



## **X Incontro Mondiale delle Famiglie**

Roma 22 - 26 giugno 2022



## **We need fathers and mothers**

**Rayan and Mary Rose Verret -USA-**

Panel 4.1





## **WE NEED FATHERS AND MOTHERS**

Rayan and Mary Rose Verret

Vatican City, June 2022

(Ryan) On the Feast of St. Joseph this past year, after spending the night on a campground with my oldest son and around thirty other fathers and what seemed like around one hundred or so little boys, there was a quote from the Franciscan Friar celebrating the Mass that day that I keep going back to. Father shared, “There are two words that remain for all time as the most important words ever said: moma and daddy!” I had never thought of it this way. Sometimes a parent hears those words over and over and says “ahhhhh!”. Yet, what an amazing and unique gift it is to be called “father and mother, mommy and daddy”.

(Mary-Rose) Perhaps we all begin the journey of fatherhood and motherhood with some inadequacies or fears. For many of us though, we’ve just never seen what we naturally desire and want: to co-create with God and raise our children in the Church. We grow up in a culture and society where parenting in the Faith is foreign. Many of us had parents who were caught by surprise by what the world would be like as they tried to raise their children. In search of better jobs many young families uproot from their extended families and friends and go without the supportive communities which may have supported three or more generations of families before them. The witness of family friends, grandparents and a community of families supporting each other in what it means to be father, mother, and family is eroding.

As we look at the fears of young couples today there is fear about becoming parents. Many of us had parents who were not present or not present in a way that was



meaningful, in a way that prepared us for fatherhood and motherhood. How do we walk with fathers who worry they do not know how to father and mothers who fear they who do not know how to mother - who will accompany them?

(Ryan) Recently we were able to spend some time with a couple that has been married for nearly thirty years and have seven adult children, ) and who we have gotten to know through the introduction of a good priest friend. From the moment we met this couple, they seem to just really live out in a tangible way what we all long for in marriage and family: presence, love, and security. Twice we were welcomed into the home of this couple who not only received us, but our five children to stay with them for a week. As we mentioned earlier, many young people have never experienced the presence, love and security that I am referring to here. In our recent time with this special couple, I noticed their interest in sharing some insights and wisdom in parenting. It was so natural and personalized for what Mary-Rose and I needed to hear. It wasn't done in a preachy way or in any way that overstepped our role but only fostered and nurtured us in the parents that the Lord wants us to become. As I listened to them, I realized what a gift it was to have them to walk and talk with that day.

Deep within each of our hearts is the instinct to be a father or mother, and that instinct, that desire, does not lead us to a place of confusion or to a dead end. It is a doorway that should lead us to a path of hope. Desires given by God are not meant to lead us to confusion, but they should lead us to a place of hope. The family is the seed of the church. The family is everything. Every new child is a new hope for the world and even though we may feel that we are in a motherless or fatherless generation, we can not say it is a chain that can never be repaired. The Church consistently confirms that, in Christ, all things can be made new.



First we speak about Fatherhood ... AL is challenging us to be a father who is always present. When our children are young, we are the center of their world, but as they grow, we need to become part of their world. Children need to find a father waiting for them when they return home with their problems. This brings to mind the parable of the prodigal son. We should not only receive our grown children, but they should always know we are waiting for them and ready to welcome them back.

What children most desire from their father is presence. A father's presence is itself an affirmation of the child and allows him or her to understand what it means to make a gift of one's self. What is this presence that children desire from their father? The undistracted ability to spend time together, to "waste time" with their children, as Pope Francis says. How many fathers have forgotten how to be present to their children? It is this very presence that speaks loudly to their lives - "you are precious, you are loved, you are unique, you are a gift,..." When a father's presence speaks this language to his children, the child will then grow up understanding the language of love necessary for fatherhood, but he will also hear the voice of his Heavenly Father. "You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

"We often hear that ours is "a society without fathers". In Western culture, the father figure is said to be symbolically absent, missing or vanished. Manhood itself seems to be called into question."

(AL n. 176)

Being present as a father can change the course of your children's lives and your grandchildren's lives! Make time to just be present.

What is motherhood? Motherhood is a holding that both nurtures and positions a child to fly. It is a tenderness that is rooted in a firm understanding of what God is



calling this little child to be. Motherhood is a heart that grows larger and more beautiful with each expansion, each gift, each challenge, each child. How does one learn this holding, this tenderness, this expression of motherhood that lifts up families to God? How does one learn to be a mother if they have not had a witness of this in their own life? By being part of a community of families where mothers can encourage and witness and support each other, by being humble and open and asking for help from mothers whom you admire. A mother remains a mother even when her children are grown. She, like a father, always waits and always has her children in her heart.

When our daughter was six she said to us “how does a child come into a family?” and before I could answer her, she said “but I already know and I will tell you. First, you see, a child is born in God’s heart and he thinks about that child and what family it should be in. Then that child is born from God’s heart into the parents’ hearts. After that, God makes the baby grow in its mommy’s tummy. Babies are always born in God’s heart first and then into a family, and every baby is a piece of God’s heart.” I said “you were right when you said that you already know!”

I would add that a child is always in his or her mother’s heart. So much of what our mother does is pray and wait. When a child is growing in her womb, she prays and waits. When a child leaves the home and begins a new life, she prays and waits. The prayers of a mother are very powerful. Also spiritual mothers – perhaps one of the most unseen yet powerful vocations in the world.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux said: “The loveliest masterpiece of the heart of God is the heart of a mother.”



Becoming a mother is also becoming open to suffering. Becoming a mother is a vulnerability. And becoming a mother, a woman opens her heart to both joy and suffering.

As Catholics we know the gift of motherhood, however, we live in a culture where androgyny is prized over complementarity, and feminism over femininity, experiences over parenthood, pets over children, and as Pope Francis recently said: “Thus, civilization grows old without humanity because we lose the richness of fatherhood and motherhood, and it is the country that suffers.”

So now we ask - what is the witness of each family, of your family? What is this “richness” of which Pope Francis speaks? Each family is a unique witness which points the world to God. To God’s love, to His faithfulness, to his unity, tenderness, fruitfulness, mercy, ... the family, the mother, the father and their children, reveal to you and to us the beauty and goodness of God in a way that nothing else can. The family unit is so precious and so good. We must do all that we can to build a foundation for new families who are forming (singles and engaged couples), form and accompany those who are beginning (newly married couples), walk with those who are carrying heavy crosses (bereaved parents), and support those with unique challenges to parenthood (addictions, special needs, loss of a spouse, infidelity...).

How is God calling you to accompany fatherhood and motherhood? We each have a gift, even charism, as a family that can lift up another family and lift up the Church. The Church is made up of little domestic churches, churches of the homes, and if we are living out the richness of this vocation, this theology of family, we will bring that richness and that beauty to our parishes and build up the Church. Your little “yes” to God each day as you live out the gospel in your family as parents is the antidote to the world’s isolation. We ask you to bring this to prayer - ask God how is he calling



you to share your fatherhood and your motherhood with your community and with the Church?

In closing, we would like to share with you this prayer which is at the heart of our call to be a family of missionary disciples. This prayer, which first came to our family years ago through a wonderful priest in the sacrament of Reconciliation, was an invitation for us to open the doors of our hearts and family to God!

“Heavenly Father, I thank you for the gift of my spouse and for the gift of each one of our children. You know our hearts and our needs. You know we desire to live faithfully our promises to you and to each other. We oftentimes find ourselves hurting each other and creating wounds in each other's hearts that we never wanted to cause. We recognize the gaps in our family caused by selfishness that have made us live distantly from you and each other. We want to invite you to fill our hearts with your presence and make us a family united in You. Please share with our family the presence and prayers of the Holy Family, St. Joseph, Mary, Our Mother, and her Son, Jesus Christ, to help fill the gaps our sins and limitations have created, so that we can know and live from a complete family that reflects your love to the world. May our family always be a living gospel, a little community giving witness to your love in our world.”

Compare with spoken text