

## **CTK Mission Principle #8:**

**We the people of Christ the King, called by God our Father to be surrendered to the Lord Jesus, in the power of His Holy Spirit, in the heart of His Church.**

- **to be a people committed to the support and strengthening of family life, mirroring “the many signs of the Church's love and concern for the family, a love and concern expressed from the very beginning of Christianity when the meaningful term domestic church was applied to the family.” (Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, #3)**

In the first reading from this Sunday's Mass we hear a story that describes the ultimate test for any family: persecution and martyrdom. A mother and her seven sons are being encouraged to violate the Law of Moses, thus indicating their refusal to continue to live as faithful Jews. One by one the sons refuse and are tortured to death for their refusal to abandon their God. After watching all seven of her sons being martyred, the mother herself is then put to death. Can there be a greater test of the formation of a family than whether or not they will abandon their faith in the face of certain death? While the event narrated in the Book of Maccabees took place thousands of years ago, our brothers and sisters in Christ are facing the same persecutions today. In many countries around the world families are having to ask each other, if they face the ultimate challenge to their faith, what will they do? This is not a theoretical question for the Christians of Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, and many other parts of the globe.

Could it happen here? Fr. John Hardon, the late Jesuit catechist extraordinaire, commented that one of the fundamental duties of parents was to prepare their children for martyrdom, as he noted that there were more Christian martyrs during the last century than in all of Christian history up to that point. Concerning this, we want to avoid the two opposite errors, being paranoid on the one hand or being carelessly naive on the other. As followers of the Lord Jesus, we don't know what the future holds, but we know Who holds the future. That should be our anchor, or guide, that we continue to trust in the Lord Jesus and His provision for us. At the same time, it is clearly our responsibility to make sure that our families are that living example of the domestic Church that Blessed John Paul the Great wrote so movingly about. The family is that privileged place where the children first hear about the Lord Jesus and where they are first taught to pray, taught to center their lives on the King of Kings, taught the importance of being followers of the Savior Who died for them. The place where they can see the love of the Lord Jesus for His Church mirrored in the love their parents have for each other. It is their first real encounter with what it means to be a Christian.

For the last millennium and a half there was great societal support for the family, especially in the Christian West, but with the collapse of Christianity in Europe and the various assaults on Christianity in the United States, the same part of the globe is now being seen as the post-Christian West. This has not made it easier to be supportive of

family life. The fact that most Christian denominations have moved away from their original support of the Church's teaching on marriage and family life and adopted pro contraceptive and even pro abort and pro homosexual positions means that Christianity can no longer speak with a unified voice in this most crucial area. Does the Lord Jesus then call us to hide our light so that we can fit in? The documents of the Second Vatican Council constantly reiterate the basic theme that it is the Church's role to offer to the world the word of life, to be the light that shines in the darkness, the light to the nations, the joy and hope. Our response to the growing darkness is meant to be to turn up the Light! How do we do that for our families? We must learn ways in which we can better support them so that they truly live out that calling to be the domestic Church. How can we share the witness of the value and blessing of family life with a society that is increasing opposed to family life as we understand it?

The reality of persecution is already being experienced by some of our families. The belittling negative comments some of our larger families have to endure in public settings are an example of that. They especially need our support. The eighth section of our Mission Statement quoted above emphasizes our parish's responsibility to be supportive of family life—that we are committed to support it and to strengthen it. In a very real way, the health and survival of the parish itself depends on this, and not just our parish but all the parishes. The family is the essential building block of local Church life and if the families are not healthy and thriving then the whole local Church will suffer.

What is the Lord Jesus' response? He has not changed His mind about the value and blessing of family life, nor has He altered the clear and consistent teachings of His Church concerning how to live out the great gift and blessing of our sexuality. The bottom line is that as we look at our society as it drifts further and further from its Christian roots, the result is not an increased happiness and sense of well being in people; just the contrary, the level of difficulty and despair is increasing. How much more is it therefore imperative for us, by the witness of healthy, happy, holy, family life, to show the world the Kingdom's alternative to the disintegration around us? For us to be able to do that requires that we do all we can to support and encourage our families in their vital role in building the Kingdom. We will have the full support of the Lord Jesus in doing this, since, after all, it is His idea in the first place. Let us plead with Him for the guidance and strength we need to be fully supportive of our families during this difficult time, that they would be able to be all that the Lord Jesus intends them to be.

#### Reflection Questions:

For the individual: What am I doing to be more supportive of my family?

For the family: How can we as a family deepen our relationships with each other?

For the parish: How can we as a parish be more supportive of family life?