

"FAMILY AND CELEBRATION"

Celebration encompasses our entire existence. Saint Paul would say: SOMA - PSYCHE - PNEUMA. WE HAVE BEEN DESIGNED by the TRINITY to CELEBRATE.

GOD THE FATHER created men and women, placing them in the centre of a "COSMIC CELEBRATION". **JESUS** compares salvation to a WEDDING FEAST (Mt 11.22) and states that "As long as they have the bridegroom with them, THE GUESTS cannot fast" (Mk 2.19). **THE SPIRIT** vitalizes the life of the church, an anticipation and source of a renewed world, in the image of a "FAMILY CELEBRATION", uniting all peoples in one, single family. A celebration can spring from many sources, and I will highlight three of them: KNOWLEDGE - BEAUTY - BROTHERHOOD. I always think of the SUNDAY CELEBRATION as based on these three components.

KNOWLEDGE - We observe our SUNDAY CELEBRATION in order to "HAVE KNOWLEDGE" of the MYSTERY OF GOD, experiencing it as children of one family. The Sunday Eucharist is the deepest experience of God we have been given: BODY EXPERIENCE. From here grows the KNOWLEDGE of the God of Jesus: GOD RELATIONSHIP AT THE FAMILY LEVEL. THE RELATIONSHIP is the identity of the God of Jesus. In Trinitarian life, it precedes His relationship with us. The experience of the discovery of "GOD RELATIONSHIP" helps us to believe, without a doubt, that GOD IS LOVE AT THE FAMILY LEVEL.

BEAUTY - We often hear this repeated these days: Beauty will save the world! DOSTOEVSKY said: Without beauty, man no longer lives; the secret of life lies right here. But what is beauty? How is BEAUTY expressed WITHIN A FAMILY? When is the Sunday celebration beautiful? I will answer you based on my experience. I once took part in a Mass celebrated by Padre Pio and in the presence of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: the CELEBRATION was not given by the church ornaments and vestments, the chants or the grandiose ceremony; it was the BEAUTY of their faces that were weary with age and lined with wrinkles that illuminated the celebration; they radiated a wonderful light and had a fascinating beauty. And, I remember the feast of my first holy communion. It was during the war, a time of fear and extreme poverty; no opulence. I will never forget the beauty radiating from my father's face (he died in the bombings just a few days later), my mother's, and the faces of all those present. THEIR BEAUTIFUL FACES WERE CELEBRATING. TAILHARD DE CHARDIN extends to us the following invitation: BE HAPPY! Let the BEAUTY of your smile BLOSSOM and PRESERVE IT on your face.

BROTHERHOOD - The Sunday Eucharist generates a FAMILY BROTHERHOOD: NOT "MANY TOGETHER" but "MANY AS ONE" (Jn 17.21). This is the BROTHERHOOD that derives from the Paschal Supper celebrated by Jesus. A gathering of "STRANGERS" that become ONE BODY AND ONE BLOOD, partaking of the body and blood of the Resurrected Crucified Christ.

HOW TO MAKE SUNDAY A FAMILY CELEBRATION

After fifty years, the dogmatic constitution "Sacrosantum Concilium" should be reconsidered and its main themes rediscovered.

- ❖ The Eucharist is a sacrificial supper where eating and drinking together, like the family called together by the Spirit, the Body and Blood of the Lamb, constitutes its and our Easter.
- ❖ The initial trinity greeting transforms the guests into a "CELEBRATING ASSEMBLY", a "FAMILY OF GOD".
- ❖ The celebration nourishes us as with a family with two tables: THE TABLE OF THE WORD AND THE TABLE OF THE SHARED BREAD.

DIFFERENT REASONS FOR AND WAYS OF CELEBRATING

Celebrations with different meanings and different rites intertwine within the family: name days, birthdays, anniversaries, births, graduations, first jobs, a recovered harmony, the return of a family member from afar. Even the Sunday Eucharist has different contexts, which underline different moments and aspects of the experience of every family and of the entire community. Sunday will always be the week's Easter Day, but the liturgical year gives a different celebratory tone to each Sunday.

The Sunday gathering cannot be properly celebrated unless we take account of the liturgical period, harmonizing it with the rhythms of the celebrating community. Characterizing the celebrations according to the LITURGICAL SEASONS helps the family to give a sense to the different periods it is experiencing: the anticipation, desire and joy for a birth, the beauty of motherhood and fatherhood, the raising of children, the recognition of one's failings and forgiveness thereof, the discovery of family life as an "Easter Mystery", relishing the presence of Christ Resurrected in prayer and in the breaking of bread with those who have none; the effusion of the Holy Spirit who is the soul of family communion, and finally to live the "TERRIBLE DAILY ROUND" with the strength of faith, the peace of hope and the joy of charity.

These are the suggestions that the different liturgical seasons, if lived correctly, can give to the family. CELEBRATION requires a sharing of the joys and the sufferings of a family, the Sunday celebration must reflect participation in the moments of the Community's life: the HOMILY, the prayer intentions and the various exhortations left to the sober discretion of the minister, cannot but recall the events experienced by the members of the assembly. And this gives rise to a question: "Does the passive and slavish use of printed notes help to experience the Sunday celebration as a live Community celebration, with its own specific history, or does it strip and disembody the celebrations of their uniqueness and meaning? The Sunday celebration is not fully a family celebration if there is no room for sharing with the poor, even those who are not present, or even with people of other cultures, nationalities and religions.

It is vital that we personalize the SUNDAY CELEBRATION, bearing in mind the experience of God's family that gathers together to celebrate. There are different forms of celebration and of MAKING FEAST. Today, means of communications have brought them all to our attention, but I do believe that we should resist the temptation to adapt the Sunday celebration to what we see broadcast. I refer to three types of celebrations:

Papal - Diocesan - Parish

In order to express celebration at the family level, each of these forms must maintain its own prerogatives.

The Papal celebration is rich, and at time, redundant in rites and ceremonies. It expresses the universal nature of the church, guaranteed and presided by the Bishop of Rome.

The celebration of the diocesan Bishop presents the local church in its different components, gathering together under its pastor who is the "source and guide to communion".

In order for it to be a true Family Celebration, the parish celebration must have its own **personality**, which derives from the lives of those who celebrate it. It must distinguish itself for its simple and understandable rites, the chants that involve the entire assembly, leaving to the "schola cantorum" the discreet and sole function of guide. The parish celebration is characterised by the reception, the greeting and the personal relationship that should grow from Sunday to Sunday.

The celebration must not be a repetitive event, but by its very nature, expands and infects even those who would have serious reasons for remaining away.

If, from Sunday to Sunday, KNOWLEDGE, HOSPITALITY AND LOVE GROWS, THE CELEBRATION OF THE FAMILY OF GOD, which is a FAMILY OF FAMILIES, ALSO GROWS

One last thought:

EVANGELIZATION is neither new nor old; it has two fundamental and indissoluble moments which spring from the apparition of CHRIST RESURRECTED:

- ❖ The SUNDAY EUCHARIST that through the WORD and the LORD'S SUPPER makes the Community of disciples grow in Faith as a Family gathered TOGETHER by the Trinity. (EMMAUS).
- ❖ THE MISSION, arising from the SUNDAY EUCHARIST brings the announcement of Jesus, the CHRIST CRUCIFIED, to the ends of the earth (Mt 28, 19), so that everyone rejoices becoming and living as one SINGLE FAMILY OF GOD.

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