

**Giorgio and Anna AGAGLIATI**

**FAMILY 2012 – SPEECH FOR THE MEETING  
“THE FAMILY EUCHARIST ON THE DAY OF THE LORD”  
FRIDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> JUNE – H15 – SANT’AMBROGIO**

We have been married for 29 years, preceded by seven years of engagement. 36 years in total: a lifetime if you consider that our ages are 54 and 52.

We grew up in two neighbouring parishes, in which we were both active.

From the very beginning, it was natural for us to be a couple, then a family, who sanctifies the feast day. The community Mass we were involved in, first each in his own parish and then together, was the point of reference of the week. We attended as an engaged couple, then as a married couple, and then together with our children, even when they were babies. We never considered taking it in turns to go to Mass when the children were little. Nobody complained if at times they cried, and it was important to us that they were given the perception of “being at home” in the house of Lord, even before reaching awareness.

Ten years ago, with the ordination of Giorgio as permanent deacon, our lives as a couple and a family changed radically, even when living day of the Lord. This change has led us to rediscover and reconstruct our sense of celebration, and here, as well as in other aspects of our lives, we have experienced the synergy of the Grace of Marriage and Ordination.

This did not “click into place” all at once. On the contrary, it was a gradual process, which started back during the training for the diaconship. Great attention was given to this aspect, especially by the tutor deacons and their spouses, who shared their experience with us.

Amongst other things, we were told of the feeling of detachment, of physical separation that we would experience at the Mass. It did happen, and we felt it despite the theoretical preparation. A case in point is our second son Paolo’s reaction on the evening of the ordination. He was five years old at the time. Back home, after the ceremony in the Cathedral and celebrations in the parish, he stood in front of us with arms akimbo, and asked: “Are you still my daddy?”. He knew very little about ecclesiology in general, and the diaconate in particular, but it was clear to him that those who wore an alb and a stole and went to the altar did not have a family. Our reassurances, reinforced by a hug, put his mind at rest. For Irene, who was already nine years old, the impact was not so strong, not to mention the fact that she had been together with her catechism classmates at the church.

For the two of us, entering the church together for the Mass and immediately separating to take our places was not easy, especially at the beginning. And it still isn’t today when it comes to the important celebrations: Christmas Mass or the Easter Vigil. We should add that the first six years of the diaconate took place at the parish where we live, but four years ago Giorgio was transferred to another parish, which isn’t very close. For the first three years, Anna continued her activities in the old parish, and it wasn’t until this year that she started to work as catechist in the new. Moreover, for a few years now, Giorgio is a member of the diocesan team for the catechumenate, and this involves, among other duties, his presence at the Cathedral on Ash Wednesday for the election of the catechumens and the Easter vigil for the Baptisms.

As we mentioned, these difficulties have nonetheless been amply compensated by the powerful Grace we have been granted. The diaconal ministry has influenced our understanding and our concept of celebration on two different levels.

First level: we have understood, not intellectually but from experience, with the intelligence of “seeing”, so dear to John the Evangelist, that from that “spring and summit” originated not only our marriage vocation, but also Giorgio’s vocation to the ministry.

Second level: As deacon, Giorgio has become “a minister of celebration” for the entire community, and little by little we realised that this did not diminish, but enriched the family. It is enriched above all for two reasons: the first is a different attention to the details and harmony of the liturgy as a whole, which technically is assigned to Giorgio, but which extends to both of us and also to our children, if only for the fact that we discuss it together. The second is the extension of the perspective from which we see the celebrations, which has given us a keener perception of something that is peculiar to every Christian family, but which habit tends to obscure: in other words, in our large ecclesiastical community gathered together for the celebration, there is the little church of our family.

There are two moments in the celebration where the deacon stands out as minister of the “threshold and the bridge” and where his spouse and children have a special significance in the bond between service to the community and family life:

- The sign of peace: The deacon’s coming down from the alter to exchange the sign of peace with his spouse and children assumes a particular significance. It is a sign within a sign that places the Eucharist in the centre of the deacon’s family life, and whose ordained ministry has been grafted onto the marriage.
- The distribution of communion: The persons who share the daily life in the world with the deacon, and especially his family members, approach him to receive the Body of Christ that fortifies them in their family and daily lives.

These two moments can also be found in the Eucharistic celebration, in a completely singular way, a pre-viewing of the permanent diaconate that Don Giuseppe Dossetti formulated soon after the completion of the works of Vatican II, the Council that, in the Lumen Gentium Constitution (no. 29), restored the permanent diaconate as the first level of Ordination. Incidentally, the Council “extended” it to married men, and married men were in the absolute majority from the very beginning. In 1966, after the conclusion of the Council, Dossetti was talking about “the introduction of an extensive diaconate, radiating far and wide, highly decentralized, and which represents the true terminal point of the insertion of the sacramental charismata into the concrete texture of the Christian community”, by “individuals who live as much as possible in the common condition” (\*)

Ideally, the Mass continues during the family’s Sunday meal. Here, the different aspects of the family members’ commitments in the community are assembled: Giorgio, the deacon, Anna, a catechist for adult confirmation candidates, both children activities coordinators at the oratory of their parish church. We won’t pretend that our entire Sunday meals are spent edifying each other “with psalms, hymns and spiritual chants”. We talk about everything, and sometimes we even watch TV. But the prayer before meals is a daily custom with us, a link to the invocation that precedes the Holy Communion. Our conversation always includes exchange of ideas regarding meetings at the church, on the readings and the homily heard. In fact, when we haven’t been to Mass at the same church, to console ourselves we say that we have been edified twice, because each has related the homily he/she

had heard. When Giorgio has preached the homily, he shares it with Anna in advance: she is always asked to “review” the draft. If Giorgio reads it in the presence of his children, then criticism is assured!

In conclusion, we ask a prayer. Not only for ourselves, but for the entire diaconal family of our diocese that this very year celebrates the fortieth anniversary of the restoration of the permanent diaconate by the then Archbishop, Cardinal Michele Pellegrino, in 1972.

(\*) G. Dossetti, “Per una valutazione del magistero del Vaticano II”, lessons at ISR di Bologna 5-8 October 1966, published in “Il Vaticano II”, il Mulino, 1996, page 55