

COMPLETE MY JOY (Philippians 1:27-2:2)

*“Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,²⁸ and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God’s doing.²⁹ For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—³⁰ since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,² **make my joy complete:** be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”* (Phil. 1:27-2:2, RSV)

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION TO THE HUSBANDS AND WIVES, MOTHERS AND FATHERS OF THE DIOCESE OF PHOENIX

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I. Introduction

1. When I consider the blessings that God has bestowed on me in my life, second only to my Baptism into Christ’s family is the blessing of being raised in a faithful and united Catholic family. My parents, Patrick and Helen, committed themselves to God in the vocation to Holy Matrimony, and this provided a stability for me to grow as their son and as a son of God. I, and my brothers and sisters, never worried about their commitment to God, to each other or to us. For this I am eternally grateful. Their motherly and fatherly acceptance of my life, that of my 5 siblings and the common, simple home life that we lived allowed God to form us and prepared us to follow His will.
2. Likewise, throughout my life as a priest, I can say that some of the most meaningful moments are those when God sent me to walk with and minister to families amidst the ups and downs of life. Family is likely where we feel the deepest joys as well as the deepest pain. This is because of the deep love that comes with family; it echoes our deep human need for love. In fact, I am convinced that the priestly work that we spiritual fathers do for the upbuilding of the family is our most important work. I think this more today than ever.
3. So, in this 15th year of my service to you as your bishop, and the 50th anniversary of our founding as a Diocese, I seek in this exhortation to, in a way, visit your home. Throughout this Jubilee Year, I shall be praising God for all of the

husbands and wives, mothers and fathers of the Diocese of Phoenix. Over these past 50 years, countless faithful Catholics have surely attained the goal of their lives--eternal salvation. Credit here is due to the rich mercy of God, to the dedicated priests and religious who have served our Diocese so well, and to you and the many faithful families who have lived--and continue to live--your vocations with generosity and even, at times, heroism.

4. I thank the Lord for each of you. I call upon the Holy Spirit and the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of our Diocese, to assist me in encouraging and challenging you to deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ—Who is the source of hope and love for every vocation. Your taking up this mission in a renewed way during this Year of the Family will do much to *complete my joy* in you as your spiritual father.

How to read this Exhortation

5. I ask that you read through this exhortation prayerfully and slowly, with a listening heart. In this way, you can receive what the Lord has for you, fitting for your own journey and your family's journey. Many of you, though from strong and intact families, have yet to hear family life presented as a beautiful, noble and joy-filled life that can certainly be lived with God's grace. Others of you give thought regularly to your family's mission, and are looking for a challenge; I trust you will find it.
6. I also am keenly aware that for many, the family pain that you experienced, or are experiencing now, has injured the hopes that such happiness in a family could be attainable. Do not be afraid. Great hope remains in Jesus Christ who has overcome the world. If this place of suffering is where you find yourself at this time, you may profit by reading chapter four first, on suffering, sin and healing.

God's Remarkable Plan: Image the Trinity, Domestic Church

7. Let us begin: God has a plan for your good and for your family's healing, renewal and mission. This is not to say that your family life will look at any point like a sales brochure model! It doesn't have to. In fact, to an almost comical degree, simply looking at the people the Bible names in the bloodline of Jesus--the difficult and fractured family situations that God used to give us our Savior--should assure all of us that He in no way sees our family situation as irredeemable.¹ Far deeper than the appearances, God wants to increase a profound communion of love in your family that corresponds to the deepest desires of your hearts.
8. Is this truly possible? Yes. How? Because of *what you are*. I want to remind you here of who and what you are, Catholic families of the Diocese of Phoenix. What you are is beautiful and exciting, at the deepest possible level! And the challenge

to become *what you are even more* is therefore worth our time to discuss, and worth any required sacrifice.

9. A bit of theology is needed here. Theology is pondering God's mystery, the truth he reveals about Himself. St. John Paul II, in his magnificent 1981 exhortation to the Christian family, *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, reminded all of us that "the family has the mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love," and so become "a living reflection of, and a real sharing in God's love."² Through the family, husband and wife -and any children God gives them - are a living image or icon of the Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity!
10. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI makes this point even more explicitly when he says, "God is Trinity. The human family is, in a certain sense, the icon of the Trinity because of the love between its members and the fruitfulness of that love."³ As the concrete image of God to the world, every family - *your family*- is, by its nature, a communion of love and life.
11. When the world's coldness, monotony, or malevolence cause other people to wonder—as they now often do—whether God exists at all, where has He placed the clearest sign that He is indeed present, and that He is love? He placed it in the family, man and woman united in life-long marriage, bringing the child, a fruit of their love or foster/adoptive generosity, into their little community, growing love in the world, growing visible light to counter the darkness.
12. To this awe-inspiring truth--that the little icon of the family images the Trinitarian God in a unique way--we can add this: *the Christian family is also the littlest living cell of the Church—the domestic church, in fact*. This is another indicator of your dignity and the adventure of your mission! Your home is, and is called to grow, as an outpost of the mission of the Church militant on earth, in union and service with your parish. "Thus, the little domestic Church, like the greater Church, needs to be constantly and intensely evangelized: hence its duty regarding permanent education in the faith...the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates...the future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of the home."⁴

Enemy of God, Enemy of the Family

13. If this is "natural" for a Christian family, then why is it so hard? Here we run into a real difficulty, and another mystery: the mystery of sin and evil. Before they fell, love was easy for our first parents, Adam and Eve, but after falling to the temptation to try to be gods themselves, love became hard—and love remains hard in this life. The soil no longer obeys Adam easily, childbirth is a matter of pain for Eve. We face disease, and earthquakes, and bedbugs. Family life exists now on a spiritual battlefield. You have as spouses and parents the choice *either to engage the challenge as an adventure or to abandon the field* in

some way. There is no escape from this choice—not to choose is, in fact, to choose retreat.

14. Satan, the enemy of God and of all of His creation, is profoundly aware of the centrality of the family in God's plan and its irreplaceable role as an icon of the Trinity. We shouldn't be surprised, therefore, that this leader of the evil angels would aggressively target the family with all of his cunning and resources. St. Paul assures us that it is Satan who is behind the great battles that we face, "Our struggle is *not with flesh and blood but with...the evil spirits in the heavens.*" (Ephesians 6:12)
15. Before her death in 2005, Sr. Lucia, one of the three visionaries visited by Our Lady at Fatima, wrote in a letter to Cardinal Carlo Caffarra that "*the final battle between the Lord and the kingdom of Satan will be about Marriage and the Family. Don't be afraid because whoever works for the sanctity of Marriage and the Family will always be fought against and opposed in every way, because this is the decisive issue. Nevertheless, Our Lady has already crushed his head.*"⁵
16. Sister Lucia's words are alarming, but also encouraging. The final war has already been won! Nevertheless, the battle raging around us is real. On every side, and painfully even within our own families, we experience destructive attacks that only a short time ago would have seemed unimaginable.⁶
17. Despite these real challenges, this is not the moment for us to become discouraged or lose heart, for that would be to forget that "*where sin increases, grace abounds all the more,*" (Romans 5:20) and that "*in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*" (Romans 8:38) The breaches in the civilization of love and culture of life are many, but they call us not to despair. Rather, they challenge us to unflagging trust in the Lord and Giver of life, to radical reliance on God's grace and mercy, and to personal engagement in the domestic church on behalf of love and life.

II. The Nature of the Family: a Garden and not a Jungle

18. I am a farmer's son. Planting and harvesting illustrates nature very well. Hence, I begin this section on the family's nature with this story.
19. A wise teacher once had one of his young students over to his home. Among the topics they discussed was nature and the human soul. The young student was immovable on his argument that young people grow up best when left to their own decisions, and that parents and society were to blame for the sorry state of the individual in the country. Knowing that they were at an impasse in the discussion, the philosopher changed subjects. "Would you like to see my garden?"

Knowing his teacher to be a cultured man, the student immediately agreed. The philosopher opened his home's back door and they stepped out to view the "garden". What greeted their eyes was a disheveled yard filled with weeds, overgrown trees, spider webs and piled leaves. It was a picture of neglect.

"What do you think?" asked the philosopher.

"Garden?" replied the student. "This is a mess!"

"Just like the uncultivated soul, my young friend."

20. The Church will always uphold a demonstrable fact that, in our time, has become a point of controversy: *the family has a nature*; that is, it has a given meaning, structure and goal. Like a rosebush or a rhinoceros, and even more like a garden, the family *does not invent*, but *receives* its God-given reality as a gift—that which it tends toward when it has the conditions necessary for thriving.⁷ The structure is, from Creation until now, man and woman covenantally bound by vows for the sake of their own good and for the sake of any children who come forth from their "one flesh" union. The married couple's family home is a life- and love-giving center in the world for as long as they both shall live, all the way to their Heavenly home.
21. Why is the family such a big deal? People in other periods of history would have answered, "What a silly question." Not anymore. The nature of the family must be explained and defended because this question is now being asked regularly, and answered badly. Simply put, the family is a big deal because it is the God-given and natural "soil" meant for each new child's growth.
22. Back to human basics for a moment. When it comes to the deep question of God's will for the procreation of new human life, the Catholic Church has been entrusted with a profound insight into the beautiful mystery and meaning of marriage. In the marital embrace, husband and wife entrust to one another the reproductive matter needed to form new human life; sperm from the man, egg from the woman, and twenty-three chromosomes from each. But man is a unity of matter and spirit, of body and soul, and only God can create a soul - that immaterial, immortal, spiritual principle in man that gives life and unity to the human body. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states (#366), "The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God – it is not "produced" by the parents – and also that it is immortal." The soul is not some by-product of material evolution, nor is it "produced" somehow by the joining of sperm and egg, it is "*created* immediately by God." By joining a spiritual soul to the biological material provided by mom and dad, God brings a new human person into existence!
23. This person, hidden and awaited and awaiting birth, lives, on average, nine months of vulnerability, a vulnerability in many ways shared by his or her mother. This little person is entirely dependent on the generous readiness of

others to “make space” for his life. During and after birth, unlike other animal young who often are physically capable of a certain independence within minutes or hours, humans remain very fragile. For years we are very dependent creatures! Childhood is a lengthy process requiring the nurturing of abiding patience, protection, and readiness to “make space” for another on the part of the mother. And here we come to the first crux of the family matter: who has made space for her to be a mother?

24. As one family advocate has put it, “At the birth of a child, a mother is usually close by. The question is, ‘where is the father?’”⁸ The nature of the family, into which each human being is vulnerably conceived, vulnerably born, and vulnerably raised, is clearly seen here to require more than biological motherhood and fatherhood; a secondary protective reality which speaks to our dignity as persons and which today requires the full voice and effort of the Church to uphold: marriage.
25. Marriage is then at the foundation of our consideration of the nature of the family. There may be an objection at this point. “Wait, we were talking about nature. Marriage is just a social construction, isn’t it?” I answer only that marriage, the social and personal event of the joining of a man and woman’s life for the purpose of establishing a family, appears in every known society throughout history. *Man and woman, by their very nature, are social beings.* We are forced to object to the existence of society itself if we object to the natural and smallest society we call marriage. Marriage, the foundation of the little society of the family, appears in human history everywhere society is found. In other words, marriage is a healthy sign of natural human life. In the original garden of our first parents, marriage appears. In human history, anywhere marriage is thriving and garden-like, society is strong. When marriage becomes jungle-like, society suffers.
26. Therefore, the Church refers to the family, based on marriage, as the “fundamental cell of society.” Society is the living body, of which the smallest living part is the cell called the family. We should not be surprised, then, that in societies where the family is flourishing, the common good thrives as well. A body with the clear majority of its cells functioning well will be a strong body, with its immune system ready for the dangers of the world. A body with too many weakened and vulnerable cells is dying.

Beyond Mere Survival: The Family’s Nature is Love

27. Beyond the survival of the species and the society, though, the family is the irreplaceable center of love and of life. The nature of human beings is to need love as well as life! Love is not optional. What is love? The word love has suffered from a certain overgrowth of confusion in the English language, like the philosopher’s neglected garden. It is a bit of a mess and needs a good pruning to be seen for the garden that it is. St Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, defined the word love this way, “Love is willing the good of the other.” This definition is

simple, profound and very helpful. Love is one person willing the best, the good, for another, for the other's sake. Let us not be afraid to prune that which is confused and overgrown.

Marital Love is Free, Total, Faithful and Fruitful

28. From this simple definition, "Love is willing the good of the other," let us now look at the love specific to marriage which, well-lived, spills over into the children, the extended family, and the surrounding community. The words of the Catholic marriage rite beautifully express four qualities of marital love: *free, total, faithful and fruitful*.
29. This revisitation of a wedding, dear married couples and those of you called to marriage, I hope will resound in its beauty, its profound meaning, and its call to be vulnerable to this love and to avoid the deadly state the Sacred Scriptures call *hardness of heart*. "To love at all is to be vulnerable," wrote CS Lewis.⁹ This is why real love can cause awe and even a paralyzing fear. Love is risky! Is it really necessary to take such risks? Yes. For the alternative to the risk of love is self-enclosed hell. Lewis's striking passage on love continues:

"...Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."

30. Do not be afraid of love! We need love in all of its necessary vulnerability and sacrifice because we are made in the image of Love itself! In the story of creation found in Genesis 1, we read:

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply..."

31. Love is the *natural language* inscribed in our bodies and souls, made male and female. The male body and soul is created to complement the female body and soul at all levels—biological, psychological, and spiritual—and vice-versa.

32. At the key moment of the Catholic marriage ceremony, in front of God and their invited family and friends (who represent the whole world), the priest or deacon, official witness for the Church, asks the man and the woman to publicly assent to three important questions, which contain the four fundamental qualities of authentic marital love.
33. The first is this: “Have you come here to enter Marriage *without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?*”
34. “Are you truly *free?*” the Church is asking, and, “Are you here in front of this altar of sacrifice--willing to give a *total* gift of yourself to this other person?” The man and the woman reply, “Yes.”
35. This love requires your freedom, your free willing of the good for your spouse! And it requires your total gift, holding nothing back out of fear. It requires that you consider this promise irrevocable, never to be taken back despite the inevitable challenges that accompany love in a fallen world.
36. The second question speaks to *faithfulness*: “Are you prepared, as you follow the path of Marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?” The man and woman each reply, “I am.”
37. True love is *faithful*. Living this faithfulness requires a constant exercise of “willing the good of the other” in marriage such that a powerful force in the world is increased. St. John Chrysostom said, “The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together.” Therefore, the Church and wise nations and communities recognize and support *even at great cost* the need for families to be based on marriage, the committed, life-long covenantal bond with all of its necessary rights and duties.
38. Think here of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Contemplating with awe and gratitude the mystery of a God who is eternally and reliably a fire of never-ending love, we best understand the nature of marital love and the demands that flow from it. Would there be “cheating” among the members of the Trinity? Obviously not, and therefore the marital covenant which images the Trinity must be faithful through all the storms of life. Can we imagine a “breakup” of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Certainly not, and therefore a valid, sacramental marriage is indissoluble. Nothing but death can break the bond of such a marriage. Would the three Divine Persons opt for sterility, or does their love bear constant and abundant fruit? Hence marital love requires the rejection of any chosen option for sterility, whether it be contraception use or surgical sterilization.
39. This brings us to the third question of intent. The priest or deacon asks, “Are you prepared to accept *children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church?*” “I am,” the man and woman each reply.

40. Love is *fruitful*. Usually, though not in every case, acts of sexual intercourse proper only to marriage give rise eventually to the gift of children.
41. Despite the cultural propaganda against children being a good for their parents, those who experience children learn that what the Second Vatican Council beautifully stated is true: “Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and education of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their parents’ welfare.”¹⁰

The Natural Good of Parental Authority

42. You, Mom and Dad, have the God-given gift and responsibility of exercising authority in service of your children. The fourth commandment, “Honor your father and mother,” clearly speaks to children as owing honor to their parents and, while still children, obeying their authority. Do not be afraid to exercise this important role, which despite mockery and dismissal in Western culture remains your vital task and honor. God gave you children so that you would truly receive them as His gift, love them and discipline them for their own good. Your judicious, patient, loving and determined exercise of authority is a protection of your children, a key gravity-center in their education, which requires a readiness to obey legitimate authority. The word “obey” is derived from the Latin verb meaning “to listen”—and you are uniquely equipped, simply by being their parents, to teach your children to listen. They take their first and most important cues from you on what is wise or foolish, worthy or unworthy, sinful or beneficent, beautiful, true and good.
43. In a remarkably practical and strong address to fathers and mothers toward the end of the 4th Century,¹¹ the bishop St. John Chrysostom compares a child in a remarkable way to a walled city with five gates. These five gates are the child’s five senses. Perhaps this metaphor is as relevant today, even more so, than in times before the Internet was surrounding parents. Fathers and mothers are the regents of the city, keeping close vigilance over each gate, encouraging the “traffic” of the good to leave and enter through the mouth, the eyes, the ears, the skin and the sense of smell. Parents also must be diligent in ruling out the bad, keeping the child free from harmful teaching, example and experience. In a single, vivid image, the bishop captures the irreplaceable nature of your authority and educational task.

The Family Home: Natural Center of Education and Prayer

44. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and selfless service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and

self-mastery—the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones.”¹²

45. To educate comes from the Latin word meaning “to lead out.” Parents are called, and by the nature of their relationship to their children, have a unique ability, to lead their children out of self-absorption into the happiness of self-control and the ability to make a self-gift of love for others. Fathers and mothers “are teachers because they are parents.” And even when you delegate your educational role, in part, to capable professional teachers and schools, it remains your role to be the primary educators of your child, especially in the areas of faith, virtue and prayer.
46. I constantly thank God for my Mom and Dad, and for our home where prayer was as normal as breathing. There were crucifixes in our bedrooms and the Last Supper on the wall next to our dining room table. On the dresser in my parents’ bedroom were statues of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, along with a candle to be lit before evening prayer and enough rosaries for each of us—the dresser served like a household altar around which we knelt every evening to pray. By going to Confession together as a family, every two weeks, I learned how God’s mercy restored peace and made it possible for each of us to forgive and receive forgiveness. The Lord’s Day was marked by Mass together, plus a meal and fun activities with other relatives and friends.
47. The family—including your family—is the irreplaceable center of life and love for the world and the Church. In fact, and this remains the most neglected and urgent of facts, “The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.”¹³ No matter what challenges you face in your family in living God’s plan, the Lord has more grace in store than you can imagine. The nature of the family is a gift and a calling to life and love. We might pause here and take a breath, a deep breath, pondering the mission this implies, God’s call to the free-will of every person whose vocation is marriage and family! Yes, an adventurous mission awaits you in your family life. Let us now look at this mission.

III. The Mission of Every Christian Family

48. Having looked at the nature of the family, marriage, and marital love we can now look at the family’s *mission*. When family life is lived in accord with the dignity inherent to it, it heals and re-evangelizes the Body of Christ so that the light of Christ can shine forth to all peoples. This again, is because the family reflects the love of the Holy Trinity: “The family has the *mission* to guard, reveal and communicate love”¹⁴ – the love of the Trinity and Christ’s love for the Church.
49. This mission is carried out by fathers being *fathers*, by mothers being *mothers*, by sons being *sons*, and by daughters being *daughters*. St. John Paul II did not

say “Family, do what you are” or “Family, strive to make yourselves a family.” Rather, he said “Family, become what you *are*”: Family allow your nature as a communion of love to grow, develop, mature, and overflow into the world with a generosity of life and joy. Living “*in a manner worthy of the call you have received*” (Eph. 4:1) depends firstly upon accepting that calling from God.

50. “Your mission, should you choose to accept it...” begins the drama of every *Mission Impossible* film. Do you accept your mission, Mom and Dad? Unlike the films, this mission is very possible, though difficult; like the films, you must personally accept the mission.

Your Marriage, Centered on Jesus Christ

51. But marriage is hard! Those who glimpse the plan that God has for marriage may well agree with the words of G.K. Chesterton when he said, “it is not that Christianity has been tried and found lacking; it is that it has been found difficult and left untried.” No matter our vocation, these words ring true! It is often thought that faithful, chaste, committed, life-long married love is just too difficult. As your shepherd, I want you to remember the angel’s message to Mary, whose unique mission in history likely sounded impossible when she heard it, “*nothing will be impossible for God.*” (Lk. 1:37)
52. As disciples of Jesus, you can always rely on Him to instruct and guide you. A marriage that is truly Christ-centered will stay with Him who says, “*learn from Me*” (Matthew 11:29) and to the Father who says, “*Listen to Him.*” (Mk 9:7) Even as God tells His disciples these things, He knows that this love will continually need to be learned and relearned. As you spouses, year by year, come to Him in personal prayer, Mass and the other Sacraments, say to Jesus, “Teach me and guide me in the way You want me to love my spouse and my family.” I don’t mean this in a general way. The Holy Spirit *will guide you specifically to love the unique members of your family* “until the hour when we stand before [God]... Saints among the Saints in the halls of heaven.”¹⁵

Blessings of a Chaste Life

53. A word now on the pivotal virtue of chastity in your life. A healthy marriage is *impossible* without *marital chastity*. This cannot be overestimated. A healthy and holy marriage without chastity is as likely as a healthy garden without sunlight. No chance.
54. Chastity is *not celibacy* within marriage. No, the act of sexual intercourse that makes a husband and wife “one flesh” and is ordered to bringing new human persons into our world is a *great good*. Chastity in marriage means self-control in sexuality, a freedom to steer one’s sexual desires and actions lovingly, so that in sex you “will the good of each other.” Chastity actually liberates true sexual love! It opposes the slavery caused by its opposite vice: lust. Chaste sexual love

refuses to do anything that is lustful. The chaste couple can live their sexual relationship beautifully.

55. What does this mean concretely? First, do no harm to this act, which is meant to renew your wedding vows. Refuse to allow pornography, contraception, or any fantasy mentality to turn this act into an experience of using each other, rather than loving each other. The opposite of “willing the good of your spouse” is “using your spouse as an object for self-gratification.” Do not give any quarter to this temptation.
56. Proactively, to grow your sexual relationship in a loving way, communicate well with each other—frankly, patiently and readily. Be quick to forgive each other for thoughtless hurts and even sins. Spend time, good time, together cultivating the garden of all areas of your intimacy: your verbal communication, your care for each other’s needs of affection, your time just to be together. These areas of intimacy till the soil of the garden of your love and spill over into a meaningful sexual relationship. Your children, too, will be deeply blessed by this resulting closeness.
57. If you sin in this area, never despair! Get to Confession quickly, and quickly forgive your spouse. Then, begin again. Chastity grows by God’s grace and renewed effort toward self-mastery and freedom. This “self-mastery is a long and exacting work. One can never consider it acquired once and for all.”¹⁶ Major strides can be made with the combined help of the Sacraments, growth in prayer together as a couple, accompaniment of trusted friends, insights from wise experts and complete surrender to Jesus with the intercession of His Mother, St. Joseph and all the saints.

Openness to New Life

58. I rejoice in the fatherly teaching of Pope St. Paul VI in his 1968 letter *On Human Life (Humanae Vitae)* where he courageously and prophetically upholds the dignity of husband, wife and child in accord with God’s loving designs. This encyclical, published the year before we became a diocese, remains as relevant as ever.
59. The disaster invited by theologians, bishops, priests and laity who rejected Pope St. Paul VI’s letter is upon us. *Enough!* What further evidence do we need to see that the Sexual Revolution’s divisions: sexual pleasure separated from procreation, sexuality from marriage, man from woman in divorce, woman from child in abortion, youth from the hope that love can be faithful and beautiful, the elderly from children who can care for them at life’s end—are a plague of misery on a scale never known before? *Enough!* Husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, you are called to have great hearts here, counter-cultural and brave. You

can build something better, freer, more generous, and nobler, beginning in your own home.

60. Love and openness to life go together in the marital act. Contracepting this unity on purpose, by any means including surgical sterilization, is inviting a poison into your marriage. Do not refuse the gift of a new child into your home, into God's family, into the history of the world, with a soul meant for eternal life. Your own heart will grow in virtue and in the capacity for love, which is the real meaning of your life.
61. At times, a couple discerns, prayerfully and thoughtfully, a just reason to postpone pregnancy for a time or even an indefinite period. The Church recognizes and encourages here the exercise of *responsible parenthood*. "The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgement in sight of God."¹⁷ Having a large family *is also responsible*, and the Church rejoices in this sometimes heroic decision of a married couple, but there can be times when justice and love call for a postponement. What is a couple to do then? This is where the science and discipline of Natural Family Planning are so helpful. Modern methods of NFP, readily available thanks to many dedicated laypeople in our diocese, are reliable, relationship-building tools. There is also a challenge with NFP. Specifically, NFP requires periodic abstinence from the marital act.
62. *Periodic abstinence from the marital act does not mean periodic abstinence from love!* In fact, at times abstinence is a requirement of love in a marriage. Abstinence is an opportunity to learn to love each other in a myriad of other ways. In fact, respecting the God-designed cycle of fertility reliably strengthens the marital relationship with the benefits of self-control, understanding and mutual respect. Is this a challenge? Certainly. Does it involve suffering? Yes, at times. Yet as the saints show us, suffering, well-lived and offered to God, brings surprising joy. More about this in section IV.
63. The suffering of temporary or even permanent infertility should be mentioned here. This particular cross is among the heaviest for a couple, and the temptation to access illicit technological means to conceive a child, such as *in vitro* fertilization, can be intense. But this grasping at life causes further harm, is intrinsically evil, and must not be used. It violates the equal dignity of the child, who, like his parents, is always a gift and not a means to some other end; nor is he a "product" to be purchased. I highly recommend Natural Procreative Technology (NAPRO), developed at the Paul VI Institute, for moral medical means of increasing the natural possibilities of conception, and assuring that the nature of child as gift from God is respected.

64. The fundamental issue here is *trust*. Trusting God in all things, including His care for the needs of your family and each child that blesses your home with his or her arrival, is at the heart of your family's mission.

Masculine and Feminine Difference Matters

65. Masculinity and femininity in the family are part of God's remarkable plan. Man and woman image God together, and His plan is for both motherhood and fatherhood to thrive in the family. While it is popular to speak of "parenting" in a vague way, this 20th Century neologism is not terribly helpful. Both women and men are parents, but while they may perform some of the same tasks, they *are not generic contributors* to the child's welfare. Ryan T. Anderson states, referring to the mountain of corresponding sociological evidence available, "There's no such thing as parenting in the abstract; there's mothering and there's fathering, and children do best with both."¹⁸

A Mother's Particular Gifts to the Family

66. Let us consider first the love of a wife and mother. Husbands and children need the unique feminine gifts that can only come from the one who is wife and mother in the family.
67. Scripture, in many ways, acknowledges the godliness of maternal love. In the prophecy of Isaiah, God's love is compared to that of a mother when the Lord says, "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you." (Is. 66:13)
68. To know the women saints is to know that these great saints and doctors of the Church have given witness to what is now called the "feminine genius." Here I wish to present to you the heroic example and thought of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, whose pursuit of truth and love led her to conversion to Christ and to martyrdom in the Auschwitz concentration camp. A brilliant philosopher, Teresa Benedicta contemplated God's design for femininity remarkably. In a simple and profound sentence, she wrote, "a woman's soul is fashioned as a shelter in which other souls may unfold."
69. St. Teresa Benedicta also wrote, "Woman naturally seeks to embrace that which is living, personal, and whole. To cherish, guard, protect, nourish and advance growth is her natural, maternal yearning."¹⁹ This uniquely feminine way of seeing the wholeness of the human person is a great gift, not only to the family, but to the world. By the presence of these uniquely feminine gifts of nurturing and relationality, a woman can be a 'spiritual mother' even if she does not have children of her own. If the destiny of our lives is an eternal relationship of love in the Most Holy Trinity, the wisdom of feminine love is an essential witness in

family life. As Proverbs says, “reject not your mother’s teaching; a graceful diadem will they be for your head; a pendant for your neck.” (Prov. 1:8-9)

70. Dear daughters in Christ, the worth, dignity and genius inherent to you is irreplaceable in your family.
71. Ask the Lord for all the grace you need to live out your calling to holiness. Only you can offer your husband the respect that St. Paul speaks of in his letter to the Ephesians. Only you can offer the motherly love your children need. We know this even more convincingly now as recent psychological research indicates that the mother alone has the power to truly comfort and stabilize a child, especially during the first years of a child’s life.²⁰
72. I have here a challenge for you and your husband, which I offer knowing you will have to consider, in some cases, remarkable sacrifice. Be at home while your children are young. Where possible, put other work off during this time of necessary imbalance when your children need most to absorb your motherly presence and the unconditional love you more naturally provide. This time goes so quickly, and once gone, cannot be recaptured. Never doubt that there is no greater “job” in all the world than to be the first to form and nurture the mind, heart and soul of your child.
73. G.K. Chesterton, the famous English writer and convert, wrote memorably of your irreplaceable role: *“To be Queen Elizabeth within a definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labours, and holidays; (...) to be Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals, manners, theology, and hygiene; I can imagine how this can exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it. How can it be a large career to tell other people about the Rule of Three, and a small career to tell one's own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone and narrow to be everything to someone? No, a woman's function is laborious, but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute.”*
74. Your prayers also carry a special weight before Him who answered His own mother’s concerns at the Wedding in Cana. Only you can love your own children from the full depth of your feminine heart. God has willed it so.

A Father’s Mission in the Family

75. Husbands and fathers, you too have an irreplaceable mission. There is a security and stability that only you can give your family. This will only bless your family to the extent that you fulfill your role as provider, protector and spiritual leader.²¹
76. As lead (if not sole) provider of the income needed to sustain the family, you shoulder a burden that frees your wife to be present to you and to your children, particularly when they are young. Sacrifices of the larger home, the extra vehicle or vacation are *nothing* compared to the precious gift of your children having their mother's presence to them in the home. Do all you can to assure this, or to move in this direction in close dialogue with your wife. Some of you, I know, sacrifice more than luxuries. I commend you. Pray that as your spiritual father I will match your level of sacrifice for the children God has entrusted to me. Some of you husbands are suffering through unemployment or job insecurity at this time. Trust in God; seek good friendships of men who can come alongside you, and take necessary steps to provide even if outside your normal field for a time. I am praying for you.
77. You are also the primary protector of your family. What does this mean? It means you are the sea-wall against the storms that threaten from inside and outside. While your wife's attention is more naturally focused on the relationships within and around the family, yours naturally is drawn to threats. This is a gift to your family. Protect them, Dad! These threats take various forms: of special note at this time in history, the threat of overuse of technology and the always evil problem of pornography come to mind. Do what you must to protect the precious time, peace, unity and healthy imaginations of your family. Your denying a smart-phone to a teenager is no sin—any suffering from an unpopular decision now will be repaid a hundred-fold by a grateful adult son or daughter down the road, and even if not then, in Heaven. Other threats, known better to you than to me, are your responsibility as well, along with positive encouragement toward new, healthy experiences, challenging opportunities of charity, service and work, and even encouraging risks for personal growth. All this you deeply impact as a father.
78. I know well that the third dimension, spiritual leadership, is often the most difficult. Yet, God will in no way fail to give you the grace to enter this place of spiritual battle within yourself and on behalf of your family. Your steadiness in maintaining the grace of weekly Mass and the sacraments, your growth in disciplined prayer and your pursuit of deeper personal conversion throughout your life provide an indelible lesson in spiritual leadership. This indeed, along with your love for your wife and care for your children, will be the best of fatherly gifts.

79. St. Paul twice tells fathers not to provoke their children, but to “bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:4) He writes this *immediately before he gives his most forceful teaching to us about spiritual warfare*. Your presence and encouragement build your son or daughter in a uniquely masculine way and make a stunningly powerful difference in their lives and faith.²² When you as fathers affirm your sons in word and deed and time together, you are giving the authoritative pronouncement of their goodness so that they can live confidently as beloved sons without trying to find their ultimate meaning in the things of the world. When your daughter is affirmed as good, beautiful and precious by you, the most important man in her life, she will be confident and well-equipped to say no to the false flattery of the world that so often fails to see her true dignity, value and worth.

80. In your renewed determination to live your masculine mission as provider, protector and spiritual leader of your home, you will often have setbacks and moments of doubt. We all do! Stay the course. Lean in to St. Joseph, the husband and foster-father who faced difficulty after difficulty in providing for protecting and leading his holy family. Ask him to intercede for you whenever you do not see the path ahead clearly. He is the “Protector of the Holy Family” and the “Terror of Demons.” He knows your struggle and is a great saint of prayer.

Faith Formation and Human Formation of Children

81. Your domestic church, as you continue to grow, educates your children powerfully. This begins when families introduce their young children to Jesus in the Eucharist. I want to especially encourage you to bring your young children to Mass. Your presence is wanted and needed among us in the family of the Church. While the squirming or crying of children may seem bothersome, these certainly do not block your reception of God’s grace. “If the Church is not crying, it is dying.” Present at Mass during these early years, your children are learning the rhythm of relationship with the Lord and His Church.

82. As children get older, it is important for parents to consider the best way to intentionally bring them up in the faith so that they take part in the mission to “guard, reveal and communicate love.”²³ Of course, to take part in this mission, your children must first have known and experienced that love themselves. This will happen by way of prayer, liturgy, the sacraments, catechesis, retreats and family customs.

83. Here I offer three considerations to you parents to take up in prayer. First, how your children will *understand* the faith. Second, how they will *experience* God's love. And, third, how they will see the faith in the *witness* of others.

84. The propaganda of atheism has made great inroads in sowing doubt in our young people, even as young as elementary school age. Atheistic arguments often include the idea that somehow science has disproved religion as simply superstitious and even a cause of more harm than good. Sadly, we have often failed to proclaim the faith in a credible way, which further allows these errors to gain traction. I assure you that these arguments are no match for the sound intellectual tradition that is ours. It is the mission, not just of the clergy, but also the domestic church to understand and communicate these truths. The family should be a place where young people work these questions out and are encouraged to engage the faith. A knowing faith is a strong faith.

85. Our faith also entails an encounter. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI famously said, "being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."²⁴ Have you encountered Jesus? Are your children convinced that they have encountered Jesus Christ personally? Do they know the Holy Spirit's voice of peace in them in such a way that they can be led by Him? When your children encounter God's love in a true way, they will be able to own their Catholic faith in a more profound way. This happens first and foremost in your family as you are attentive to God's presence and as you are faithful to prayer and the sacraments. In addition, the various youth retreats and school activities that give young people Christian experiences can play a vital role in ensuring that young people have the encounter with Christ and so be His disciple.

86. Finally, quite often the faith of a young person is invited to greater depth by the example of others. You parents are, of course, the first examples. The families and friends that your children spend time with will also make a tremendous difference. The words of Pope St. Paul VI remain true, that we listen "more willingly to witnesses than to teachers."²⁵ Young people, upon seeing the witness of others, especially peers and those just older than them, can be encouraged to step beyond a private notion of the faith and be the encouragement for others. How hard it is for a young person to live the faith alone. Here I encourage the many ways families get together to support and build each other up in faith.²⁶

A Word for Parents Whose Children have Strayed

87. I wish here to speak directly to those of you whose children, for one reason or another, have strayed from the faith. I am one of you! As a spiritual father, I

know the pain of watching the children leave the fold. The remarkable life of a heroic saint can help us here. Though St. Monica lived over 1,600 years ago, her witness is as relevant as ever. She, out of love for her son, Augustine, prayed unceasingly for over 20 years for his conversion from sin and error.

88. I encourage you to imitate the faith and persevering trust of St. Monica. While it may be difficult and, at times, tempt you to despair, I encourage you with the words of a faithful bishop upon seeing her great prayer, "it is not possible that the son of these tears should perish."²⁷ Not only did he not perish, St. Augustine became one of the Doctors of the Church. In addition to your prayer, your abiding love and support for them is also invaluable. Teaching will likely have to come from someone else once they are adults, however; St. Monica is said to have been told by the bishop, St. Ambrose, "Speak less to Augustine about God and more to God about Augustine."

The Family's Mission to Extended Family Members, Friends, the Church and Society

89. As you take care of each and every member among you in the ups and downs of life, you witness to Christ before the world. This happens ordinarily as you welcome children into the world with unconditional love. This is done in an extraordinary and particularly beautiful way when families give witness to love by accepting children with special needs of any kind and, if called by God, by opening your home to foster and adopted children in need of love and care.

90. The elder generation occupies a crucial place in families. As Pope Francis reminds us, "grandparents have a capacity to understand the most difficult situations: a great ability – and when they pray for these situations, their prayer is strong. It is powerful." This is indeed a treasure for the family. When special care is required for those who are elderly, the family is challenged to offer more in service and personal attention. This too is a great lesson and even a source of peace for the young, especially if it entails the spiritual care and affection given up to the moment the Lord calls their loved one home. This continues in the prayer and funeral rites offered for the deceased.

91. Beyond the family, neighbors, friends, the single and lonely can all be served as *the family exercises the badly needed gift of hospitality* and witnesses, in the unique and privileged setting of the home, to charity and respect that comes with a family centered on God. To the extent you are able, reach out to those around you that have need of a welcome. Hospitality in the domestic church is a true front in the New Evangelization of our contemporaries.

92. Finally, there are some among you who have been blessed with tremendous marriages, stories of healing and God's grace, virtuous openness to life, and charisms for teaching and accompanying other couples and families. You are disciples of Christ, precisely as married couples living the truth of the domestic church, and are called to become apostles to other families within your parish or in other key areas of evangelization. I urge you to greater involvement in the marriage and family apostolate which takes many forms. It is the natural course in the Church that disciples are called to be apostles! Your marriage and family are strong in this time for a reason—and that reason may be to help others on that path to holiness as *missionaries to other couples and families*.²⁸

IV. Suffering, Sin and Healing

93. While each family is created by God to mirror His own love and to share in His very life, the entrance of sin into the world damaged this original intention and everywhere threatens the strength and stability of the family. Each and every family, without exception, feels the burden of sin and its consequences. However, the suffering caused by sin, when united to Christ, becomes redemptive and can be the source of indescribable grace in the sanctification and salvation of your families.

94. Society would tell us that suffering is an evil to be avoided at all costs, even if that avoidance results in sin. But our faith tells us this is not true.²⁹

Types of Suffering in the Family

95. Original sin is a partial cause of particular sufferings for the family, including infertility, sickness, disability, and death. I know that families struggle in their care for ailing children, spouses, and aging grandparents. I see when parents feel deeply the suffering of a handicapped child. There are many who long for a child but cannot have one of their own. Family members grieve deeply when a child or parent is prematurely called home.

96. Another kind of suffering is felt through the collective sin of the culture of death. I realize that it is a very real and difficult struggle for parents to raise faithful, spiritually confident children in a society steeped in sins against life and authentic love: where abortion is rampant and support for euthanasia grows, where despair and the violence it breeds explode in schools and neighborhoods, where consumerism and materialism enslave, where pornography invades every

formerly safe and sacred aspect of life, where increasing numbers of children are encouraged to question their sexual identity in the wake of the lie of gender ideology,³⁰ and where the damaging and perverse homosexual lifestyle is not only accepted but celebrated. Families of faith, the Church desires to be your support and guide as you navigate daily life in the hostility of the post-modern climate.

97. Where the clergy and even elevated shepherds of the Church have failed you in this, I am truly sorry. In this time of upheaval in our Church, when stories of abuse and cover-up remind us of the devastation of sin even within the most sacred of institutions, know that I share your anger and pain—whether you have been directly or indirectly affected by such violations of vows and trust. This is a tremendous cross and one we carry together, with Christ.
98. Today, nearly all families live in a world of extreme busyness, where countless activities—even good and wholesome ones—sap energy and time and leave families drained and disconnected. The legitimate need to provide materially for the family is, for some of you, another source of suffering. Increasingly, mothers find themselves nearly forced to spend more time outside the home to help provide for the family. Exhaustion can lead to difficulty in being not only physically present but also emotionally available to the family. Single parents especially may find themselves stretched to the limits of their emotional, physical, and material capability. Military families struggle with prolonged absences and long stretches of anxiety and loneliness.
99. A related suffering comes from the excessive use of technology. Increasingly, preoccupation with media finds families *exchanging a relational existence for a virtual one*. Addiction to screens severs the bonds of intimacy and love in the inner circle of the family. Loneliness breeds loneliness. Left alone, even while home together, family members may find themselves turning more and more to shallow entertainment. Children and parents are left lonely in their own homes.
100. St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta challenges us: “Do you know the poor of your own home first? Maybe in your home there is somebody who is feeling lonely, very unwanted, very handicapped. Maybe your husband, your wife, or your child is lonely. Do you know that? Today we have no time even to look at each other, to talk to each other, to enjoy each other... And so less and less we are in touch with each other. The world is lost for want of sweetness and kindness. People are starving for love because everybody is in such a great rush.”³¹

The Suffering of Sin

101. The sin of one family member upon another may be the greatest of sufferings within the family. Abuse inflicts unspeakable hurt and takes many forms, whether verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual. Unhealed wounds can bleed into relationships in the home and prolong pain for generations. Addiction dissolves the ability to love freely and creates chaos in family life. Divorce, while socially acceptable and often mistakenly encouraged, can leave in its wake injured spouses, traumatized children, and broken homes. This is a type of suffering few acknowledge, and abandoned spouses and the children of a divorce are often silenced by social shame.³² Fatherlessness in particular is an epidemic which has scarred the souls of millions of children, whose hearts echo the cry of Jesus on the Cross, “*Why have you abandoned me?*” Even within otherwise strong and intact marriages, there will be hurt stemming from selfishness, misunderstandings, and lack of charity. I hear this in confessions, and in communications from many of you.
102. Be on guard against the lies that the ‘father of lies,’ who preys upon hurting souls, would speak into these wounds. He is our enemy, and when we are hurt his voice speaks of resentment, fury, revenge. This is not God’s voice or his will. Forgiveness is key to remedying the wounds here. Forgiveness, is an important step in the process of healing, and sets us free from the pain, resentment, and anger that can enslave us when we hold hurts too tightly. *Forgiveness is not primarily a feeling, instead it is a choice*—a choice to extend God’s merciful love to someone who has hurt you, in obedience to Jesus (Matt 6:14-15) who not only taught us about forgiveness but gave us an example while on the Cross. “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*” (Luke 23:34)

The Strength to Suffer Well

103. It is strange. One hundred and twenty years ago, toothaches were awful. Life expectancy was two-thirds what it is today. Physically, we now suffer less than any people in human history. We have Ibuprofen and Novocain. But there may be more family suffering than any other time in human history. This results in a gradual erosion of the ability to suffer well. Suicide rates, even among the young, indicate this. In a time when we are often able and even encouraged to indulge in every desire, it becomes increasingly difficult to bear with courage and resilience even the smallest sacrifice which love requires.

104. Marriage and family themselves are caught up in the fallenness of the world. They are no escape from the sufferings of life, but in Christ, they are filled with the grace to bear suffering well, and even with joy.

A Future and A Hope

105. Jesus has a plan for your family and His purposes will not be thwarted by sin and brokenness—if you but surrender your hurts to Him in love and trust. “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, plans to give you a future and a hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

106. To look at Jesus on the cross is to realize that He knows our suffering, *from the inside*. Venerable Fulton Sheen wrote: “What do the scars of Christ teach us? They teach us that life is a struggle: that our condition of a final resurrection is exactly the same as His; that unless there is a cross in our lives, there will never be an empty tomb; that unless there is a Good Friday, there will never be an Easter Sunday; that unless there is a crown of thorns, there will never be a halo of light; and that unless we suffer with Him, we shall not rise with Him.”³³

107. We do well to remember the words of St. Paul: “*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed to us.*” (Romans 8:18)

108. God too sees your sufferings, is with you in your pain, and desires that you allow Him to use each ache for your own holiness and the salvation of your families. Suffering can be powerful and redemptive. When it is united to the Cross of Christ, no prayer, no disappointment, no hurt is ever wasted. Every moment of suffering can also be an act of love.

109. When you offer your suffering up to God, He will use it like oil from the press to anoint your family. In this way, you mysteriously but truly participate in the redemption of those whom you love most in the world!

Healing: A God who Restores

110. God, who allows suffering for our redemption, and who suffers with us, also desires to restore to us all that has been lost and broken. Sometimes, what is broken actually becomes stronger when healed. I think of the broken equipment on our family farm, which, after having been repaired with the

welder's torch, *was stronger in the place of welding than ever before*, and would not break in the same place again.

111. Even a marriage or family wounded by rebelliousness, neglect, abuse, or rejection is still a sacramental source of grace and mercy, “albeit a mercy that might entail drawing close to Christ’s own suffering.”³⁴ In times when you may feel that your family is not a perfect icon of the Trinity, take comfort in knowing that there are many ways to image the love of God. Sometimes, that image is the Cross of Christ.
112. Fulton Sheen’s words are convicting: “Even those who have some degree of sanctity find it hard, sometimes, to remain on the cross until the end; the world is full of half-crucified souls who have come down from the cross at the challenge of the world after an hour, after two hours, after two hours and fifty-nine minutes. Few are like the Savior, who will stay until the end that they, like him, might utter the cry of triumph: ‘It is finished.’”³⁵
113. How do we heal when we know our wounded family and we ourselves need it? The sacraments are always mysteries of Jesus’ healing—when we receive them with proper readiness. Confession and the frequent reception of the Eucharist in particular bring healing to our souls. Additionally, prayer by those who have the charism of healing can also bring great physical and spiritual healing. Finally, sometimes we simply need someone to listen and help us see a path forward; this is where wise Catholic counselors and other psychological professionals can be of great service. We have a growing number of such professionals in our Diocese, and I highly recommend seeking out their help when needed.

Louis and Zélie Martin: Sowing a Household of Saints through Suffering

114. The Church lifts up to us the lives of those who have lived heroically the vocations of marriage - and suffering - in order to be an inspiration and source of intercessory power in our own lives. I encourage you to find such an example in the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Louis and Zélie Martin, the first married saints of modern times and the only married couple to be canonized together. Their marriage was rich in suffering, but even richer in love.
115. Saints Louis and Zélie both had desired religious life, he to be a priest, she a nun. Louis, however, was unable to master Latin, and Zélie was turned away from the convent for unexplained reasons. God, in fact, had other plans. When

He revealed that they were called to marriage, they embraced their vocation wholeheartedly and desired to have many children to “bring them up to heaven.”

116. Their marriage would bless the Church in a way far surpassing even their greatest hopes. They would raise five daughters, all destined for the convent, one of whom, Thérèse, would become one of the most beloved saints of all time, a Doctor of the Church, the patron saint of missions, and spiritual mother to millions - even though she died at 24 years of age, never having left the convent after her entrance at the young age of 15. Her *Story of a Soul* reveals that the spirituality of the Little Way which she made famous was really a discovery of the deeper meaning of her own childhood, lived within the circle of the devotion of her family.
117. Married in France in 1858, Louis and Zélie both worked hard as business owners, creating and selling a special lace for which their region was known. They lived modestly and prayerfully, staying close to the sacraments and never missing an opportunity to practice charity to their neighbors and raising their children to do the same.
118. But they knew the suffering of grief intimately. They would bury two infant sons, and thus surrender all their hopes for a priest in the family. Two daughters would also die, one in infancy, one at the age of five, causing Zélie to admit, “I thought I would die myself.”
119. The next sacrifice the Lord asked was that of Zélie’s life—she died of cancer when Thérèse (the youngest), was only four years old. Louis carried on with the help of his older girls. But one by one he would be asked to give them back to God, too, at the door of the convent, even Thérèse, his “Little Queen.” In the end he also would offer a final sacrifice in the form of an illness which took his health, his independence and his mind. At his last painful visit to his Carmelite daughters, Thérèse would never forget her father’s final words to them. Pointing his finger upwards, he exclaimed with great effort, “In heaven!”
120. Indeed, they are in heaven, but still always concerned with the Church militant below. In raising this married couple to the altars, the Church gives them to you, mothers and fathers, as witnesses to the joy of the restorative hope of the Resurrection, to the grace to bear the heaviest crosses, and to the sanctity of marriage and family life.

121. God's generosity knows no bounds. With the simple faith of Thérèse and her parents, surrender all and allow Him to restore your family and marriage to wholeness in the way He knows best.

V. Strengthening Family Life

What, practically speaking, strengthens family life? How is the garden of family life most assuredly planted and cultivated?

Family Plan for Spiritual Life

122. For this 50th Anniversary of our diocese, I have published for your use a companion to this exhortation, a *Family Prayer Guide*. I urge you to use it and grow in family prayer, strengthening your domestic church by opening wide the doors to Jesus Christ. I also entrust to you the following six additional key areas of growth for your marital and family spiritual life, two of which I also emphasized in *Into the Breach*, my apostolic exhortation to men.

Keeping the Lord's Day Holy

123. As your spiritual father, few things give me more joy than when I see fathers and mothers together leading their families to Mass on Sunday. The Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy is the height of the week. If it is not already the case, establish today that "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" (Joshua 24:15) Make Sunday Mass attendance a non-negotiable when it comes to planning the family calendar, even when the family is away on vacation.
124. Here are ways to teach and witness to your children what it means to "*love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength*" by worshipping Him in the Mass with fervor and reverence: (1) Dressing for Mass should reflect the solemnity of the occasion. (2) Arriving for Mass early honors the Lord, in Whose house we are guests, avoiding rush whenever possible, to take the time to thank God in prayer before Mass begins. (3) Showing reverence in front of Jesus, present in the Tabernacle, by genuflecting with love and honor every time you pass in front of Him teaches the truth about His presence. At that moment, we are in the *true presence of the King!* (4) Participating actively in the Mass by prayerful silence, singing and speaking the responses with conviction and fervor, and inviting your children to do the same, teaches them the language of their Mother, the Church.
125. On Sunday, the entire day can and should be lived in a holy way, with prayer and good time together and fun. When Sunday is lived so as to truly become in every Christian home the Lord's Day, a special day to praise Him,

receive Him in the Eucharist, dwell joyfully in His love and with each other as a holy communion of love, I am convinced that the New Evangelization of our tired Christian West will flourish.

Monthly Confession

126. In her Precepts, our Mother Church requires of us to go to confession a minimum of once per year. In some areas of the world, this is difficult to manage, but here we have access to the Sacrament much more often. I encourage you not to settle for minimalism as an individual or as a family. Monthly confession, with parents leading the whole family to the Sacrament, is an indelible memory for a child, and a great aid to the soul.
127. When we are aggravated and fighting in the family, when tempers are short and patience is thin, it is time for a spiritual cleansing. Teach your children to go to confession regularly, once per month, and you will instill in them a habit that will guard their soul throughout their lives. I can think of few other things you can do for them that would have a more lasting positive effect in their lives, and bring peace to your home.

Daily (as often as possible) Family Meal

128. The regular meal together as a family has a certain grace to it, a spiritual gravity and ability to foster discovery of each other over time. One social study found this regular meal to be the number one family habit that led to children's success in school.³⁶ It is hard to imagine a more effective step toward family communion outside the sacraments. St. John Chrysostom, the first saint to teach the "little church" of the home, in a homily speaking to Christian parents about their homes, advised two special places that parents should create: one was a special prayer "table" analogous to where the Scriptures are read in church—the other the family dinner table—analogueous to the altar where the Eucharist is shared. The family meal, as unrushed as possible, is where real encounters happen between parents and children, between siblings and members outside the immediate family.
129. This is one of the reasons Satan is committed to filling up our lives with other things to do. The more busy we make ourselves in giving in to this temptation, the more difficult it will be to sit down to eat as a family. I urge you to resist this. Families need to disconnect from the world's pace, be present to one another and break bread together. If dinner becomes too difficult, consider making breakfast the family meal. It is worth the adjustment, and any sacrifices entailed.

Prioritize Time Together as Spouses

130. Perhaps not initially obvious as part of a plan for spiritual life is the necessity of a regular time away, a date night or other form of consistent time alone together as spouses. *Relationships are built with the material of time*; there is no substitute for good time away together. Recall how in the Gospels, Jesus, though he was God Himself, took regular time away from His disciples to be alone with His Father. As spouses, time away from household tasks and children is a fundamental source of renewal for your marriage.
131. The *type of time away is less important than the commitment to it*; spousal loneliness, which is common in marriage, is denied a foothold as you nurture the love you committed to at the altar. One concrete suggestion; adoration of the Blessed Sacrament as a couple periodically is some of the best time you can spend. The Lord rejoices in your spousal love, He wants it to mature in your hearts as you grow in holiness together.
132. A magnificent additional commitment is an annual weekend retreat as spouses. We priests are required to take a significant annual retreat as a spiritual time away with the Lord. Your vocation is no less important than ours, and planning a retreat together annually will refresh your marital spirituality.

Technology in the Home: Establish Clear Digital Boundaries

133. Without establishing clear boundaries for digital devices at home, your “plan for spiritual life” can easily be undermined and even sabotaged. The digital era has brought about great opportunities to spread the Gospel, but we cannot remain naïve to the reality that technology can also bring about harm and even great evil to our homes. Pornography, violence, profanity, endless ideologies and angry political material are often available at the palm of your children’s hands. Therefore, parents must be careful about allowing their children the use of electronic devices, including phones, which today are hand-held portals to the Internet. Dear parents, it is my strong advice that whenever possible, you allow your children to be children, delay access to these digital devices and then restrict their use in favor of real play, real conversation, and real friendship.
134. I have known families that do not allow television and computers to be placed in private rooms, but only in more public spaces. Some have set specific times or curfews for the use of portable devices. Other families have decided not to allow access to portable devices until their children are ready to drive, or when there may be a need to know where they are in an emergency. All of these can be thoughtful solutions. You as parents know your children better than anyone else and must make those choices through prayer and discernment as well as knowledge of the addictive nature of these devices, a well-documented phenomenon. But make no mistake, you must have a plan, because technology

has a logic to it, and the logic is “keep looking at the screen.” The gift of your time, *which is a non-renewable resource*, is given to you by God for experiencing *real life*.

Our Lady of Guadalupe: Evangelist Extraordinaire

135. In 1531, while half a world away the Protestant Revolution was dividing Christ’s Church, the Mother of Our Lord started a beautiful unification of divided peoples in America. A Native American man named Juan Diego encountered the Virgin Mary as he was headed to a catechesis class to learn his new Faith as a convert. There at a hill in what is now Mexico City, named Tepeyac, Our Lady gave Juan Diego an odd and seemingly impossible mission: approach and convince the local bishop, as a poor peasant, to build a new church on this hill in a remote area. The bishop initially was skeptical of his story. Embarrassed, Juan Diego tried to avoid encountering Our Lady again.
136. But on the morning of December 12, Juan Diego ran out of his house looking for a priest to administer last rites to his dying uncle, and Our Lady appeared once again, saying: “Am I not here, who am your Mother? Are you not under my protection? Am I not your health? Are you not happily within my fold? What else do you need? Do not grieve nor be disturbed by anything.”
137. Mary assured Juan Diego that his uncle wouldn’t die. In fact, he was already cured. Then, a miracle that would change the world occurred. She instructed Juan Diego to cut a bouquet of fresh Castilian roses from the top of Tepeyac hill, which were miraculously growing in the high-altitude winter ground. Juan Diego cut as many as he could, placed them in his overgarment, called a *tilma*, and headed to see the bishop.
138. Allowed again into Bishop Zumarraga’s residence, Juan Diego displayed the content of his tilma. The flowers fell to the floor and appearing on the garment was the image that we now know as Our Lady of Guadalupe. At the sight of the image, the bishop and his advisors fell to their knees in reverence. The bishop then proceeded quickly to build a church at the site as Our Lady had requested.
139. Remarkably, as many millions were leaving the Catholic faith in Europe due to corruption in the Church and the devastating rebellion of Luther and others in the Protestant Reformation, within one decade of the miracle of Our Lady of Guadalupe, some 10 million Native Americans came to the Faith with the help of Jesus’ mother and a humble native man. The terrible pagan practice of human sacrifice came to an end in America; the unconquerable divide between the Spanish colonialists and the native peoples was conquered.

Marian Consecration of your Home

140. This is a true story of faith, obedience, Mary's intercession and God's grace. Dare we hope that our faith and obedience, Mary's intercession and God's grace can work a miracle again today amid our own pervasive culture of death and divided families? I invite you to dare with me.
141. Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patroness of America, and of the Diocese of Phoenix. Her intercession for our families is key to winning the spiritual battle again in our time. My dear sons and daughters, if you haven't done so already, invite Our Lady to dwell with you through *consecrating your home to Jesus through her Immaculate Heart*. I ask every family in our Diocese to place an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in a special place, perhaps your prayer space, in your home. You can make of it a special occasion, and perhaps invite a priest or a deacon to bless the image while he also blesses your home.
142. According to Fr. Michael Gaitley, an expert on the history of Mary's rare but real miraculous appearances on the earth, the second largest consecration to Our Lady in history is taking place here and now, in the United States, and I am greatly encouraged by this fact. The last nation our Blessed Mother brought this close to her Son was Poland in the 20th Century, which despite much suffering, gave us a constellation of saints made up of Maximilian Kolbe, Faustina Kowalska, and the Pope of the Family, John Paul II.
143. "The only failure in life is not to become a saint." This is true. This is indeed true for every member of your family, and we need all the help we can get. Our Lady will help us to the halls of Heaven with her prayers.

CONCLUSION

144. "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer fully reveals man to himself."³⁷
145. Let me conclude this exhortation with one more witness to the Gospel, a saint, a man's man, and a holy one who changed my life personally. I was blessed to work with him directly at the Holy See for nine years, and most of what I know about leading and being a spiritual father comes from him.

146. It was from his father and mother, and his only brother Edmund too, that young Karol Wojtyla (now known as St. John Paul II) discovered the beauty and nobility of love. In the daily rhythm of the Wojtyla home in Wadowice, worshipping the Lord together every Sunday, praying before meals and in the evening, the future pope experienced and made his own the love of God that was revealed in its fullness through Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Mary.
147. Then, while facing with his Dad the tragic deaths of his Mom and brother, the love of Jesus took ever greater root in young Karol's life. With the death of his Dad, shortly after his own 20th birthday, he experienced the loneliness of having no earthly family member with whom to share the joys and sorrows, the hopes and dreams of human life; yet by divine providence he had already received through them a great gift which many of our contemporaries do not know. Fr. George Rutler describes it this way: "...a woman being a woman and a man being a man do not play roles unless the roles are part of a divine drama of creation. This creation of man and woman was God's greatest outpouring of perfection..."
148. Dear husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, whom I have the privilege to serve as a spiritual father, let your hearts rejoice anew at God's call to bear witness to Jesus and His Gospel by loving one another in the very family in which you now are living. You are not alone as you face the sorrows and struggles, the lights and shadows, that are part of family life. Recall Jesus' promise, "*Know that I am with you always.*" (Matthew 28:20)
149. It is not by chance that Jesus called you and me to be His witnesses at this troubled time in history, in the post-sexual revolution confusion. Now, He is calling us to know, love and serve Him in the "final battle about marriage and family" of which Sister Lucia wrote.
150. We walk side by side with many whose experiences have led them to think that the nature of the family is "a jungle, not a garden." For reasons known only to Christ, He has chosen you whom He has joined in marriage to be, at this time in history, an icon of His love for His Bride the Church. When you make sacrifices, then, for one another, when you encourage and forgive each other, when you worship the Lord together, when you welcome children and raise them in the practice of the Catholic faith, you are helping our skeptical generation to believe that free, total, faithful and fruitful love is still possible. Indeed, nothing is impossible with God; trust Him and begin.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, you who lived family most heroically, pray for us!

Promulgated December 30, 2018: Holy Family Sunday

¹ Pope Francis shares this history remarkably in his 2016 exhortation on the family *The Joy of Love*, Chapter 1.

² *Familiaris Consortio*, 17.

³ Benedict XVI. *Homily on Holy Family Sunday*. (Dec 28, 2009).

⁴ *Familiaris Consortio*, 51-52.

⁵ “Fatima visionary predicted ‘final battle’ would be over marriage, family.” Catholic News Agency (July 8, 2016).

⁶ One only has to think of the high percentage (over 75%) of couples living together before marriage, the widespread and almost normative experience of divorce, easy and sometimes coercive access to contraception and abortion, legal and cultural attempts to redefine marriage, the rapid rise of gender ideology and its harmful deceptions, hostility towards authentic masculinity and femininity, the pervasive problem of substance abuse and addiction, the spread of depression and loneliness even among children, the plague of pornography, and the alienating and addictive effects of excessive technology.

⁷ Unlike the rosebush or rhinoceros, our greatness and dignity as God’s image and likeness on Earth demands that *our free-will* be part of the process of being. However, we are still first receivers of a nature, as complex as it might be compared to lesser creatures.

⁸ Jennifer Roback-Morse.

⁹ C.S. Lewis. *The Four Loves*

¹⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.

¹¹ St. John Chrysostom. *An Address on Vainglory, and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Children*.

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, 2223

¹³ *Familiaris Consortio*, 75.

¹⁴ *Familiaris Consortio*, 17.

¹⁵ *Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I*.

¹⁶ CCC, 2342.

¹⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.

¹⁸ Ryan T. Anderson. “*The Consequences of Redefining Marriage*.” Address at Salt Lake Community College. (March 31, 2014)

¹⁹ Edith Stein. “*Ethos of Woman’s Professions*” in *Essays on Women*, p. 44.

²⁰ Erica Komisar, *Being There*. Decades of research “confirms the more time a woman can devote to the joy and job of mothering a child in the first three years, “the better the chance her child will be emotionally secure and healthy throughout his life.”

²¹ Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted. *Into the Breach*. (2015).

²² Werner Haug and Phillipe Warner. “*The Demographic Characteristics of the Linguistic and Religious Groups in Switzerland*” by of the Federal Statistical Office, Neuchatel. The study appears in Volume 2 of Population Studies No. 31, a book titled *The Demographic Characteristics of National Minorities in Certain European States*, edited by Werner Haug and others, published by the Council of Europe Directorate General III, Social Cohesion, Strasbourg, January 2000.

²³ *Familiaris Consortio*, 17

²⁴ Benedict XVI. *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.

²⁵ Pope St. Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41.

²⁶ These can include various parish small family groups, Teams of Our Lady, Domestic Church Groups, Marriage Encounter, Couples for Christ and other apostolates.

²⁷ *Confessions of St. Augustine*. Book 3, Chapter 12.

²⁸ For assistance in discerning your gifts and what opportunities exist for service to families, contact the Office of Marriage and Respect Life, or in Spanish, the Office of Hispanic Parish Leadership Support and the Office of Hispanic Mission.

²⁹ Notice the contrast here to the message of the “prosperity gospel” so prevalent in our current culture.

³⁰ Gordon Rayner. “Minister Orders Inquiry into 4,000 Percent Increase in Children Wanting to Change Sex.” *The Telegraph*. (Sept. 16, 2018).

³¹ Reprinted from “The Co-Worker Newsletter” Spring/Summer 1989 and is distributed by Family Life Council, Inc.

³² For a deep and helpful look at the effects of divorce on the family, see *Primal Loss: The Now-Adult Children of Divorce Speak*, edited by Leila Miller.

³³ Venerable Fulton Sheen. *Characters of the Passion*.

³⁴ Nicholas Healy. *Address to Mini-Synod on the Family*. Phoenix (2018)

³⁵ Venerable Fulton Sheen. *Lift Up Your Heart*.

³⁶ “*The Importance of Family Dinners IV*.” Study by CASA. Columbia University (2007).

³⁷ St. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.