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1. The Family

When us Christians think or speak about the family, we should, in the first place, consider the family's role in history: over the ages the family has undergone and is still undergoing many changes.
The patriarchal family in Nomadic times is the first type of family that the Bible bears witness to: various generations lived together as a clan, headed by the patriarch. The sedentary, agricultural age followed and the family mutated, living in hamlets, villages and then towns in small houses where it was no longer possible for the various generations to live together. The family was different again in diaspora, in times of exile, within *gojim* that were unfamiliar and hostile, and different once more was the family in the times of Jesus in a context of villages characterized by prevalently hand-craft production and trading.

Although it's true that the structure and type of family have changed, it's also true that its essence remains, however, crucial and, in a certain sense, unchangeable regarding feeling the family as sharing loving relationships which become solid and which bond both a man and a woman and the various generations. The family, therefore, should not be interpreted solely in a historical context but also as love which becomes history, which makes history. The family is not the result of the casual meeting between a man and a woman; it is not simply like with animals about the continuation of the species. *For mankind the family is history*: history which can have a beginning, can be an alliance and last over time. It's not surprising that in Hebrew the family is called *Bajit*, in Greek *oîkos-oikía*, or "home", which is recognizable and recognized, the family's vital space.

But for the faith in God of followers of Abrahan and Jesus Christ, what are the decisive elements of the family? Primarily *love*: the family is the nest of love, the epiphany of love, the alliance of love. The wedding vows, which make man and woman "the same flesh and blood" (Gen 2,24; cf. Mc 10,7-8; Mt 19,5-6; Ef 5,31) are the first affirmation of love and an amen pronounced between the two partners, between the two alterity, an antidote to living without the other. Love generates alliance and alliance itself generates paternity, maternity and, therefore, fraternity, sorority, all the original, essential relations in life. It is, first of all, in the family that each of us knows "passive" love towards us (we are loved by those who brought us into this world) and then active love for the next; it is in the family that we learn to "leave" it by practicing the art of love, creating a new family. The love we experience in the family is decisive for life and our ability to love.

It is within the very family that we also learn trust. So, if it is true that already in the uterus the unborn child can feel whether it can or cannot trust the mother carrying it, coming into the world and becoming civilised, it is essential to trust in our parents,

brothers and sisters and to receive their trust. The life of each one of us depends on our ability to believe, to have faith in others, in life, in the future, to accept others' faith in us: [1] but we receive this teaching mainly in the family.

Finally, we have access to *hope* through the family, we can win over the desperation that looms over every life: as our life goes on we understand that we can only hope with others, and in the family "hoping together" is necessary to learn to live in this world and our times.

But if it is true that what we have seen until now is God's wishes for the family, if this expresses the true vocation of the family, and represents the vital anthropological features for authentic humanisation, to be able to live our lives fully and build a common project living in this world, it is even more true that *above all it is possible to live within the family the commandment of love, pass on the faith, bequeath hope*. We often think that Shema' Jisra'el (Dt 6,4-5), the great commandment of love which Jesus in the Gospels compares to love for our neighbour (cf. Lv 19,18; Mc 12,29-31 and par.), does not regard love within the family. As love in the family – it is said – is generated by free choice, by reciprocal attraction and instinct and therefore cannot be commanded, then such love is not included in the commandment.

However, love for our neighbour indicates who is close to us, who decides to be neighbour to the next (Lc 10,36), and, therefore, regards the family, no better place for togetherness. The reciprocal love between spouses, the reciprocal, though not symmetrical love between parents and children, fraternal love, are all contained in the commandment that subordinates all the others and reassumes all the Law. This is the radical and faithful love that cannot be denied, love sustained by an alliance, a pact that God desired and stipulated "putting under a single yoke", "joining, co-yoking" man and woman. A love that man and woman cannot disjoin: "What God has joined together, let not man separate", said Jesus (Mc 10,9; Mt 19,6)

Within the family love is diffusive: from parents to children, up to becoming a good neighbour for those without a family, becoming fathers and mothers to orphans (c.f. Gb 29,16), showing loving care towards widows (cf. Sir 4,10), sharing God's gifts with the believer and his family (cf Dt 26,1-11). As far as the Apostles' exhortations are concerned regarding family life, domestic morality – the so-called "family codes" or "domestic tables", (cf Ef 5,21-6,9; Col 3,18-4,1; Tt 2,1-10; 1Pt 2,13-3,7) -, it is true that they draw from models of Greek environments in the presence of Christian churches. It is also true that the ethics contained are highly Christological: to be meek, one with the other (cf. Ef 5,21), to respect reciprocal obedience (cf. Ef 6,1; Col 3,20) to love ourselves with Christ's very love (cf. Ef 5,25), to love our spouse as we love ourselves (cf. Ef 5,33), all this is is living in *agápe*, putting into practice the "new commandment" of love (cf. Gv 13,34; 15,12). And for this reason, marriage, and so the family, is the "great mystery", in very reference to Christ's *agápe* for the Church" (cf Ef 5,32). Yes, the Lord's sequence is found first of all in the family and only the Lord's will, a particular or special summons can transcend the structure of family love. For this reason the commandment which imposes love toward those who gave us life, among the 10 commandments in the Torah, is the only one associated with a

[1] On this theme cf E. Bianchi, *Gesù educa alla fede*, Qiqajon, Magnano 2011, pp. 8-12

promise to God: “Honour thy Father and thy Mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you”(Es 20,12; cf. Dt 5,16). In brief, if we do not know love in the family, how could we know it out?

As far as faith is concerned, both for the *Old and New Testaments, they family remains the ideal place, “the natural environment for transmitting the faith*. [2] We know that in the Jewish tradition the mother in particular is essential for her children's faith and for passing on the will of God, to the point that one could affirm: “There is no family without a Torah, and no Torah without a family”. Significantly the Jewish family has not only the family prayers at the beginning of Saturday, but also the Passover feast the *seder*, when the children, the new generations are told of Israel's liberation from slaveship and about Passover. The Passover *Haggadah* is told again and again so that the faith in God *go'el*, liberator never diminishes over the generations. The following constitutes a great teaching: our God, who is God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob ... of Jesus Christ, before being my God was the God of my forefathers, and therefore the God of all those who came before me and thanks to whom I have known him to be trustworthy and therefore I believed.

Giovanni Crisostomo told Christians to “Make of your home a Church” [3], and Agostino spoke of “the domestic Church”[4] as there is an analogy between the Church and the family. It was a great friend of mine, the Bishop of Prato mon. Pietro Fiordelli who introduced these words into the *Lumen Gentium*: “In this that we could call the domestic Church (*In hac velut ecclesia domestica*), the parents must be the first teachers of the faith to their children and favour the vocation of each one of them” [5]. Parents who are trustworthy, credible in as much as they are authoritative thanks to the coherence of what they say and how they live and feel, can pass on faith to their children; they can lay the land and prepare everything so that the faith that they transmit to their children becomes strong in their ability to believe, they can receive the gift of God, the faith that God bestows on each of us prepares our hearts to receive his gift. If parents know how to demonstrate their faith in God and Christ, and so show God and Christ to be trustworthy, also their children will practice their belief. Parents must show:

they really believe in an invisible presence;

they truly adhere to a living God ;

they trust in him day by day;

that with effort, but also with love they carry out His will, convinced that that if their life;

they love Christianity and with it Jesus Christ who is the Apostle and the Apostle who is Jesus Christ.

Believing together, practising the faith are learnt in the family. This is true also for hope as hope is the other side of the coin; faith in fact is the “anchor of hope” (cf. Eb 6,19). And so with words and lifestyle we bear witness to and bestow the Lord's sequence. “We believed in Love” (cf. 1Gv 4,16): this is the song, the story that the spouses must transmit to their children and grandchildren. “We trusted each other (we were engaged), then we formed

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[2]B. Maggioni, *Il seme e la terra*, *Vita e pensiero*, Milan 2003, p.88 on this theme see also B. and B Chovelon, *L'avventura del matrimonio: guida pratica e spirituale*, Qiqajon, Magnano 2004, pp. 175-182

[3]Giovanni Crisostomo, *Sermones in Genesim* vi,2

[4]Agostino of Ippona, *Epistulae* 14*

[5]*Lumen Gentium* 11

an alliance under the wings of faith, believing in love": this is the synthesis of the story of love in the family.

2. The family, the day of the Lord, Holy Communion

Regarding the relationship between the family and the day of the Lord [6], if the first Christians bore witness that "*Sine dominico non possumu*s", "without Sunday we cannot live" [7], the family today too must bear the same witness to mankind.

The "day of the Lord" (Ap 1,10) is a fundamental reality for the Church, it is a sacrament in time, memory of the entire history of our salvation regained through the resurrection of Christ, Lord of all realities created in Him (cf. Col 1,16) and by Him (cf. Id; Ef 1,10). Therefore, this day, the day of the Lord but also the day of the church and of mankind, cannot be lived in a peculiar manner by those who have family. Outside the Christian regime, in which religion had a sociological function of integration in the civilised world, we note a breaking away from the Sunday practices. In these circumstances we should be aware that Christian practice has always been difficult and tiring, as the sequence of our Lord Jesus always is. In the 4th century Ephrem from Nisibi reported that Sunday was becoming worldly in such a way that it made Christians sin more than on other days:

The first day of the week is worthy of honour .. Blessed is he who worships the day of the Lord, observing its holiness... While our bodies rest and cease their toil, we sin ... going to taverns and sinful places[8].

For the sequence of the Lord, therefore, to be his disciples in communion with Him, we need to live Sunday as a family, live "respecting the day of the Lord, in which our lives were born by means of him" [9]

But what exactly does living Sunday as a family mean? First of all it means *pacing the time together symphonically*. As a family we live together in the same house, but we don't live that time at the same pace, so the home becomes a hostel and the members of the same family do not have the chance to truly meet, to do things together, to celebrate the feasts and rest together. That is why us Christians try to oppose with intelligent resistance the current tendency to work on Sundays. The question is, primarily, anthropological: how to meet, interweave relationships, offer our physical presence, if we don't have one day to stay off work and dedicate ourselves to staying together in a selfless, non-functional fashion? Today that society is shattered, that relationships are ever more precarious and communications more and more virtual, in terms of humanisation we need a rhythm of relaxation time in common, an antidote to alienation caused by our jobs but also the chance to stay together, to be a community, to experience communion. In other words, "living the family as a space for relationships within it and outside of it"[10], beginning from

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[6] I have dedicated a wide study of this theme: *Vivere la domenica*, Rizzoli, Milan 2005
[7] *Acta Saturnini*, *Dativi*, *et aliorum plurimorum martyrum in Africa* xi
[8] Ignazio di Antiochia, *Ad Magnesios* ix, 1
[9] Efrem di Nisibi, *Sermo ad nocturnum dominicae resurrectionis* 4
[10] F.G. Brambilla, "Stili di Vita" della famiglia tra lavoro e festa, in *Communio* 230 (2011), p.13

that special day, Sunday.

As far as Christians are concerned – it should be confessed – in the past few years, still mainly characterised by weekend relaxation, the habit of spending the weekend away from the day-to-day environment (in the mountains, the seaside or elsewhere) has already caused notable damage to the opportunity to fully live out the parish community, reciprocal recognition between Christians, to belong to a group that meet in the same place (*epì tò autó*: At 1,15; 2,1; 1 Cor 11,20; 14,23) to confess our common faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, resurrected and living. In order to react to this'going adrift' we must reaffirm how decisive it is to live Sunday practices within the family; otherwise even the Holy Communion will be experienced individually as an obligation to be satisfied rather than as the opportunity to experience together what we are: a family. From this point of view Jews (but also orthodox Christians) can teach us something: families go to the synagogue together on Saturdays, also as there are not various liturgical celebrations at the synagogue as there are masses for us (and certainly not special prayers for children and teenagers...). Here is what we should do: feel called upon by the lord together, listen to the word of God together, celebrate our faith together, experience the Holy Communion that makes all as one body, the body of Christ together. After the Holy Communion, fundamental for Christian life, we should insist on the chance to l*ive the holy day together, starting off from the festive meal eaten together in the family*. This is an essential resistance to the shattering of relationships, to drifting apart from each other, above all in modern-day life which with its frenetic rhythms of work, school and various activities that diversify the different family members' lives during weekdays, make it almost impossible for a family to eat a meal together.

If, in the light of this rooting of the family, we radicate our Sunday Christian practices, it can be affirmed that, today, more than ever, it is a *prophetic* practice, available to all the followers. What do I mean by this affirmation? In the sense that different families, truly diverse for environment, culture, these days also for language and ethnic background, find themselves called before he whom they recognize as their Lord. They obey together and together rediscover they are listeners to the Word and members of the sole body of Christ. Thus a communion is created against anonymity and homologation, where we find reciprocal recognition and the demolition of all barriers. This is, furthermore a prophetic practice as men and women, the young and the elderly are in the same place, united by a bond of faith, hope and charity. Is this not a miracle, for people who are looking for miracles? Is it not a miracle that, although a minority, millions of men and women worldwide on the same day carry out the same act of sharing, have the same hopes and carry out the same charity?

And so we return to the role of the family: parents are called upon to teach their children not only the rhythm of the week marked by the day of the Lord, but that of the entire year; they have the duty to transmit to their children the importance of the feasts – starting from Easter, the feast of all feasts – and to help them to experience these feasts as Christians. The liturgy celebrated can help children to understand many things that we are unable to explain: it is our duty, however, to teach them to recognise the signs, to understand the human actions of the liturgy and to listen to the word of God, always efficient (cf. Eb 4,12) over our today and God's today.

This is true of teaching to pray, which must begin when children are very small; teaching that is born by parents' praying with their children. If the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray it was because they saw he was the first to dedicate himself to prayer (cf. Lc 11,1); and in the same way, when children see their parents intent in prayer, they will ask... Prayer must, however, be carried out with authenticity, not just as worship but as a convinced, trustworthy act. If Jesus promised "Where two or three people are together in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18,30), then, above all in the family Jesus himself, God can be present, can be evoked by prayer, called "amongst" us to be recognized as our Lord. Is this difficult for parents? It is difficult for all of us to pray, but the gift of being able to pray is always bestowed on he who asks the Lord with sincerity, because the Holy Ghost invoked is always present (cf. Lc 11,13). It is not about praying as monks do, but it is necessary to pray together sometimes, in ways that are eloquent for your children. On the other hand, in certain situations praying carried out together in the family is sometimes imposed as a necessity: in times of pain, of mourning, in times of troubles, on bad days... At the same time we also need to pray in times of joy, festivities, at the beginning of meals, just where it happens, in beauty. Yes, praying with other family members sometimes involves taking on responsibilities together, at times accepting God's will, at times displaying joy before God. Praying with others is praying for others. But all this can be learnt from the roots of Sunday Holy Communion, because mutual prayer is the liturgy which inspires the models and shapes personal and family prayer.

Conclusion

From our brief itinerary, we understand one fundamental fact, the need to call upon creativity within the church and families: *to once again place adequate understanding and practice on the day of the Lord, day of the church, day of Holy Communion, a day for mankind at the centre of Christian life.*

Rediscovering the centrality of the day of the Lord, "the family rediscovers itself as the place of decisive relationships for the people who make up the family";[11] for progress in humanisation; to live for love, the only reality the will "never cease to be" (1Cor 13,8).

[11]F. Manenti, "Il giorno del Signore e la famiglia oggi: un tempo da ritrovare" in A. Torresin (ed.), *Il giorno di Dio e degli uomini. Domenica e Eucaristia*, Ancora, Milan 2006, p. 174