

THE SQUIRREL FAMILY

Dangers to our Families today

Excerpts from the book "The Foundry Worker and the Gardener" of Fr. P. Ribes, s.j. Published by the Gujarat Sahitya Prakash.

Intent of the story and the jottings

- ✓ *To study the values our families live by in our world.*
- ✓ *Right and wrong family values. Consumerist values destroy the family.*
- ✓ *Happiness and unhappiness in our homes. Causes.*

THE FABLE

Narrator: Within the hollow of a tree, there lived a squirrel family. Their food was simple, their nest poor, yet they were very happy. Father and Mother Squirrel loved their children and one another. They spent lots of time together. They shared all they had, they talked, they laughed and they suffered together. That's why they were so happy. One day, Father Squirrel confided to his wife

Father: "Honey, you know, when I see you and our kids having such hard time, and I compare myself with the other inhabitants in the forest, I feel very bad. They have big, posh dwellings, they give their children and wives lots of comforts and luxuries. But I?, poor me! I feel guilty for being such a poor earner, a bad husband and a hopeless father! I have to do something about it!

Narrator: From that day on, **to give more and better things to the family**, Father Squirrel began working very hard. Before sunrise, he was out in the forest to collect the choicest fruits and nuts. He returned home late, far in the night. Forever he kept telling himself: "I have to make it! **I have to give my wife and children the very best!**"

Narrator: Before long, Father Squirrel ranked among the richest inhabitants in that forest. Now, his wife could dress like a queen, and his children live like princes and princesses. Yet, our Squirrel was not satisfied. **He wanted to have more and more.** Money, wealth, prestige had become his goal in life.

Narrator: In their palatial nest, his wife and children were rolling in the lap of luxury. They never had it so good. Nevertheless, in their wealth and comfort, mother Squirrel and the little ones were feeling very lonely, insecure and unloved. She could never see her husband, and the kids, could not talk with their Dad. They were not able to enjoy the togetherness and blessedness of the family life of former days. She felt worse than a widow. The kids felt like orphans. No one could hear Dad's voice, nor feel the warmth of his loving touch. One day, in tears, the little Squirrels told their mother:

Little Squirrels . "Mum, where is Daddy gone? He is never at home! We feel lonely! Has he left us? Does Dad, not love us any more?"

Narrator: Turning her face one side, with one or two tears rolling down her cheeks, with a quivering and unconvincing voice, she replied:

Mother: “Oh! No! Daddy loves us very much! He works very, very hard to get for you and for me the best things money can buy. He wants to give us the best food, the best clothes, the best toys; only the very best of everything. See how much he loves us!”

Narrator: That night, she waited for her husband to return. It was in the wee hours of the morning. Then, she told him:

Mother: “Darling, I have to tell you how lonely I feel. Without you, I feel sad, deserted and unloved. How I long to spend time with you, but I never get a chance! I need you. I need a husband, not your money! I am longing for you, for your voice, for your touch, for your company. The children too, want you. The little ones crave for your love! Stop giving us money. Give us your love, your company, give us yourself! We want you!”

Narrator: ; Father Squirrel was very hurt. In a bout of temper, he shouted:

Father: “What? What are you saying? That I don’t love you? Can’t you see that I am killing myself for you to give you the best the world can offer”. I want to give you and my children the best education, the best house, all possible comforts, success, a high standard of living, economical security and respectability in society! And now you have the cheek to tell me that I do not love you? How ungrateful you are”.

Narrator: Meekly mother Squirrel replied:

Mother: “Yes, I know all that, but it is not a big house we want, but a happy home! We are not craving for money, for luxuries, for comforts, for exquisite food! I long for a husband! The children are craving for their Daddy!

Narrator: Distraught and furious Father Squirrel yelled:

Father: “What? You don’t seem to understand! You are always asking for love and more love, for affection and more affection! Do you think that in today’s world, we can live on love and affection? Don’t forget, ours is a competitive world. I want to give you and my children a bright future, economic security, a high standard of living and a life free from worries!”

Narrator: Calmly, but firmly, mother Squirrel replied

Mother:“ The first thing that you, as a husband, have to give us is love, company, a listening ear, emotional security, understanding, laughter, friendliness...in other words” yourself”.

Narrator: In a rage, Father Squirrel shouted:

Father: “If this is the case, it’s better for me to quit. I can clearly see that you do not love me’. I cannot live with you in this house anymore! Too late I discovered that I married the wrong woman! You ruined my life! You have failed to love me in return for all I do.

Narrator: From that day on, Father Squirrel never came back to his luxurious house! The children did not see their father again..

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Why was there joy and happiness in the Squirrels’ family at the start of the story?
2. Was there the same joy and happiness later on? How did their joy get spoiled?
3. What made Father Squirrel act in a way that finally destroyed the happiness of his home?
4. What is a happy home? Describe its characteristics
5. What **are, according to you, the three most important things** that will make our homes happy? Mention them. Give reasons
6. What are **the three least necessary ones?** Name them. Why?
7. What are the main obstacles, coming our way, in today’s world, to make our homes successful and happy? Name them. Give reasons.
8. As a rule, do you think that our ‘modern families.’ all in al, are really happy and helping our children to develop as satisfied human beings? Why?
9. Can you find some other lessons from the story of the Squirrel Family? Name them.

INPUT: SUGGESTED THOUGHTS:

House Vs Home.

- A ‘house’ is made of things; a ‘home’ is built of people’s hearts
- A ‘house’ is cold and dead, a ‘home’ is warm, alive and welcoming.
- We need a ‘home’ more than a ‘house’
- We do not need wealth to build happy families, but love and togetherness.
- The ‘quality’ of family life is not to be measured by the quantity and the monetary value of their gadgets and possessions.

What is wanted for a happy home.

- What children and grown-ups as well, need are affection and acceptance, not necessarily material comforts?
- What the spouses need is not a luxurious bed-room, but a loving and meaningful relationship.
- Money is not enough. Money fills the pockets, not the hearts.
- A modicum of material goods is needed for a happy home, but not superfluities, riches, affluence and opulence.
- For a happy ‘home’ the most wanted commodity today is ‘time’. Time to talk, time to play, time to pray, time to fool, time to enjoy and time to eat together.

- Children need their Parents' presence. There is no available substitute to fill up the void created by the absence of the parents.
- To build your 'home you must 'understand and accept' your people.
- Do not fall into the temptation of making life in your home too comfortable.
- Be 'fatherly/motherly' not 'paternalistic/maternal'

Dangers and Pitfalls

- Do not mistake the 'standard of living' with the 'standard of life'. Your living standards may be poor, yet your standard of life may be very high.
- Let your family be unique, do not try to compete with your neighbor's families with other Joneses.
- Don't be bluffed into the myth of 'The great tomorrow'. Do not strive to give your family a wonderful tomorrow; rather give them a 'wonderful today'!
- Do not be swallowed by the rash and frenzy of the competitive spirit of today's society.
- Do not toil and moil to have more and more! Strive, rather, to be more! Yes, more and more human, more and more loving.
- Work-holism is a modern plague! Be aware! Get soon immunized!
- By working more and more, we become less and less humane..
- As a rule, the 'quality of family life' is inversely proportional to the 'quantity' of one's wealth
- Do not fall into the trap of giving to your children material goods beyond their real needs.
- Do not give your children, as a vicarious satisfaction to yourself, the luxuries you could not enjoy as a child!
- This "vicarious-satisfaction" is a trap where many good modern parents get caught. up.. This trap will spoil your children and ruin the happiness of your 'home'!

Consequences of falling in those dangers and traps.

- Once we surrender ourselves to greed, we are swallowed up by it! It's a deadly trap.
 - By wanting to have more than others, we end by feeling inferior, to all and frustrated!
 - The more we have, the less we can enjoy! It's like food; the more we eat, the less we enjoy it's taste..
 - By struggling to have more and more, we 'burn ourselves out' and feel weary and exhausted. .
 - By running the 'rat-race' we become rats and robots; we lose our identity. We end becoming just anonymous numbers in a faceless crowd.
 - Modern life condemns parents and children to co-exist under one roof. It shuts the door to a warm, happy and gratifying family life.
- **What to do! What not to do!**
- Educate your children to be 'themselves', to 'stand on their own feet'; do not kill yourself to give them a secure future, rather teach them how to forge a 'secure future' by themselves
 - Give your children a 'good education', a solid 'formation for life', not 'life-insurance policies'.

- Be critical! Do not swallow the ‘slogans’ of modern publicity of “What a happy home should be”
- Challenge our modern assumptions of what is to be a successful earning husband and progressive working mother

APPENDIX ONE Bible Texts on The Family.

Respect and love for parents:

Ex. 20:12

Deut 5:16

Prov 13:1; 17:6; 23:22-25

Ecclus 3:5-8; 3:9-10; 3:14-17; 7:28-30

Parents Love and care for their children:

Deut 11:18-19

Prov 29:17

Ecclus 30: 2-5; 32:26

1 Tim 5:8

Holy Family:

Respect Joseph showed for Mary (Mt. 1:18-25)

Care for the Holy Family (Mt. 2:13-15; 19-23)

Joseph looks after Mary (Lk 2:1-7)

Return to Nazareth and obedience of Jesus. (Lk 2:39-40)

Jesus lost in the temple, concern, obedience (Lk 2:41-52)

APPENDIX TWO

DANGERS TO OUR FAMILIES TODAY.

“Dos” and “Don’ts”

Points for Discussion, Prayer and Reflection

For Married People and Those Who Intend Getting Married.

Note: A comprehensive list of Dangers to Our families today have been catalogued in eleven chapters below.. They can be taken for reflection and discussion in any order.

Chapter One:

Living with the in-laws may give rise to many difficulties

- ✓ For lack of living quarters and/or economical constraints, many couples have to live with their in-laws.
- ✓ The in-laws should accept the new members joining their family with love, friendliness and understanding. They should not criticize them nor boss over them.
- ✓ They should make an honest effort to understand their background and treat them as equal members of the family.
- ✓ They should never speak to the husband or wife about the real or supposed shortcomings of his/her partner's parents or family.
- ✓ The new comer should accept his/her in-laws' family wholeheartedly and forget his/her own family. No comparisons should be made between his or her family, nor pass disparage remarks.
- ✓ The new comer should co-operate, make a sincere effort to understand and love his/her new family and be always loyal to it.
- ✓ He/she should stay clear from tale bearing and gossip and never let confidential secrets of his new family leak out.

Chapter Two:

Working Conditions of the Partners may be a cause of many marital problems.

- When due to unavoidable circumstances, one of the partners is away from the family: say, working abroad, or as a seaman, etc. – frequent communication by an occasional visit, letter writing, or phone calls is a must. On the contrary one or both partners may be led to loneliness, insecurity, craving for intimacy, frustration and even infidelity.
- When both the parties work in different locations and spend most of the time outside the home rubbing shoulders with all sorts of strangers at their place of work, there has to be a positive good-will and a sincere effort to honestly communicate with one another and spend as much time together whenever they meet; otherwise a sense of estrangement, of cooling off in relationships and even of suspiciousness may arise.

Chapter Three:

Lack of Preparation Before Marriage Explains Many Marriage break-ups

- There should be a long and thorough marriage preparation before marriage..
- Marriage should not be entered upon in a hurry and in a perfunctory and casual manner
- Partners should not only know each other thoroughly before marriage, but also they should know each other's families. Marriage does not link two individuals only, but TWO FAMILIES AS WELL!
- Partners should attend a serious and informative marriage preparation course.
- They should read books about marriage and discuss them together

- Partners must be encouraged to consult and take advice from expert counselors, doctors, social workers and priests.

MANY MARITAL PROBLEMS ARISE FROM A FAULTY PREPARATION BEFORE MARRIAGE, namely:

- **Ignorance** of what the basics of marriage are
- **Lack of awareness of the obligations, duties and privileges** of their state of life.
- Starting their marriage with wrong and **unrealistic expectations**, thus soon falling into frustration and disappointment.
- Entertaining **wrong assumptions** about the roles husbands and wives should play today within the family.
- Partners may **lack skills** to cope with interpersonal conflicts, which are bound to arise within marriage.
- Partners may labor under **mistaken notions about sex, love and marriage**, they may mistake love for liking and sex for lust.
- There may be a gross **ignorance of the ideals and values of a Christian marriage**.
- Partners may lack the **basic knowledge and skills on how to bring up their children**.

Chapter Four:

Emotional immaturity of one or both the partners ruins many marriages,

- Physical and biological maturity does not necessarily entail the emotional maturity required to make a marriage relationship work.
- Some signs of emotional immaturity among many married people are
 - **Possessiveness.** Not letting one's partner free to be himself or herself.
 - **Jealousy.** Unfounded suspiciousness infidelity of one's partner
 - **Feelings of insecurity.** Asking for reassurance time and again
 - **Self-centeredness and selfishness**
 - **Inability to give oneself to his/her partner, or contribute to the relationship.**
 - **Pouting and sulking** like children. Inability to share and dialogue with one's partner one's feelings and thoughts.
 - **Aggressiveness or its opposite, submissiveness**
 - **Unwillingness or inability to cooperate**
 - **Inability to face and solve conflicts**
 - Inability to detach oneself from his/her own **family of origin**
 - Transferring one's frustrations, **personal, work frustrations, etc. to his/her partner or to the members of the family.**
 - **Compulsions** and inner conflicts not yet resolved.
 - **Withdrawals or** escape mechanisms manifest the inability to cope with stress or unpleasant situations, for instance, alcohol, too many friends outside marriage, excessive T.V. watching, etc.
 - **Lack of humor** shows inability to cope with ambiguity.
 - **Rigidity**, inability to change one's views and stances.

Chapter Five:

Incapacity to communicate in a Healthy Grown-up style.

- Inability to listen empathetically to one's partner
- Dishonesty in communication. Pretending, covering up, keeping silence when one should speak
- Fear of giving feedback, both positive and negative
- Not being able to express one's ideas and much less one's feelings
- Allowing resentments to grow. Not being able to communicate to others, in an acceptable way, one's hurts and grudges.
- Withholding "external marks" of affection. If you love your partner, please, let hi/her know it.
- Blaming others instead of trying to solve problems
- Partners should show appreciation for each other
- Partners should express gratitude to one another.
- In financial matters, partners should be transparent,.
- Already before marriage they should decide how they will handle their finances.
- Have to make sure in financial matters who is who; whose is what, their accounts, expenses, properties etc. Ideally, all such matters should be put down in writing. If need be let them secure the help of an expert. Don't keep things for later on, when conflict may arise.

Chapter Six:

Inability to Forgive. The "Justice Trap"

- Partners should accept each other's mistakes and shortcomings and still love one another.
- Do not condemn but understand your partner. Get under his/her skin and try to ascertain why he/she acts in the way he/she does.
- Do not attribute his/her hurtful remarks or actions to ill will or malice. It may just be weakness, weariness, tension, poor healthy and over work.
- Clear up your misunderstandings and hurt-feelings as soon as possible.
- Never retaliate. It will lead to escalation and possibly to a marriage break-up.
- Forgive and try to understand your in-laws too. They have their past history, their upbringing, their conditionings and their hang-ups too!
- Never use your marital relationship or your sex rights as a means to punish your partner. It's cruel and ruinous. It's a sure path to break your marriage.
- Do not have sex when you feel angry, resentment up or spiteful. Settle your differences before you have sex. Only then, sex will be a sign of true and sincere love!

Chapter Seven:

Unwillingness to invest in your marriage:

- Invest time, LOTS OF TIME, in your marriage relationship. It pays high dividends.
- Parents and children have meals together and spend time together.
- Spend time together, talking, communicating, going out together, etc.
- Be willing to sacrifice your pet ideas and likes for the sake of your partner.
- Do not grudge investing money also in your marriage and home. Be generous with your partner.
- Keep in mind: “ Your marriage is the most important business of your life”
- In case, of any hypothetical clash between your family members and those of your partner’s family, for your partner’s sake and for your marriage sake, stay together with him/her. What God has put together, no man should divide – not even your parents or your partner’s parents.
- Be always willing to compromise.
- Contrary to what people say: ‘Marriages are not made in heaven but they are made on earth and it is you and your partner who will make or break your marriage’.

Chapter Eight:

Perfectionism Ruins Marriage.

- Do not expect too much from your partner.
- No one is perfect. We are fallible human beings. Accept your partner and yourself as imperfect.
- Avoid ‘fault finding’ and ‘fault picking’. It leads to ruin.
- Learn how to live in peace with the imperfections of your partner and of your in-laws’.
- Learn also how to leave in peace with your imperfections, yet never make peace with them! May God grant you the wisdom to know the difference
- Allow one another the right to do mistakes. The worse mistake you can make is not to learn from your mistakes
- In marriage ‘Blaming games’ not allowed, please!.
- Do not try to make your partner better than what he/she is! Let him/her be as he/she is!
- If at all, try to make yourself a little better, but not too much!
- Do not try to be better than what you are! Do not play the “superman” or the “superwoman”
- You can accept your partner whatever he/she is, you can’t change him/he. Yet you can always change your attitude towards him/her.

Chapter Nine:

Don't trying to live-up your marriage according to the societal values of today or to other people's expectations.

- **In your married life, do not compete with other Joneses. Let them live, as they like.** Live as you think you ought to.
- Do not equate “standard of living” with “standard of life”. Most of the time high standard of living goes along with low standard of life!
- Do not judge the success of your marriage and family life by the standards of our ‘consumerist and competitive’ society.
- Status symbols do not measure or show ‘the success in your married life’.
- Let your family be your family! Do not compare your family with others. Each family, as each individual, is unique!
- Give your wife and children” emotional security” rather than ‘economical security’.
- Be aware not to fall into the trap of the “rat-race-trap’. Once trapped, you and your family will at the mercy of the advertising word.

Chapter Ten:

Basic educational, ethical, cultural, social and religious differences between the partners do not forecast a Happy Family Life.

Note: The points mentioned in this chapter should be pondered upon and discussed at length and agreed upon by the partners before they enter into marriage!

- Large cultural and educational differences **between the partners are not advisable. They will be a source of many problems later on.**
- **Notable** discrepancies between the social mores and habits **of the marriage partners will make adjustments hard, well nigh impossible.**
- Sexual incompatibilities, different sexual needs and expectations should be avoided. **They will create later on insurmountable difficulties.**
- Different ethical principles and value systems **will give rise to strife and serious disagreements in the use of marriage.**
- Basic disagreement in religious beliefs and practices **will likely cause problems and clashes with the partner and their offspring. That's why “mixed marriages” are not to be encouraged**
- Fundamental differences in the philosophy of education **and on how to rear children will create clashes and likely rifts among the spouses.**

Chapter Eleven:

Lack of Christian Spirit and Principles will not make a marriage a true Christian Family.

- Unwillingness to make sacrifices **in order** to keep the law of God and the Gospel values **will ruin a Christian Marriage.**
- Simplicity, humility, spirit or service **is necessary for building a true Christian home.**
- Restrain and self-control are wanted **for living up to the ideal of the Vocation of Christian Marriage.**
- Deep respect and love for one's partner, for children and all those in the home, **as Christ loved, is a must in a Christian home.**
- A Christian family has to pray together **A Family that prays together stays together.**
- Loss of Christian values **inevitably leads to failure of Christian Families**
- Religious, Sacramental Practices and Church attendance **is part and parcel Christian family life..**