

Pastor's Pen: Stewardship of the Family

From the dawn of time, the most basic building block of any society, culture, or religion has been the family. Within the Bible, family and family life structures are the most used image to describe God and His people and the interrelationships of God's people. In the Second Vatican Council, the council fathers referred to the family as the domestic Church. The health of the family will determine the health of any society or culture to which they belong. It is something to be cherished, protected, nurtured, and made holy.

Last week, I wrote about the stewardship we are to show regarding our souls. I wrote about our responsibility to take good care of it. That care is important because it aids us significantly in the stewardship of our families. In the nuptial blessing said over the newly married couple at a wedding, we are reminded that marriage was one part of God's plan in Eden that was not forfeited by original sin nor washed away by the great flood. The children that come of marriage are blessings entrusted by God to the parents. Parents are shepherds. They are the first and most effective teachers of their children. Hence, speaking of the stewardship that should exist within the family is important. If stewardship is promoted and lived within the family, it is to the benefit of the family and to the benefit of every larger group to which the family belongs. I will take the four pillars of stewardship and apply them now to the family: Prayer, hospitality, service, and formation.

Stewardship of the Family and Prayer

The family is the first incubator of faith for our children. Inasmuch as prayer bonds us together within our parishes, so it needs to bond the members of a family. Prayer connects each member of the family to each other and to God. Prayer, especially the family praying together, cannot be absent in a healthy Catholic home. Parents should be the first to teach their children to pray. There is a danger in allowing the first prayers they learn to be in a school or CCD program: we never want to see prayer as a primarily academic exercise. The children should be able to see in their parents what they see in their priests or teachers: leaders of prayer.

The foundation of prayer starts before the children come. The foundation comes in the marriage itself. The couple, bound by the sacramental grace of Matrimony, becomes prayer partners as well. Praying together as a couple is a proper stewardship of marriage and family life in that it recognizes that to bind closer together as a married couple and as a family requires God's grace. This is especially true in going together as a family to the great liturgical prayer of the Church: Mass. The use of the grace of Reconciliation forges again the bonds lost by sin. Families should also go together to their confession; children need to see the witness of their parents going to Confession.

Time for prayer should be a normal part of family life. A family rosary, prayer before meals, just before bed...there are plenty of times where prayer can be brought into daily life. Making use of the time for Eucharistic Adoration (1st and 3rd Fridays 9AM-9PM as SS Peter and Paul), and coming in as a family is a great witness and a telling teaching moment on priorities.

Stewardship of the Family and Formation

The first place children learn the faith and its importance is within the family and from the parents. At your child's baptism, we remarked several times how you as parents are the first and best teachers of the way of the faith. The priority or lack thereof of faith in day- to- day life will be learned long before your child enters school or CCD. When matters of faith and prayer are central in the family life, then good stewardship is being done in protecting and growing what God has given you within marriage and family life. When prayer and faith are wholly secondary (or less) to worldly pursuits, then poor stewardship is being exercised.

I know many families who do proper stewardship of formation in what they expose their children to and what they allow to have influence. Media is not evil by its nature. It can be uplifting, teaching, and reinforcing of Catholic faith and values. One of the reasons our parish participates in Formed.com is to give parents ways to learn more about faith and because it provides a great library of material for children to help them grow in faith. Much better to be exposed to these things that can build our children and their faith up than the mounds of immoral garbage the world offers them instead. The directions on how to get onto Formed is the bulletin.

Stewardship of the Family and Service

Service...mutual service...should be a hallmark of every Catholic family. The way members of the family selflessly attend to the needs of their fellow family members will go a long way to raising children who value serving rather than being served. That service should have an element of sacrifice to it. The way children see their parents selflessly serving each other sets wonderful Christ-like example by which they can model their own selfless service. Children should be taught service without expectation of reward; it helps them to do the good because it is the good. Families should, when possible, volunteer as a group in events outside of the family. The more service is taught and lived, the better stewards everyone becomes.

Stewardship of the Family and Hospitality

Nowhere is this lesson more needed than in the 21st century family. Hospitality is about making yourself present to other people. Nowadays, we can be a group of people in the same room with our faces in some screen and not looking to the good of those we live with. Learning how to put our own wants secondary so that we may attend to those around us needs to be learned in the home. Christ was attentive to the needs of those around Him; proper stewardship of our family teaches us in the home to be attentive to each other. That requires sacrifice. However, it teaches all parties involved to seek the good of those closest to them so that they take that trait outside of the home. It steers us away from narcissism and toward the altruism that the Gospel preaches. As most in the mental health professions are saying a child should have no more than 2 hours of screen time. Teaching the child to communicate and be empathetic is a fine way of filling that time. This, by the way, parents, requires you to put down your screens as well.