

HOMILY

The Vigil of the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time August 22, 2009

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And Joshua said to the people, "If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today who you will serve. As for me and my household, we will serve the lord...."

A family moved to a new city where the father's company had transferred him. This meant that little Sharon would enter the first grade in a brand new school. On the first day of class, the teacher was asking each student to provide her with some information as she called the roll. After asking for the proper spelling of her name, the teacher asked Sharon for her address. The youngster replied, "Miss Smith, we don't have an address yet!" "Oh," said the teacher, "your family doesn't have a home yet?" Sharon replied, "Yes, ma'am, we have a home; we just haven't found a house to put it in!"

How right that little girl was! A house is not automatically a home. There are people who live in enormous houses with every convenience you could imagine, but they don't have a home. Then there are families who live in crowded conditions in two-room houses, but you only have to be there a few minutes to experience the love, the laughter, and the togetherness, and you know they have a home!

The home is the most important institution in this country. It has been said many times that if you destroy the home, you can destroy the nation.

In Colorado one day, a great oak tree fell down. It was more than five hundred years old. It was a mere sapling when Columbus sailed to America. It had been struck by lightning fourteen times, survived storms, withstood earthquakes, and endured mud slides. Everyone was curious about what had finally brought it down. After an extensive examination, it was discovered that some tiny beetles had bored under the bark, dug into its heart, and eaten away at its fibers. The mighty oak was destroyed from within, and it tumbled down.

My friends, the United States of America is in danger of a great tumble because the beetles of moral decay have been nibbling away, quietly and unnoticed, at the fiber of the family. We have reached a point where divorce is easier for couples than working at a marriage; abortion has become an easy and accessible means of birth control; children spend more time in day care and with television than they do with their parents; and old folks are unnecessarily ushered into nursing homes to get them out of the way.

We Christians have a divine responsibility to strengthen America by having the kind of homes that God wants us to have. If we make our families strong, we will make our nation strong. So today I want to suggest a couple of ways to create and maintain strong Christian homes.

First, let your house be a place where positive Christian values are transmitted from generation to generation. The home is the first and most influential school any of us attends. If parents and we adults don't make an intentional effort to pass along Christian values and family traditions to our children, no one else will. One of the primary responsibilities and opportunities of the Christian home is to pass values from one generation to the next. It must be done early. Children are like wet cement—you have to work with cement in the early stages while it's soft and pliable. Then you can shape it and smooth it; but once it dries, it's set! Then it becomes a nearly impossible task to change it.

Second, what values do you transmit to your children? To your grandchildren? Do you show respect for one another? Are you transmitting to your children, to your grandchildren, the value of accepting responsibility for their room, their chores, their money, and their pets? In your home, can one find understanding ears and strong shoulders upon which they can unburden their hearts and seek guidance in an atmosphere of love?

Of course, the best way to help create a Christian home is making sure that Jesus is the its center. Does your daily life reflect the truth that you really believe Jesus is present in your home? Are your actions, your speech, your love honestly proclaiming the presence of Christ in your home or do they demonstrate your belief that you really left the Lord back at church? Is faith just a Sunday happening, limited to one hour a week?

Many years ago, near the royal English residence on the Isle of Wight, stood several homes for the poor and aged. A missionary visiting one of the homes asked a lady, “Does Queen Victoria ever call on you here?” “Oh, yes,” was the answer. “Her Majesty frequently comes here to see us.” Then, wondering if the woman was a Christian, the missionary inquired, “Does the King of Kings ever visit her?” The lady immediately gave him a happy smile and said, “No, sir, He lives here. That’s why we are so richly blessed.”

Does God live in your home? Does it have a spiritual atmosphere? Do the plaques on the wall, the books on the shelves, and the CDs on your stereo announce to those who visit that Christ is central to your home? If you want to have a strong Christian home, your life must revolve around the powerful presence of Jesus Christ.

Our nation will stand strong or feebly fall on the foundation of its homes. If moral and spiritual decay continue to nibble away at the fiber of American family life, then the downfall of the country is approaching rapidly. But if you and I, as believers, will set an example by constantly working to create strong Christian homes for our families, there may be hope for the future.

A little boy asked his busy mother to help him find something to do. So the mother found a large map of the United States on a page in a magazine. With a pair of scissors, she cut up the map into small pieces like a puzzle. Then she gave the pieces and some tape to her son and challenged him to put it together.

The youngster returned in almost no time with the map together. His mother was amazed and said, “Son, how did you get that entire map of the United States together so fast?” The youngster said, “It was easy. On the back of the map was a picture of a family. So I turned it over and started to work. Once I got the family put together, the country turned out just right.”

How true that is! The strength of our nation depends on the strength of our families. Let us be challenged today to work hard to make our houses into homes, where positive Christian values are transmitted from one generation to the next, where friends are welcomed and children are more valuable than furniture, where undesirable pressures are kept out, and where Jesus Christ is kept central! That's how you make a house a home!

