

Family Life Today

Problems, Hassles and “Challenges”

*Edited from: “Family Life Today” by Fr Joe Fernandes Director,
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1. Introductory thoughts for the participants.

- ✓ Going by the number of cases pending both in the Ecclesiastical tribunal for annulments, and in the Civil Courts or divorce, the increase of family pressures and the consequent break-ups of marriages becomes obvious.
- ✓ As marriage is the basis of family life, the increase number of divorces and annulments are threats to family-life.
- ✓ The problems that cause them are varied. We mention here below a few that are most prevalent today.

2. Opening Prayer

- ✓ `Silent prayer for our families.
- ✓ Hymn : Bind us together
- ✓ Common prayer.

Mother Theresa’s prayer for the family.

Heavenly Father, you have given us a model of life in the Holy Family of Nazareth. Help us O loving Father to make our family another Nazareth where love, peace and joy reign. May it be deeply contemplative, intensely Eucharistic and vibrant with joy.

Help us to stay together in joy and sorrow through family prayer.

Teach us to see Jesus in the members of our family, especially in their distressing disguise.

May the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus make our hearts meek and humble like his and help us to carry out family duties in a holy way. May we love one another as God loves each one of us more and more each day; forgive each other’s faults as you forgive our sins.

Help us, O loving father, to take whatever you give and to give whatever you take with a big smile.

Immaculate Heart of Mary, cause of our joy, prays for us.

St Joseph, pray for us Amen.

Personal Work

Moderator

Request the participants to write down a list of the main difficulties challenges and hassles standing against a happy and healthy family life today.

Group Work

- ✓ Share the lists brought up by the audience.
- ✓ Pick some of the main problems and difficulties mentioned by the house and
- ✓ a initiate a discussion of them.

Appendix

We suggest here below a few family problems and difficulties brought by Fr. Joe Fernandes for discussion and reflection.

1. To begin with, marriage is approached lightly and casually

When someone approaches marriage with a thinking like '*if things don't work out we can separate*', the seeds of destruction are already present. Unconsciously, the person is not going to put his/her full whole-hearted effort into making the marriage work. When clashes and crisis come - which need a whole-hearted effort of both parties, the baneful results are obvious.

While proposal is quite commonly an accepted way of finding a partner, it does not exclude the need for a long period of courtship: long enough for the couple to know each other's personalities, values, families, needs, and expectations. Do their temperaments blend? Are they willing to compromise at any cost when differences and clashes arise,

Many think that if both are 'good,' it is just enough for them to marry. With the increase of the stresses that married couples have to face today, being 'good' it is not at all enough.

In case the boy has to return to the Gulf soon, or someone has come from abroad, or the parents are aged and want to see their children married soon, **are not valid reasons for omitting a period of adequate courtship.** This cannot be emphasized strongly enough.

2. Absence of both Parents from home

Today it is practically taken for granted that women will be working. Husbands want their wives to work because of the extra income involved. Besides, women have invested much in an education or a profession and so want to follow their career. If they had a good job before marriage, the continuing benefits like seniority etc. are added factors against giving up their jobs. Against this, there is the other aspect of being a housewife and above all a mother to her children. Women being naturally nurturing are ideally suited to caring for their children. But quite a few women are not able to keep a proper balance between their roles of being a mother and wife on the one hand, and pursuing their careers on the other. While some women can do it very well, many others are not able to do so. **More than material gifts, children need the timely presence of a mother.** Some women admirably know their limitations and the needs of their children,

and so they pull out of their careers when their children are very young, and resume their jobs when the children are well settled in school life (primary or middle school) when their presence is not so necessary.

3. Equal partners

Another source of conflicts is that women today rightly reject the notion that the husband is 'Lord' and his wife is sort of a slave/servant. With better education (sometimes even better than her husband) she wants to be treated as an equal and not inferior to her husband. She wants to take on her share of decision-making etc. and she wants her husband to take his share of housework. She wants her husband's help as an equal and not as a 'Master'. And if she earns more than her husband, the problems get compounded.

4. Consumerism

The Consumer-mentality and the need to be better than the Joneses demands its pound of flesh in marriage. The pursuit of more money (there never seems to be enough) put further pressure on both. Desires are created, and the initial frustration of not having those material things is met with by working harder to make 'ends meet'. When this involves working beyond one's capabilities, the stress so created is devastating. If there is an inability to recognize the limitations of one's capabilities, the stress and frustration is expressed within the 'safe' confines of the family or in alcohol. The family suffers.

5. Media mania

Soap, cheap and even objectionable TV programmes - which are very addictive - take their toll of family life, Much of the prime times suitable to strengthen family life are lost, when part or the family, or the whole family, is glued to the idiot box.

Those wasted times are vital for the family bonds to grow stronger. They could be spent conversing at the dinner table, being together, sharing and interacting with each other

Over and above, the values these T. V. Programmes portray, 'such as regular change of marriage partners, violence, cruelty, greed and sex are not going to leave our families totally unaffected.'

6. Work situations

Living in situations where men and women work in the same office, travel together etc. gives ample opportunity for varied needs to be met outside marriage. If my spouse does not give me the love I want, there are others of the opposite sex who are ready to give it to me - *likely, people having problems with their own marriages*-. Adversity makes strange bedfellows. This helps to slowly build up relationships with others outside marriage, while our marriage

relationships grow colder. It may be a matter of time before a marriage breaks, unless something is done in time.

7. There is also the problem of children being brought up by the grand-parents. In spite of all the perks and gifts that the parents may shower on their children, (*as substitutes for their lack of personal insolvent and care*) deep resentments build up in the children. Counselors dealing with children's problems will testify to these problems.

8. Stress and Strain

Stress often leads to alcohol consumption as it is the easiest way to relax. From there io alcoholism there is a short step, unless the problem of stress is solved. We need to learn how to handle the stress that comes from daily living, and to become aware when the stress reached its limits. In such situations a change in a job to a lower level of stress may be needed. The courage to take such a step is not easy.