

“Celebrate a feast: ritual and gesture as family experiences”

1. Introduction to the theme: Sundays and Workdays

During our preparation for this statement we soon realized that the feast needs to be prepared for through our normal working day, where God certainly has a role in our everyday things. It is all about our day to day conversation with God, be it a work day or a Sunday; we live in and with His presence. Our children grow up through us and through our life of faith, Sundays or Workdays. They grow up through our everyday life.

Prayer – our conversation with God – requires as a basis, conversation with each other as a couple and as a family.

2. Love between God and people – Love between a husband and his wife

To celebrate the *day of the Lord* as a family means that mother and father are in a **living** relationship with Christ. Just as the love between a husband and wife needs continuous care, renewal and more depth, so too does the love of Christ, the third partner in the marriage covenant. In the same way Christ gave himself through death on the cross and resurrection for His Church, so too do we give ourselves as husband and wife to each other. Christ lives and works through us. Christ is present in our love and loyalty with His love and loyalty. In this way our marriage becomes a sign of the covenant with Christ and His Church.

Our natural love as a couple is the basis on which the sacrament of marriage is built. Since grace builds on nature, our care for this love, care for holding onto and deepening our first love with its growth through concrete signs of love and touch, is also an important requirement for the growth of grace. For this to develop you need to have a sense of what your partner needs, to have creativity and willingness to approach your partner. We know what makes each other happy and so we take time to give each other some sign of our love. We try to care that our discussions do not stop abruptly but help towards a positive and lively discussion. We do not just simply sweep conflict under the table, in order to simply have harmony that is neither real nor lasting, but try to look at it in the face and find a solution, which does not mean one partner has to pick the short straw. Dignity of the individual has to remain intact at all costs.

3. Forms of expression – Bearings taken from elements of the liturgy

The celebration of the Eucharist is at the heart of the *day of the Lord*. Elements of this liturgical feast can be applied to our daily life as a couple and as a family. In this way we develop a culture of love step by step.

Gratitude

Celebrating the Eucharist means to give thanks. We uphold a culture of gratitude on a day to day basis by giving thanks to God for the little things in life we so often take for granted. We give thanks to our creator for the gift of life. We feel we have been richly endowed and give thanks to God for all he gives us, for our material and spiritual goods. We accept them and enjoy them. We try not to look jealously at others, at what they have, but practice being happy with our lot and all we have. We give thanks for our partner, our children, our talents and abilities, our education and professions. We give thanks for our faith and the many signs of love of God's divine providence we experience daily.

Evening prayer is always prayed under the theme of gratitude for the day and the love we have received during that day.

Forgiveness

During the Eucharistic celebration we ask at the beginning of Holy Mass for God's forgiveness for the mercy of the Father. During our day to day life we often rub up against our partner's *special ways* and weaknesses. We try to forgive each other but also pray that we can each accept forgiveness and pray intentionally the Our Father: "...and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us."

We always try to approach the other and forgive them. The love of Christ and the experience of His all merciful forgiveness gives us the strength to forgive our partner, so that our hard hearts can be open again.

- Petitions

Through the petitions we bring our prayers with the entire Church before God. By placing our trust in the words of Christ: "Ask and you shall receive", we turn to Him daily in prayer. There are so many things in our life for which need His help: for the health of a sick friend who has cancer, for a good outcome of final exams at school, for employment of our neighbor, for peace in a family, for the openness to talk where the relationship is difficult, even for little things such as asking for a parking place while shopping in the city... God who knows all the hairs on our heads, cares for us, even for the smallest details of our lives. We also try and bring our prayers and wishes before God in a respectful way that the other is not hurt in any way.

- In communion with

The core of the Eucharist is our feast with Jesus Christ, our Saviour. We live in a time where Fast-food is in, where you can eat what you want, when you want, where you want. However, we try as a family to sit around the table and eat with each other at least one meal a day, to have a feast with each other and to be in community with each other. Through our table conversation we often hear what is important to the one or the other, what bothers them. Here parents experience themselves accepted and in solidarity with one another as do our children. At table we discuss things, tell the other our different points of view. It is the place where we communicate as a family.

- Praise

Through the Eucharistic celebration we give praise to God. Honest praise of each other on an everyday basis strengthens and motivates our self-worth. As parents we have taken it upon ourselves to praise each other at least once a day as well as our children.

- Blessing

The Eucharistic celebration ends with a blessing. The wish: "You can do it" with the request for God's helping hand gives us the necessary strength for all the challenges of our life. Very important to us is the blessing of our children. Blessing means saying to the opposite: "I am glad you are here. You are special and unique. You are loved." Through our blessing we place our children under the protection of Our Lady and the grace of God. It is a practiced custom to bless through a few words and a gesture.

As a couple we also practice blessing each other with the sign of the cross on the forehand mornings and evenings and asking for God's protection.

If all these points become part of your lifestyle, living elements of the liturgy in everyday life, as a couple as a family, then this soon springs over to your children. In Germany is a saying: "It does not matter how we educate our children they copy all we do!"

4. Forms of expression: Home Shrine

In our Schoenstatt movement we have made the experience that if you invite Christ and his holy Mother into your homes, if you prepare a special place, a holy corner, a home shrine, such a life can be lived. This contains a cross, a picture of Our Lady and other religious symbols.

In this way we invite God and Our Lady into our everyday lives. The main focus is that the cross and picture of Our Lady are not just simply symbols for Christ and Mary, but they are really present in our home and have a positive effect on our home and family life. The home shrine all began when a mother had difficulty in the education of her child. She then asked the Blessed Mother to take up her place in her home and take the education of her children in to her hands, to work *miracles of grace*.

The home shrine is our daily contact point with God and the Blessed Mother. It is from this place of grace that she spoils and educates us daily.

The home shrine has room for every detail of our lives, for discussions, conversations, prayer, the liturgical calendar, family and Church celebrations. Through our home shrine our faith becomes alive. This spot has an effect on the atmosphere in our home. It brings parents and children together in contact with the God of life, so that we not only meet God on the day of the Lord but every day.

5. A Personal witness – Life with the home shrine

We would now like to tell you of one personal experience with our home shrine.

It was an extremely difficult time for us at the beginning of our marriage to hear that we will probably not be able to have any children. We tried to look for the sign of God in all of this. Were we to hand over this sacrifice of not being able to have children in order to have more room and time for the development of the Schoenstatt Family work? Should we adopt children? We received our answer during Mass once at the Gospel when we heard the words: "... whoever accepts one of these children accepts me."¹

After that we then tried very hard to adopt a child. This is a very difficult process in Germany as there are more couples who want to adopt than there are children. At that time the dictatorship of Ceausescu in Romania came to a bloody end and the authorities gave us hope that we might be able to adopt a child from there.

We then met up with a couple who had already visited Romania for that very same reason. They showed us several photographs of children in an orphanage. They then gave us one of these photos to keep. We placed this photo in our home shrine, symbolizing the child that we might once be able to adopt.

After overcoming many difficulties we drove to Herrmannstadt (Sibui) in December 1990 in search of a child for adoption. As we arrived we were told that the laws had changed and the children from a home were no longer allowed to be put up for adoption. However there was a small possibility with one child. We drove to the orphanage and were shocked to see that the child before us was the very one in the Photograph which we had placed months ago in our home shrine. There was no question about it this was the child God wanted us to have. She was to become our daughter. We were overjoyed. On 21st January 1991 Christine came to our home. She was five years old. At a later date we were able to adopt Teresa and Johannes.

This experience is deeply embedded in our hearts and tells us that God helps us to find Him, He takes us seriously and is with us at all times even during the smallest events of our lives.

6. Bearing witness - one example: Our silver wedding – "a day of the Lord"

Families who try to make the above mentioned inspirations a way of life do make a difference in their parishes and further a field in which they become a force of light.

Therefore we would like to encourage you to bear witness to your life of faith at family and church celebrations such as a baptism, a wedding, a silver wedding and the like. At times like these many people who are far from the Church and their faith are open for such witnessing.

¹ Mt 18,5

We made this experience at our silver wedding in 2009. It was a true celebration of faith, a day of the Lord, to which all our friends and relatives were invited. Weeks before, we made preparation for the Holy Mass and the celebration to follow. The Mass took place in the Church of the Trinity on Mount Schoenstatt, a Mass of Thanks. The focus we placed on our bringing of gifts to the altar and of the renewal of our vows. Our gifts were symbols of all that had become important to us during the last 25 years and so we prayed the following:

“We want to give thanks for the 25 years of our marriage and bring our thanks and our prayers with the bread and wine to the altar.

- We bring our wedding candle as a symbol of our married life and love together.
- We bring a baptism candle as a symbol of our children.
- We bring a net as a symbol of all our relatives and friends who have helped us on our married way in life.
- We bring our picture of the Blessed Mother as a symbol for the fullness of life which we have experienced through Schoenstatt.
- We bring two rings as a symbol for all married couples, as a symbol of longing for a lasting and final bond of love.
- We bring the cross of unity as a symbol for all priests and people who have decided to live a consecrated life outside marriage.
- We bring a jar as a symbol for all those in need, for those who suffer from illness, spiritually or physically.
- We bring bread and wine as a symbol of our work and our life.

The highlight was the renewal of our vows when we asked all couples present to take hands and renew their vows with us. We were told later that this was a very special and emotional moment for many.

Our silver wedding was a true day of the Lord where we were able to bear witness to our life of faith as a couple.

It was possible at such a time to express our joy and the peace we receive from our faith, and by such witness activate others to help promote a culture of love.

We would like to conclude this presentation with a song which reflects how our home is a holy place, where every day can be celebrated as a *day of the Lord*.