

THIRD CATECHESIS
GOD’S GREAT DREAM

“DID YOU NOT KNOW THAT I MUST BE ABOUT MY FATHER’S BUSINESS?” (LK 2:49)

To us, therefore, who believe, the Bridegroom always appears beautiful.

Beautiful is God, the Word with God;

Beautiful in the Virgin’s womb,

Where, without losing his divinity, he assumed humanity;

Beautiful is the Word born as a child, because while a child,

he sucked milk,

while being carried, the heavens spoke,

the angels sang praises, the star directed the journey of the Magi,

he was adored in the crib, food for the meek.

He is beautiful, therefore, in heaven and beautiful on earth;

Beautiful in the womb, beautiful in his parents’ arms:

Beautiful in the miracles, beautiful in his sufferings;

Beautiful in inviting to life, beautiful in despising death,

Beautiful in giving up his life and beautiful resuming it;

Beautiful on the cross, beautiful the tomb, beautiful in heaven.

Listen to the canticle with intelligence,

and do not let the weakness of the flesh distract your eyes

from the splendor of his beauty.

Supreme and true beauty is justice;

you will not see the beautiful One if you consider him unjust;

if he is just in all places, he is beautiful everywhere.

(St. Augustine, Expositions on the Psalms 44, 3)

“Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Lk 2:49) These are the only words of Jesus, the young boy which the Gospels transmit to us. No more remarks, affirmations, or words of Jesus as child have been recorded in the Gospels. We are, certainly, dealing with a complex expression that, at first glance, seems to show that Jesus lacks respect for Joseph and Mary, visibly surprised and angry because they don’t understand why he stayed behind in God’s temple without telling them beforehand. In fact, behind these rather enigmatic words, the mystery of His Sonship appears and, in Him, that of the sonship of every person, because every child of man, before being woven in the maternal womb, before being desired by his or her parents (and how many times even not desired because the child’s arrival does not correspond to people’s plans), has always been cherished in the heart of God. This makes Pope Francis say with determination: *“Every child that forms inside his mother is an eternal plan of God the Father and his everlasting love: ‘before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I consecrated you’ (Jer 1:5). Each child is always in the heart of God, and at the moment he is conceived marks the eternal*

dream of the Creator. We think that is what the embryo from the instant in which it is conceived! You have to look at him with the same look of love of the Father who sees beyond appearances" (AL 168). Not only Jesus, as the Son of God, is called to be about His Father's business; but each child, never being the property of his or her parents, belongs to the Heavenly Father, who always has for him a dream so great and amazing that it surpasses by far the imagination and expectations of his earthly parents. The key question, therefore, is: What is God's dream for every person? What does He really dream of, so that each of his children may live a great and extraordinary life? This question is answered with exceptional immediacy and depth by Saint John Paul II: *"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it"* (Redemptor Hominis 10). He speaks precisely of the revelation of love, the encounter with love, of the experience and even the participation in love, thus indicating that more than an inner movement of the soul, or an act of self-giving, love revealed, encountered, experienced, and participated is a real Person, a living Person, and Christ himself who *"by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear"* (GS 22). God does not have an abstract or idyllic dream of love for each of us. In the Son, in the One who, to the astonishment of Joseph and Mary, says that he must be about His Father's business, can the true path and real love be revealed to us. Now, love speaks a specific language, with original expression, and it has its own way of becoming flesh. How? Through marriage! Pope Benedict XVI, therefore, says that only *"marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love"* (Deus Caritas Est 11). In fact, the word "love" has a *"vast semantic range [...] we speak of love of country, love of one's profession, love between friends, love of work, love between parents and children, love between family members, love of neighbor and love of God. Amid this multiplicity of meanings, however, one in particular stands out: love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness. This would seem to be the very epitome of love; all other kinds of love immediately seem to fade in comparison"* (Deus Caritas Est 2). It is the nuptial love between a man and a woman that reveals the excellence of God's love accomplished in Christ. This is a language that conceals a truly Great Mystery. Merely the thought that God has employed such love to reveal His heart to humanity already expresses a part of the mystery of the truth. Of course, if we read through all of Scripture, especially the prophetic books, we see how often God has used nuptial language to express and reveal His unique relationship to the chosen people of Israel. However, even before this, not only

chronologically but also theologically, a much larger truth is foreshadowed in the divine mystery: God does not use nuptial love to reveal Himself, but nuptial love has always been the primary revelation of God's face. *"The couple that loves and begets life is a true, living icon—not an idol like those of stone or gold prohibited by the Decalogue—capable of revealing God the Creator and Savior. [...] Seen this way, the couple's fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself, for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit of love. The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection. [...] This Trinitarian dimension finds expression in the theology"* (AL 11). When the Apostle Paul writes in the *Letter to the Ephesians*: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; I mean in reference to Christ and the Church"* (Eph 5:31–32), he states that, in the creation of Adam and Eve, in their being created to form one flesh, God has always had in mind the Great Mystery in reference to Christ and the Church. Since the foundation of the world, even before shaping Adam and then taking a rib from his side and covering it with flesh to create Eve, God envisioned His great dream, the Great Mystery of Christ and the Church, which He has revealed to us today in the Son. Pope Francis, therefore, says with conviction that *"to want to form a family is to resolve to be a part of God's dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga"* (AL 321). The Great Mystery is not an ideal or a truth, but it is a real event with a concrete form—the Cross—that no one would ever have expected and that, in an ever new and creative way, is continually represented in our history. How? Where? When? *"The married couple are therefore a permanent reminder for the Church of what took place on the cross; they are for one another and for their children witnesses of the salvation in which they share through the sacrament"* (AL 72 quoting FC 13). This demolishes the widespread experience and superficial conception that distort the Sacrament of Marriage: it cannot be understood and lived as *"a social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment. The sacrament is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses, since 'their mutual belonging is a real representation, through the sacramental sign, of the same relationship between Christ and the Church'"* (AL 72). We use human words to speak about the Great Mystery, with its width, height, and grandeur, and Pope Francis writes in a simple language that *"the sacrament is not a 'thing' or a 'power,' for in it Christ himself 'now encounters Christian spouses... He dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens.' Christian marriage is a sign of how much Christ loved his Church in the covenant sealed on the cross, yet it also makes that love present in the communion of the spouses"* (AL 73). The mutual love of the spouses is identically the same as

the love given by Christ on the cross for the Church. There is, hence, an extraordinary equation, and just thinking about it makes us shudder. The spouses, by virtue of the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, love one another divinely, they love each other by God's grace. Where did God reach the summit of His love? *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son"* (Jn 3:16). The spouses realize and manifest the folly of this divine love to the world. As Pope Francis says, *"the common life of husband and wife, the entire network of relations that they build with their children and the world around them, will be steeped in and strengthened by the grace of the sacrament. For the Sacrament of Marriage flows from the incarnation and the paschal mystery, whereby God showed the fullness of his love for humanity by becoming one with us. Neither of the spouses will be alone in facing whatever challenges may come their way. Both are called to respond to God's gift with commitment, creativity, perseverance and daily effort. They can always invoke the assistance of the Holy Spirit who consecrated their union, so that his grace may be felt in every new situation that they encounter"* (AL 74). Of course, their love is *"an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church"* (AL 72), and *"the analogy between the human couple of husband and wife [...] is imperfect"* (AL 73), because a marriage, even the most successful, accomplished, and holiest one, cannot and should never be a person's fulfillment. The cause for the suffering of many families today is the common widespread belief that their marriage is achievement of a longed-desired, ultimate goal. The nuptial love with one's spouse is not what gives a person human happiness; in fact, no spouse is without limits, weakness or fragility, and, hence, able to respond to the great expectations of love that a person might have. Marriage is never an end but *"in the joys of their love and family life, he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb"* (AL 73). Therefore, spouses are destined not to earthly marriage but to the eternal union: the marriage of Christ the Bridegroom with His Bride the Church. When this fundamental orientation is lost, the marriage covenant itself loses its meaning and stability. It is the eternal dimension that gives it a truly human flavor; but without this reference everything becomes insipid and disoriented. This is the cause of today's widespread crisis in marriage and the family, which does not spare anyone. Marriage is just the foretaste of happiness, but not happiness itself. Do you want to be happy? Do not try to find it by building an eternal home in Marriage. It is the true gateway to the path that leads to the full joy, but stopping at the door means risking never to participate in the eternal wedding banquet. It is, therefore, urgent to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to families truthfully, showing them how *"in the incarnation, he assumes human love, purifies it and brings it to fulfilment. By his Spirit, he gives spouses the capacity to live that love, permeating every part of their lives of faith, hope and charity. In this way, the spouses are consecrated and by means of a special grace build up the Body of Christ and form a domestic church"* (AL 67). This does not

mean taking care of the religious or spiritual dimension of families but helping them to experience the extraordinary work of redemption that Christ accomplished in our humanity: without Him, human love will never be itself but will lose its original beauty. The ecclesial community must, consequently, necessarily use the best of its resources for the families, because if it is true that “*the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church*” (AL 31), likewise “*the Church, in order fully to understand her mystery, looks to the Christian family, which manifests her in a real way*” (AL 67). In the family, the Great Mystery of Christ and the Church is at stake. In other words, by saving the family, the Church not only becomes herself, but God shows His face to the world in the human flesh of family relationships, thus fulfilling His great dream for humanity.

In the family

Let us reflect

1. Does God’s Great Dream for humanity have something to do with a person’s own dreams?
2. Marriage is not happiness but only the foretaste of happiness. What concrete consequences does this statement have in conjugal and family life?

Let us live

1. “*The common life of husband and wife, the entire network of relations that they build with their children and the world around them, will be steeped in and strengthened by the grace of the sacrament. For the Sacrament of Marriage flows from the incarnation and the paschal mystery, whereby God showed the fullness of his love for humanity by becoming one with us. Neither of the spouses will be alone in facing whatever challenges may come their way. Both are called to respond to God’s gift with commitment, creativity, perseverance and daily effort. They can always invoke the assistance of the Holy Spirit who consecrated their union, so that his grace may be felt in every new situation that they encounter*” (AL 74). How does the Holy Spirit work in your conjugal and family life?
2. Loving each other by the grace of God. Loving in the way of divine love; loving one another as Christ loved the Church, to the point of giving His life on the Cross. How can we realize all of this?

In church

Let us reflect

1. Why is it so hard to make the proclamation of the Gospel of marriage and the family a part of the Church’s pastoral ministry?
2. In the family, the Great Mystery of Christ and the Church is at stake. What does that mean?

Let us live

1. *“The Church, in order fully to understand her mystery, looks to the Christian family, which manifests her in a real way” (AL 67).* How can all this be done?
2. If it is true that *“the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church” (AL 31),* what should the Church do in her pastoral ministry?