb. 4:12). Therefore if humans align their thoughts and steps with the Word of God which is a sanctifying agent, that provides light and comfort. The Word of God is a weapon to be used to advance the Kingdom of God, fighting off temptation and casting down everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (cf. Isa. 55:6-9).

His Word is Truth, and the truth sets us free. Without God's Word, one would be like wandering stars with no certainty of our destination. The Word instructs us, it gives us life. His Word has the power to bear good fruit in us. The Bible is able to care for our wellbeing. The Word of God guides humans to prioritise and use freedom responsibly, "the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing" (James 1:25). The Bible not only gives us answers for life's issues, it helps us meet the Truth, who can satisfy our needs.

According to Robbins, there are **Six Human Needs** that influence our deepest motivations and determine how we go about prioritizing our decisions and actions throughout our life. Each need serves a vital part of creating a life that is whole and fulfilling at all levels. Let's take a closer look now at the Six Human Needs.

1. Certainty

At a basic level, each of us has a need to satisfy a sense of stability in the world. The challenge of satisfying this need is that the world and lives of those around us are constantly changing and so sometimes our need for certainty and stability causes us to put a fence of controls around our lives and/or to stay in our comfort zone and resist change, whatever (even healthy change).

Fulfilling the human need for certainty means finding and creating a sense of centeredness and stability within, this certainty springs from within, as we have the Divine who resides in us. He is our comfort, our security, in him there is order and consistency. There is no need to fear, for he provides us with all that is needed and remains with us till our journey's end on this earth. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (cf. Ps.46:1), His comforting words says "Have no fear: for I will take care of you and your little ones. (cf. Gen 50: 21), "Each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make them afraid" (cf. Mic. 4:4) and "I am with you always to the end of the age" (cf. Mt. 28:20).

To arrive at this stability, what is required of us, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself" (cf. Mk.12: 30-31) .Those who follow these commands can live with certainty that "God Most High, who has (will deliver) delivered your enemies into your control" (cf. Gen. 14:20).

2. Variety

At times when we must break from what is known, certain, defined and predictable, in order to allow ourselves to evolve and become more of who were meant to be. The need for uncertainty, diversity and movement interrupts patterns of predictability and stagnation, allowing us to expand to who we can be and experience ourselves in motion. Of course there is risk in letting go of that which is certain and known, but when we let go of "needing to know", we enter a realm of possibility that is not bound by past experience.

One important need for variety, in the sense of blossoming of our potential that the Word of God calls us to fulfil is to move out of our sinful habits and learn to forgive. "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19), as we see very clearly in the parable of the barren fig tree, prodigal son and in the life of Zacchaeus. God is giving us a second chance to grow meaningfully.

3. Significance (Self-esteem)

The next Human Need is to be seen and validated for who we are and what we do. The need for Significance tells us that we do not exist in isolation but as part of a greater whole, and to be an effective part of that whole we need to know that we are playing our part – and being honoured for that expression. However to feel complete within ourselves one cannot solely depend on the approval of others but appreciate who we are. Satisfying our need for Significance is part of creating our sense of identity.

Our need for Significance is fulfilled by a humble sense of internal acknowledgement for following our own path of integrity and expression in the world. When we find significance within, we don't need approval from others. The fact that I am a child of God created in His image and likeness makes me valuable just as I am (cf. Gen.1:26) "even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father in heaven..." (cf. Mt.10:31-32). It is by baptism that we are all children of God and hence we together say "Our Father" (cf. Mt. 6:9). And as His loving children we are called to share in His Word and act accordingly as the first Christians did (cf. Acts 2:42). The reward is assured (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8). This entire event can help us nurture a healthy self-esteem and have a distinct self-identity.

4. Love and Connection

We each have a need to love and be loved by others. We each have a need to belong. Central to our experience of fulfilment in life, is to authentically love and make deep connections with other living beings. A balanced way to ignite the fulfilment of this Human Need is by taking time to genuinely connect with and love the many aspects of our own being. When we are connected to our Self in the truest sense, this connection naturally aligns with and permeates out to genuine connection and love towards others.

The Bible presents to us a model of true love. God who is all-knowing, in His goodness made a covenant with man. It is out of pure love that He created the world and all that is in it (cf. Gen.1) He made a special covenant with man (cf. Ex. 6:7) and the final covenant was in Jesus Christ that renewed the entire creation. The cross was the ultimate altruistic expression of love and Jesus did it knowing who He was, His calling and the final crown. Jesus invites us to follow Him in His ways, bringing about a sense of belongingness and intimacy. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you" (cf. Jn.13:34). St Paul in his letter to the Corinthians spells out very clearly, the various elements of Love (cf. 1 Cor. 13: 4-13). Acknowledging the privileged status bestowed on each one of us, we are encouraged to love and feel the sense of belongingness with God and others.

5. Growth

Growth is a never ending journey towards the light. Growing and expanding can be so fulfilling in its own right, that sometimes our quest to fulfil this need causes us to limit ourselves from being fully present in life as it is, or postpone applying our growth and knowledge in the world for fear of not being "ready" or "enough". It is important to realise that Growth is a journey, not a destination, and that continual Growth also means allowing ourselves to be real, to be imperfect and to find authentic ways to share what we discover and learn with others.

We are always in the process of becoming. Heaven is not a goal; it is a destination. The goal is that "Christ be formed in you," (cf. Gal. 4:19). To the Romans, he declares, "Those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son" (cf. 8:29). And to the Corinthians, he says, "All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image" (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). Thus the daring goal of the Christian life can be summarized as being formed, conformed, and transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. And the wonder in all this is that Jesus Christ

has come among his people as our ever living Saviour, Teacher, Lord, and Friend. Therefore we need to learn from Him how are we to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). In particular, we need to learn how we can cooperate with "the means of grace" that God has ordained for the transformation of the human personality.

6. Contribution

The sixth human need refers to one's life's purpose and emphasises the importance of bringing real value to the lives of others. Our need for Contribution rises naturally from the fulfilment of the other five needs, being expressed in such a way that brings a genuine sense of value to the world. Contribution comes from a fundamental yearning to make a difference to society. One of the greatest expressions of this need comes when we allow ourselves to realize that contribution comes not only from what we "do", but from who we are "being" on a moment to moment basis.

In the biblical language contribution can be seen as "you are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world" (cf. Mt. 5:13-14) and "do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (cf. Mt. 7:21). The Word of God invites us to be happy (cf. Mt. 5:1-11). Our need for contribution can also be fulfilled by being merciful to others and putting up acts of mercy. There is always happiness when we are formed in Christ and others respond to our formation.

Jesus is the psychologist, par-excellence. He provides for all our needs. The Bible helps us to meet our loving, faithful God so that we attain self-realization. As St. Jerome once said "ignorance of the scripture is ignorance of God" and ignorance of God is being an orphan who is groping in the dark, doomed to be destroyed. Therefore it is very important to make time for the Word of God.

Living The Word of God in family life today

It is becoming increasingly difficult to live The Word of God in today's consumerist, materialistic, individualistic, fast paced world. The hustle and bustle of today's fast paced world makes it difficult to have a fixed prayer time due to varied schedules of school and tuition timings of the children and so also the work timings of the spouses who many a times go early and come home late. In such a tired state of mind other forms of relaxation are threatening to take over the prayer time. Families are constantly fighting to set aside a time for prayer and more so for meditation on The Word of God. Hence, as explained in the parable of the sower, in some families The Word of God is choked among the thorns.

On the other hand there are many families that make a strong effort to imbibe The Word of God in their lives. Many families have made a special place for the veneration of the Bible. In some parishes the priests have gone from house to house and established the service of enthronement of the Bible. In some families the Bible enthronement was just that one day event, though the special place is faithfully maintained. However there are families who

come around the Bible, light candles, bow to The Word of God, read, meditate on the passage as a family and find meaning in life. Keeping the Bible at a prominent place in the house goes a long way to stress its importance to the family. The Bible enthronement done through a small prayer service by the family members will make them realise the importance of the Word and the necessity to make it a part of their lives. Each member of the family, taking care of the place, in turn, will create a desire for The Word of God and the Bible will get its due importance. Further, there is an added advantage to such families to feel the warmth of each other and to read emotions expressed and respond accordingly.

There are still more families who place before them the following questions for their meditation on the Word:

- a. What does the scripture passage say?
- b. What does the scripture passage mean?
- c. What does the scripture passage mean to me?
- d. What am I going to do about it?

The answers to these questions lead the individual families to be promoter of Gospel values and more importantly, they become a catalyst in their communities.

One can also find families who sit together after or before praying the Holy Rosary and read and meditate on the Word of God marked for next day's Eucharist. A few families make a point to celebrate the Eucharist with their children before their daily school begins. There are some other families that make use of the "Bible Quotes Tray", wherein each member of the family picks a verse and shares it with other members and takes the verse to be the light of the day.

In families where fixing a daily prayer time is **made** next to impossible and who still hunger for The Divine Word: Bible App or an audio of day's reading and reflection could help. Audio Bible CD's, transmission of biblical programs for regular commuters during morning and evening drive or gospel music during afternoon lunch break could have a great impact. Telecasting testimonies that encourage reading, meditating and living the gospel values in day to day activity could be helpful. In this way one can enrich himself/herself while on the move when it is difficult to set aside separate time for the Word of God. Once enriched and believes in the promises in the Word of God, going back home, the family will surely be enriched with the day's experience under the power of the Word of God.

Celebrating The Word of God through Family Events and Celebrations

The Bible has the power to make our celebrations more meaningful and enriched. The Word of God is so rich that it can make space on every occasion. Be it the Baptism, Confirmation, Communion day and anniversaries, during marriage preparation, day of marriage, marriage festivity and anniversaries. The celebration of the Word of God as a preparation for

confession is a grace filled movement. So also celebration of the Word of God during para-liturgical celebrations, visits of the Statue of Our Lady ward-wise and during pilgrim journey. The Word of God has a place in our family events, like celebrating the Word of God on the announcement of pregnancy, new job, birthday, on a holiday, leaving the country, death and so on.

The Family has the task of religious socialization of the children right from birth. It has always been the foundation for the development of faith and faith practices, and for participation in church life and worship. Introducing the infants to the Bible kept at a prominent place in the house, showing videos of Bible stories to the toddlers, teaching them to relate these stories through enactment, helping them to memorise small verses as a child and claim their promises in faith and giving them an opportunity to read The Word of God from the daily Mass readings at home during prayer time goes a long way in inscribing the love of The Word of God in their lives, a very good foundation to build on. The interactive steps being as follows: Share, Read, Talk, Pray and Bless. Sing song of Bible verses and Bible Stories helps the toddlers to memorise the Bible very easily. This should be encouraged by the Clergy taking the help of the musicians in the Parish/Diocese.

Role of Parish Family Service Cells

The Parish Family Service Cells started in Goa are local units of the Diocesan Family Service Centre at the Parish level. This unit consists of a spousal couples, one from each SCC along with some skilled personnel, that could be helpful to the families in the Parish. The main purpose of this unit is to foster a spirit of communion and belongingness within and among the families in the Parish. The mission statement is to build stable Christ centred happy families which will strengthen spousal relationships and promote effective Christian parenting. This is achieved through an attempt at implementation of the four tasks of the family envisaged in Familiaris Consortio No. 17

- To Build a Community of Persons
- At the Service of Life
- Participating in the Development of Society
- Sharing in the Life and Mission of the Church

The Word of God being central in the scheme of things, the families are made to gather around the Table of the Holy Bible and read and meditate on the Word of the day as available through the Daily Flash/Jivitacho Prokas wherein many a lay people participate in writing the reflections. Empowered with The Word of God, they are introduced to faith formation at various levels through religious socialization. This process is undertaken at various levels starting from faith formation before marriage at the adolescent level to immediate preparation before marriage, accompanying the newly married, in pregnancy, pre-Baptismal catechesis and religious socialization of infants, toddlers, pre-school and pre-communion children. The Word of God is given importance at every level of faith formation and the families are encouraged to use the Word of God in various ways whether it is quizzes, videos of Bible stories, daily readings, meditation or applications to daily life.

Role of Small Christian Communities

The Small Christian Communities (SCC) have a major role to play in the propagation of The Word of God. It is a place where The Word of God is not only read but also meditated upon through various means. The 'Seven Step method' is one of the ways which is commonly used to break the Word of God to the Families gathered around it. After meditation the members then choose the "Word of Life" as a take home message from the text meditated upon. They then try to live The Word of Life in their own lives and that of their family. At the next meet they come together and share how they have lived this Word of Life.

This has to be stressed as the most important aspect of the SCC as gives an impetus to better one's life as per The Word of God. If put up in a prominent place including the dining table, it gives a push to the family members to live according to The Word. The application of God's Word is a vital part of one's relationship with God.

Role of Clergy and religious

The clergy and the religious can have a direct and indirect influence on families by their very life example. The rich Benedictine practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and increase in the knowledge of God's Word has to be fostered.

In 1965, *Dei Verbum* emphasized the use of *Lectio Divina* and on the 40th anniversary of *Dei verbum* in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed its importance and stated "I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio Divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (cf. DV.25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual springtime. On another occasion he emphasised the role of the Holy Spirit in celebrating *Lectio Divina*. The Holy Spirit illumines the mind and heart of the readers and prepares them to approach The Divine Word with an attitude of "reverential hearing", so that The Divine Word bears fruit.

Since the latter part of the 20th century, the popularity of *Lectio Divina* has increased outside monastic circles and many lay Catholics, as well as some Protestants, practice it, at times keeping a "Lectio journal" in which they record their thoughts and contemplations after each session (Wikipedia).

Another way the clergy and religious could foster the love for The Word of God is by celebrating the Divine office, specially the morning or the evening prayer with the lay faithful before mass. The clergy and religious could help the SCC members to feed themselves on The Word of God. This they can do is by help select a common text for the whole Parish for the month, publish it on their Parish bulletin and encourage sharing the 'Word of Life' by all

the SCC's leaders (who are also Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) members) at the monthly PPC meeting. They could also encourage the participants at the SCC meetings to take up regular reading of scripture in their respective homes, sharing how each member has lived their life as per The Word of God encountered.

During regular reading of scripture one can experience spiritual dryness; it is at this time that the clergy and religious could encourage and help those proclaiming The Word of God to encounter God who is ever present in His Word. It is important to remember the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Lk. 24:32) who took the whole long journey to recognise the person whom they knew so well. It is important to note that the unfolding of the meaning of scripture is a slow, continuous process that will take more than a life time. What is revealed to us is sufficient enough for our wellbeing. They are to also make readers aware not to get disturbed when met with difficult passages. The Lord can speak to us even in obscure passages when we call on The Holy Spirit in our reading. Those who have cultivated love for the scripture down the line could be encouraged to find new insights from the scripture passage read over and over again to bring about small, on-going positive change in their lives.

The clergy while preparing and celebrating various sacraments and blessings for different needs with his parishioners, has to give due importance to the Word of God. They could organise bible courses in their parishes which aim to help his parishioners meet God and not only remain an intellectual exercise or be satisfied with the accumulated knowledge. The courses should be focussed on the truth of God's Word, doing what is asked of us in the sacred scripture.

Challenges faced in living The Word of God and how to overcome them

How do we respond to these challenges? Some testimonies are listed below:

Family plan and communication can help face the challenge of "I"

-Testimony by Antonio Colaco

I and my wife, with our two children have decided to be home by 8.30 PM. Occasionally, one could be delayed, this is communicated on the family what's app group. My daughter is a Physiotherapist; son lectures for M.Com and also teaches music. They have a lot to share. My wife tutors the neighbourhood children.

It is by 9.15 PM, after dinner we sit and share the day's situations. Their experiences give a good insight into crowd trends and human behaviour pattern. There is a lot of humour that flows during this time.

We begin prayers by 10 PM and finish by 10.45PM. We first have the veneration of the bible followed by the reading of the scripture and discuss what message the scripture is trying to convey to us and to humanity on the whole.

We are certainly not a perfect family but many heated discussions have reduced because the Scripture is well understood by all members. The word of God becomes the judge. Faith has grown as a result. Listening to the other as a result has improved. The “I” factor has reduced significantly. It’s almost 4-5 years since we started Bible reading in our family. It is difficult to live up to its teachings but there is lots of joy that flows out as a result of obedience to the scriptures.

Studying Citizen Charter can help face the challenge of Saying No to corruption

-Testimony by Jacob Noronha

Jacob and his wife with four children are going for bible study. Last year when they were to build a new house, suddenly in the smooth sailing of the civil procedure, there came a halt. At this time the Word of God made no sense to us, bribe was the only answer. However we did continue to read and reflect on the Word of God. On a day as my son was proclaiming the Word” the truth will set you free”, a cord struck with me to go through the government charter and latter I was able to confront the government employee and got my work done without paying a penny.

Repeated reading of 1Cor.13 and Eph.4, 5, 6 can help face the challenge of happy marriage

-Testimony by Fatima Rodrigues

It is I alone who read and meditate on the Word of God daily. Apart from reading the day’s reading, I make a special point to read and reflect on any one of the above New Testament passages. These passages helped me to rebuild my home once again; slowly we are to be a happy family.

Believing in “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and the rest will be given to you” can help face the challenge of mortification of body.

-Testimony by Ivy Ferrao

Life is full of challenges but keeping up with God’s word and family is perhaps the biggest challenge we Christians face. My day begins with The Word of God, in the early hours of the morning. I help my husband in his business. My hands are full with household chores, business responsibilities, children’s lessons and other activities. But in all this we never miss our family prayer. We recite the Rosary and meditate on The Word of God. Just as we sit and discuss our activities of the day, we read The Word and each one shares as to how we can apply it in our daily life. The word has helped me undergo self-mortification and helped me to be just. When tempted to do anything contrary to The Word of God, I recite some of the verses of the Bible and I am able to fight the temptation.

Conclusion

In the words of St. John Paul II “I wish to invoke the protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Through God’s mysterious design, it was in that family that the Son of God spent long years of a hidden life. It is therefore the prototype and example for all Christian families.

It was unique in the world. Its life was passed in anonymity and silence in a little town in Palestine. It underwent trials of poverty, persecution and exile. It glorified God in an incomparably exalted and pure way. And it will not fail to help Christian families-indeed, all the families in the world-to be faithful to their day-to-day duties, to bear the cares and tribulations of life, to be open and generous to the needs of others, and to fulfill with joy the plan of God in their regard.” (FC 86).

Hence our families have to be directed and motivated by the leaders of The Church specially the clergy in making use of the various existing spiritual and religious practices, including religious socialisation of infants and toddlers, to make The Word of God central in their family life and individual life if they are to live their life claiming the promise of Jesus Christ “I have come to give life and life in full abundance” (Jn 10:10).

Abbreviations:

FC-Familiaris Consortio

AL- Amoris Laetitia

DV-Dei Verbum

References:

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina

2. Tony Robbins -<http://addicted2success.com/success-advice/the-6-basic-human-needs-that-make-us-tick/#>