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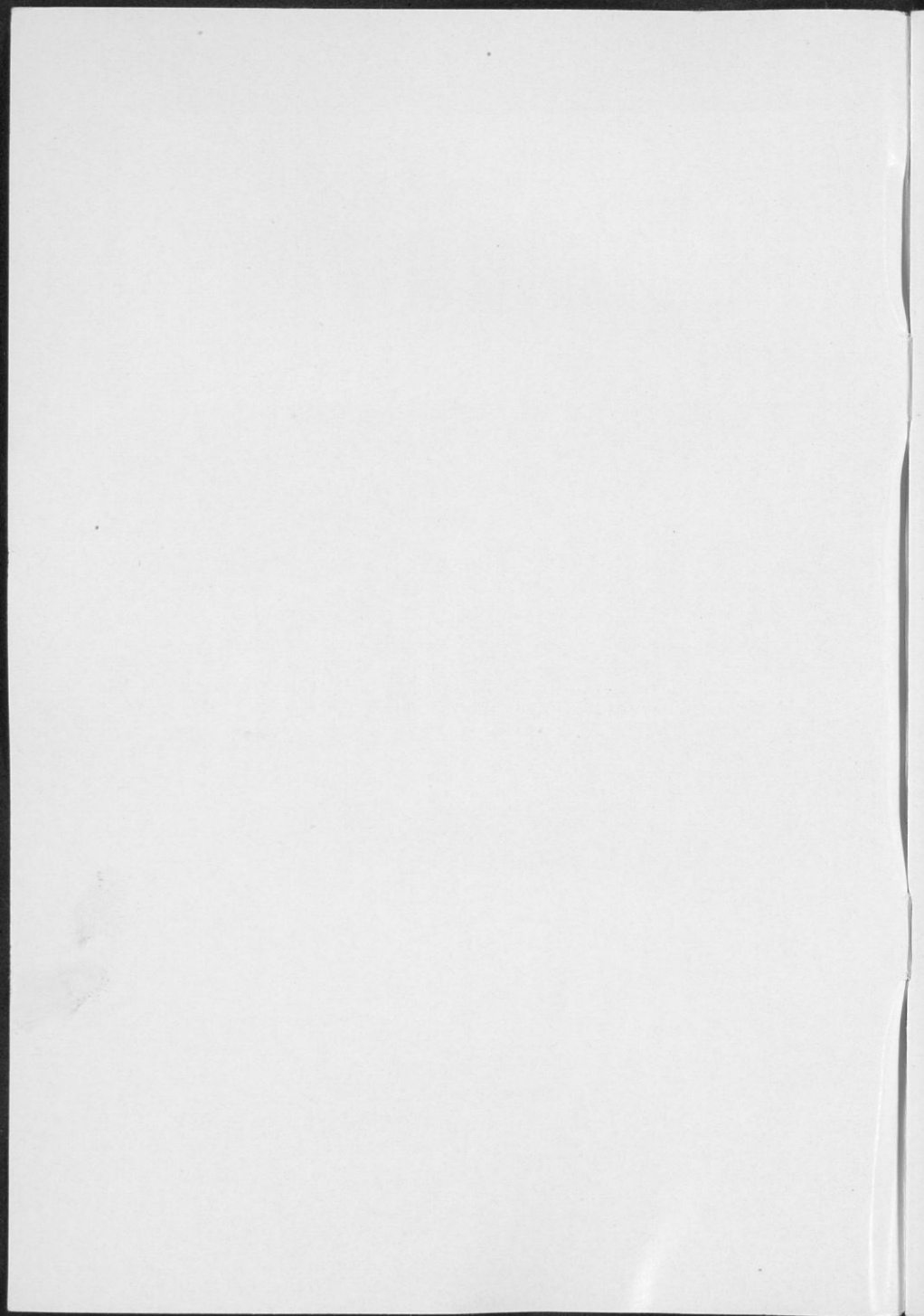
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The Christian In Action—

RELIGION

AND FAMILY LIFE

REV. LEO C. BYRNE



Religion and Family Life

By
Rev. Leo C. Byrne

A series of four radio programs presented on "The Christian in Action" (ABC, 11:30-12 Noon EST) during the month of March 1952. "The Christian in Action" is produced by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the American Broadcasting Company.



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Religion and Family Life

By
Rev. Geo. C. Butler

... in our time, the progress of religion in the United States is ...
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YOUR HOME CAN BE A HOUSE OF GOD

Address Delivered on March 2, 1952

My Dear Friends:

When we hear someone talking about a House of God, we immediately think of a Church; men and women almost universally refer to a Church as a House of God. There is a dramatic story in the New Testament—St. Matthew, St. Luke, and St. Mark all record it—wherein Jesus is portrayed as driving the money-changers from the Temple. Do you remember the comment He made before He drove those worldlings out? He said, "My House is the House of Prayer and you have made it a den of Thieves."

My House—God's House—is the House of Prayer. In the Catholic churches throughout the land where Jesus Christ is housed in His Eucharistic presence, how much more true are these churches—His Houses—Houses of Prayer. And yet, dear friends, even with this exalted idea of a Church, and at the risk of startling you, it must be said, none the less, that your home can also be a House of God.

Of course, your home would not be a House of God in the exact sense as already described. But in a very real way your home can be a House of God.

Your Home will be most pleasing to God if His Spirit dwells

therein, if His laws are respected, and if the Family has learned the value and the privilege of prayer as a way of life. In this sense it is possible for your Home to be a House of God.

Does such a statement sound as something new? Well really it isn't. More than 1500 years ago, one of the great Saints of the early Church, St. John Chrysostom, said almost that identical thing, when he referred to a deeply Christian Home as a "little church," a Church in miniature.

Here is a quotation from his writings: "Prayer and teaching in the Church are not enough; they must be accompanied by prayer and reading at home; for the home is a little church."

The Home—the Family—the Church. That is a very strange combination of words for many modern people especially since so very many Americans profess no allegiance to any organized religion. Nevertheless, it is a combination of words — the Home, the Family, the Church—that must be repeated over and over again. The Home, a little church, must be understood by everyone when we consider that in the family lies the foundation of our society; yes, even the foundation of Christianity.

There are some Christian homes that are Christian in name only. These may have a beautiful exterior, very correct furnishings, all of the modern appliances; but the people that dwell in them are so permeated with the secular spirit—the spirit of this world only—that they have become indifferent to God and the things of God. It was to these and all the followers of Christ that the Bishops of the United States spoke in their statement some years ago entitled, "The Christian in Action." They said, "The Christian must make his home holy—the Christian *Home* must realize the Christian ideal."

Perhaps you are asking yourself how your house could be a sanctuary, a house of God, and a gateway to Heaven. The very first step that should be taken is to invite Jesus Christ to take up His residence at your home. No matter how crowded you are, you surely have room for Him.

Then, do not hesitate to make "Christ the Head of the House, the unseen Host at every meal, the silent Listener to every conversation." If the various family activities are carried on with the realization of Christ's presence, that home will soon become a fertile field of virtue and holiness. Where Christ is invited to dwell and rule, family vices such as selfishness, anger and strife, disobedience and onanism all appear in their rightful ugliness.

The virtues of generosity, patience, obedience, and purity,

will easily flourish where the help of Christ is near at hand.

A realistic attitude toward Family Prayer will make it possible for this spirit of Faith to develop and grow strong. Since families do so many things as a unit, why wouldn't they say their prayers together? "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," said Christ, "there am I in the midst of them."

It is most natural for husband and wife to kneel together at the beginning of the day and at the day's end and adore Him for what He is in Himself—to thank Him for all the good things that He has lavished upon them, to ask pardon for sins, and to beg of Him the blessings and graces that are needed. Then as the family grows, first by the addition of one child, then another and another, and as each becomes able, they take their place in the family circle of prayer.

The practice of saying Grace aloud before and after meals should be observed in all homes. Such a practice is not only a beautiful display of family unity and devotion, it is also an extremely practical way of developing a healthy and holy family spirit in keeping with the mind of Christ.

Of course, there are practical difficulties that might stand in the way of carrying out this program in all details, but it is an ideal to strive for since the goal is so great. The oft repeated expression, "The family that prays

together is the family that stays together," has many important implications.

A significant thought about family prayer was expressed by the American Catholic Bishops when they said, "We heartily commend the beautiful practice of family prayer.

"The presence of Jesus Christ will surely be a source of blessing to the home where parents and children unite to offer up prayers in common. The spirit of piety which this custom develops will sanctify the bonds of family love and ward off the dangers which often bring sorrow and shame. We appeal in this matter with special earnestness to young fathers and mothers who have it in their power to mold the hearts of their children and train them in habits of prayer."

A very beautiful and commendable practice of family prayer is the daily recitation of the Rosary by all members of the family. The Rosary has always been a most powerful prayer. Our Blessed Mother of Fatima promised nothing less than peace to our world if all would be faithful to the Rosary. Under the inspired leadership of Father Patrick Peyton, C.S.C. the family Rosary Crusade has proved to be extremely popular and reports are available indicating that thousands upon thousands of families have pledged themselves to recite the Rosary every day.

Holy Mother the Church,

kindly mother that she is, offers many helps to homes desirous of becoming Houses of God. Her Priests are available for many blessings designed for marriage and family life which unite, in a sense, the altar and the home.

These blessings take the form of ceremonies in which the Church calls upon Almighty God to give the parties concerned, either for the present or future, the security of Divine Protection. The blessing has a special power, not of itself, but from the prayers of God's Church.

The Church has a beautiful blessing for the house in which you live. The request is frequently made "Father, will you come over to bless our home?" If it has never occurred to you to make such a request, your parish Priest will be pleased if you ask him.

The words of this blessing read in part as follows: "We humbly pray thee, God the Father Almighty for this house and all who dwell in it . . . bless and hallow it and fill it with all good things . . . let thy angels of light dwell within its walls and guard it and those who dwell therein through Christ Our Lord."

It is recommended that there be evidence of your Faith in the furnishings of your home, such as the sacred pictures, images, crucifixes that should adorn the walls of your home. In blessing these articles the Church prays that "Those that behold them may be led to contemplate and

imitate the lives and the holiness of those depicted" and "That those inspired by the pictures to honor the Saint in question, may by his merits, obtain grace in this life and eternal glory in the next."

A blessed crucifix or a representation of the crucified Christ should have a prominent place in every home. It vividly portrays for us the extent of Christ's love.

An appropriate picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus could also be in your home. Our Divine Lord revealed to St. Margaret Mary that He would bless all homes where an image of His Sacred Heart would be exposed and honored.

It is very evident that many Christians are neglectful of this opportunity to give spiritual atmosphere to their homes. Sometimes it is unconscious neglect and at other times it is deliberate playing into the hands of the world and the Devil.

There is a third group that compromises and have hidden off in some corner of their home a sacred image. For some strange reason they are careful that none who visit them may observe it. This attitude does seem strange since on one occasion Our Divine Lord said, "He that shall confess me before men, I will also confess him before my Heavenly Father."

In thinking in terms of blessings for the family, the Nuptial Blessing comes immediately to mind. Sometimes this is called

the Bridal Blessing. How important it is in the eyes of the Church is indicated by its incorporation in the Nuptial Mass.

In this solemn prayer, the Church begs of almighty God that the union of the young bride and groom be holy and richly blessed. Then there is a description of the ideal and true wife and as examples those exemplary women of the Old Testament are recalled to her as the Church prays that she will be as dear to her husband as Rachel, wise like Rebecca and long lived and faithful as Sarah. The blessing goes on to implore Almighty God that the bride be permitted to see her children's children even to the third and fourth generation and then to enjoy the glory of everlasting life.

It is very easy to secure the English text of the Nuptial Mass and Blessing. We offer the suggestion that it would be an excellent way for a husband and wife to commemorate a wedding anniversary to read aloud to each other the various parts of the Nuptial Mass and the Nuptial Blessing. The church has been giving this blessing in one form or another for hundreds of years. She thinks highly of it. You will, too, if you know it better.

There is another blessing which Holy Church has designed for the Family. It is a blessing that is not too well known, but only the other day a young couple (they are both profes-

sional people) came to the Parish House and requested it. It is the blessing for an expectant mother and her unborn child.

In giving this blessing the church prays that by "the ob-
stetric hand of God's mercy her infant may happily see the light of the day, and being reborn in holy Baptism forever seek Thy ways and come to everlasting life."

Then pouring forth the blessing of the Church upon the mother and the infant who lives within her, the words of the prayer become a plea that God's Holy Angels "may preside to keep them in peace, and that God's blessing may be ever present."

The Church also encourages the use of the blessing known as "Churching," which is given to a mother after the birth of her child. The prayer of the church expresses so beautifully the sentiment in the heart of the young mother who "comes rejoicing into His Holy Temple to make her thanksgiving, that after this life she together with her off-spring, may merit the joys of everlasting life."

These and many other blessings are designed to create a climate of spirituality that will be of great value in fostering a church in miniature within the walls of your home.

Various nationality groups, such as the Germans, the Polish, the Irish, the Mexican, the Italian and so many others have developed deeply religious customs

which are directed to the building up of the religious spirit in the home. Thus there are celebrations of the day of Baptism, name days, wedding anniversaries and other family events—all within the home.

Happily, there are many families who still observe them. For one with faith it is just as logical to celebrate our baptismal day as it is to celebrate our birthday. In both instances it is a new birth and the life we receive at Baptism is just as real as the physical life we receive at birth.

To commemorate the feast day of our patron saint is a most commendable thing. A little boy whose name is Joseph could celebrate the 19th of March, the Feast of St. Joseph. If his mother would bake a cake for that occasion it would be a powerful way of teaching her child a wonderful lesson about the Communion of the Saints.

The occasion of First Holy Communion is one of happiness for the entire family. The rest of the family rejoices as one of their members brings home Christ Himself in his heart. It is the custom of some families to decorate the house for the occasion that the First Communicant may in later years and throughout his life be reminded of this holy and happy day.

Warmth and happiness are spread throughout families by observing religious customs of the Church year. Advent, the

four weeks that precede Christmas is a time of preparations by prayer for the coming of Christ. In many homes one will find an Advent Wreath consisting of pine branches and hung horizontally in the living room or placed as a centerpiece on the Family table. It is adorned with four candles, one for each week of Advent, and their light is the symbol of Christ, the light that is about to come to the world.

The Season of Christmas is rich in traditional family practise everywhere. One point should be stressed. The Crib which tells us the story of Christ's Birth should be of even greater importance than the Christmas tree.

The feast of the Epiphany, the Feast of the Holy Family and Candlemas Day are all occasions of developing the spirit of Faith in our Christian home.

After a few weeks Ash Wednesday and the Season of Lent is observed and families who think with the Church are intent on fostering the spirit of Penance and Prayer. Days of fasting and abstinence and acts of self denial and mortification are coupled with attendance at daily Mass and daily reception of Holy Communion. And all this is fitting preparation for the Joy of Easter as we glory in the Resurrection of Christ.

Just incidentally, it should be mentioned that every effort should be made to instill in children the Christian meaning of the Easter Egg. It is a symbol of

the Resurrection of Christ. Just as the chick breaks the shell when it is hatched and begins its life, so Christ breaks the bonds of death and comes forth living from the grave.

In conclusion, we would like to make this observation. It would be easy to be pessimistic about the discouraging side of the American Home, obviously there are so many serious evils existing in Family Life in our country; but there are still a very great number of deeply religious homes in our midst. It is to these that young couples—young husbands and wives—can look to for example and encouragement.

The successful families rarely get their name on the front page of the newspaper, they never do anything very spectacular; but within the walls of their home you can be sure there is an abundance of peace and joy and contentment. Within such a home the love of husband and wife is deep and strong and abiding, as is the love of Christ for his Church.

Children are trained in virtue, and love and obedience are twin factors in family happiness.

Young husbands and wives, all this is possible for you and your families. A deep faith and a lovely loyalty to our Holy Mother the Church will give you all the ingredients of making your home—yes, your home—nothing less than a House of God. May the members of the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph be your inspiration and your strength.

THE HOME IS GOD'S FIRST CLASSROOM

Address Delivered on March 9, 1952

My Dear Friends:

Mothers and Fathers are the world's most important educators. Most people agree about the importance of education but they give little thought about the role of parents as teachers. In their hazy thinking they leave parents out of the picture and think of education only in terms of schools, kindergarten, etc.

But the education of children does not begin in school, it begins and continues primarily in the home. Search though you may, you will not find a teacher or a professor who has more influence on pupils than mothers and fathers have on their children. Mothers and fathers fashion and mould the minds and hearts of their children, like artists working soft wax; in the formative years of early life, their first impressions sink the deepest and remain the longest. This, of course, is all in keeping with God's Holy Plan.

The purpose of Christian Marriage is not only to bring children into the world, but also to rear and educate them. Therefore, it is not only the duty of parents to educate their children, it is also their high privilege. It can be said therefore with truth that the Home is God's First Classroom; the home is the child's most important school.

This obligation and this right of the Family to educate children comes from God and no one can take that right from the family. Behind the Iron Curtain such is not the case. There it is falsely taught that the children do not belong to the family but rather to the State; children are torn from the bosom of their families to be formed, or to speak more correctly to be deformed spiritually, in godless schools. Communism teaches its children a hatred of religion and all things sacred. But that kind of despotic thinking is contrary to nature itself which teaches that children belong to the parents — not the state.

It is also contrary to our democratic way of life, and further it is contrary to the explicit ruling of our highest court, the United States Supreme Court, in a famous decision which was rendered on June 1, 1925 in the Oregon School case, the court said in part "The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children. . . The Child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for

additional duties." Thus spoke the Supreme Court.

It is a truism to say that the education will be most effective and lasting if it is received in a well ordered and disciplined Christian family. The two qualifications "well ordered and disciplined" are worthy of being emphasized. If there is too much relaxation of discipline on the part of parents, there will be failure to check the growth of evil passions in the hearts of the children; and the control, which is such a factor in education, is lost or weakened.

A well ordered family is careful to make good use of the authority that comes from God. Authority is not given to parents for their own advantages, but for the proper rearing of their children. Parents in a sense represent God in using the authority given to them for the rearing of their children.

In such an environment youthful hearts and minds can develop and grow strong, even from the very first days of life on earth. Let us visualize the mind of a little child that has just come to this earth. It is like a white sheet of paper that has nothing written on it; then from hour to hour, and day to day, as it passes on its way, the eyes and ears and other senses act like windows thru which will pass light and shadows which will mark or mar it. Every impression will have its own influence.

The mother and the father

are the most important factors at that stage and through many later years. Indeed, experts in psychology are telling us these days that the impressions received during early childhood set up the mental patterns of conduct in the light of which all the experiences of later life are evaluated. This truth, in new and scientific terms has long been recognized by all. The Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament, written several thousand years ago, stated it somewhat the same "A young man according to his way, even when he is old will not depart from it."

For the moment let us pass from the realm of sense knowledge to the world of the spirit. When a child is Baptized it begins to live a life of Grace. The Holy Ghost, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, comes to dwell in that child's soul. The child is given the capacity and the power to know God and to love God. Christian parents have the high responsibility of guiding that child in the use of these powers from the first glimmerings of intelligence.

There is a story which wonderfully illustrates this point. It has been told that Tertullian, one of the earliest Christian writers, had the custom of going to the bedside of his son and there kneeling down reverently; he would adore the presence of God in the Child's soul. What a new meaning would come to a Christian home if it was mark-

ed by such a spirit of Faith. How anxious would parents be to develop that spark within the child's breast to become a glowing fire of faith and love.

But actually there is enormous neglect in this matter or very poor understanding on the part of some parents. We hear parents saying "Why should I bother teaching my child religion, he is too little and cannot learn anything." Then others will say "He will learn all that when he goes to school." Some even say — "Let the Sisters take care of that matter — or the priest." There is no substitute for the religious training that begins in the home.

Do you ask "When should a child first learn about God—the creation of heaven and earth and all things. When should the child first hear about Jesus—the infant Babe of Bethlehem—and the same Jesus who died upon the cross? At what point in a child's life should he learn about our Blessed Mother Mary?" *No sensible starting time is too early.*

While it is true a child does not reach the use of reason before seven years, as far as official church law is concerned, the average child has begun to use its mind long before, and with the use of his mind, he begins the use of his will, the power to choose freely. God's Grace works with both the mind and the will. And parents at a very early time in the child's life can assist in the develop-

ment of the mind and the training of a will, and in this way co-operate with God's Grace.

If this is an age when children can indulge in the fancies of make-believe, it is no less a time when they can begin to drink in the truth of Faith. There is no law which compels parents to teach their children about "Red Riding Hood" and "Cinderella" and forbids them to teach their children about the Guardian Angel or the Baby Jesus. If the imagination of a child can be stirred with the fantasy of a Santa Claus or the nonsense of Buck Rogers, why cannot the imagination of a baptized child yield to the fascination of a world where God is Father and Christ is our brother and Mary our Mother? A world where sun and moon and stars, and animals and plants in all their wondrous variety, attractively invite us to come and see how lovingly the Heavenly Father has provided for him.

Parents who are grateful for the precious gift of Faith will seek for opportunities of increasing it in their children. They will acquaint them with charming stories about the lives of the Saints. They will seek out literature that is attractively written about this subject. Parents will teach their children simple prayers which lovingly enlighten a child about God's great concern for him. These prayers, if said regularly at the bedside every morning and

every evening, and at mealtime, will help to make the world of Faith a world of reality. Trust and confidence in God instilled in the heart of a child can grow to be a great moving force in the life of an adult.

Parents naturally are interested in preparing their children to be citizens of this earth. For this purpose they should be anxious to train the mind and the heart of a child in order to develop in them a Christian character. Normal children are quick to pick up things from their elders. Therefore, place before them high ideals. Give them something to strive for, something worth attaining, and help them in the process in such a way as to encourage them to use their mental powers.

The sooner a child realizes there is no royal road to knowledge — that knowledge comes only with work — the quicker will his mind develop. Only parents can properly understand their children's needs — and their abilities, and they should be careful not to force them beyond their limits. The training of a child's heart is a most important matter. Sometimes the marring of character can be traced to the years of childhood when the heart of a child was spoiled by foolish flattery and sickly indulgence on the part of misguided parents.

The impressionable little heart is accustomed to see all things revolve around itself, and if it finds that everybody is yielding

to its will and its slightest whims, there is the beginning of an inflated ego. On the other hand the heart that is properly trained has deep and rich potentiality for love and devotion. Great goodness lies dormant in the heart of a child. Parents can awaken it and foster it and raise it up to the very heights. God has provided the spiritual equipment by endowing a child's soul at Baptism with the Divine Life of Grace, with faith, hope and charity, with the gifts of the Holy Ghost. These seeds placed in the garden of the soul will blossom beautifully if tenderly cared for and delicately handled.

The home is the place where attitudes toward society are developed. It goes without saying that the parents themselves must have Christian attitudes if they are to pass them on to their children. Let us take an obvious example; prejudice is not natural to a child, it is something that he is taught. Race and social background never enter into the thinking of little children, and they find it no barrier to mutual enjoyment of each other's company unless they have learned differently from their elders. If children have Christian attitudes toward their neighbors, material possessions, education, amusements, religious life and a host of other things, it will enable them to form right judgments. They will all make for a healthy childhood.

The same could be said about sex. There is much ado about so-called sex instructions today. Obviously the home is the only classroom where such should be taught. A father can explain to his young son and a mother to her young daughter the love of God as mirrored in the endowment of sex. A presentation of its sacredness and its divine purpose in reverent language, will enable even young children to control the instincts which center in this divine endowment.

Our late Holy Father, Pius XI, in his letter on "The Christian Education of Youth" emphasizes the positive aspects of child training in this matter, when he speaks of the virtue of chastity and its necessity. Actually, sex instructions are only a minor part of the whole program of Christian virtue. Parents can rest assured that if the values of our religion are understood the matter of training in chastity will fit nicely into the whole picture.

Father Schmiedeler in his booklet on "The Family, a School of the Virtues" tells us that "a high regard for purity will follow, almost as the day follows night, if from early childhood on, a boy or girl is given a true understanding of his religion and lives definitely conscious of what it implies." The main facts to be kept to the fore in this connection might be stated as follows: When we are in the State of Grace — free

from serious sin — we are the dwelling place of the Trinity, the temple of the Holy Ghost, and hence we are in a very special way the children of God.

All this is attested by God Himself. Here are his words from the Holy Scriptures. "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come and take up an abode with him," and again (John XIV, 23) "Know you not that you are the temples of God, and the spirit of God dwelleth in you" (1 Cor. 111, 16). "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called and should be the sons of God" (1 John III, 1).

A genuine and lively consciousness of these and other expressions of the Holy Scriptures will fill both parents and children with wonderment at God's love for us and his great concern for us.

Before concluding these thoughts about the Home — God's First Classroom, just a word should be said about these most excellent teachers, the Father and the Mother. A Father's great dignity rests, first of all, upon the fact that Almighty God has bestowed upon him the privilege of co-operation in one of nature's greatest mysteries, the creation of the life of another human being. Sons and daughters belong to a Father in a sense that nothing else he may ever possess can be called his own.

St. Thomas Aquinas, the great Philosopher said that "the Father is the principle of generation, of education and of discipline, and of everything else that bears upon the perfecting of human life." A Christian Father might dwell on that thought often lest he lose the spirit which God in His wisdom has determined for the rearing and education of children.

Fatherhood is a vocation in God's service not to be heeded lightly, but with the high determination of serious men. As the Father is the head of a family, the Mother is its heart. Her vocation while different from a father — is none the less equal to his. As a matter of fact, the memory of grown children attest that she has had the most to do in shaping their characters.

As the father occupies the chief place in ruling the home, the mother quite naturally claims for herself the chief dispenser of Love. Mothers are en-

shrined in the hearts of everyone. Only when we are older do we realize her selflessness, her burdens, her painstaking effort, her patience in weariness and humility that enables her joyfully to stoop to a child. God bless the fathers and the mothers of the world. In conclusion may we offer this high piece of praise from the pen of St. John Chrysostom. "The art of forming character in the child is far more excellent than the art of the painter or the sculptor. For whereas they work with paint or marble, he who has charge of the young works with living flesh and blood. Their masterpieces consist of canvas or stone. His products are living, breathing human beings. It ought to be an inspiring thought to the Christian parent to realize that by wise and consistent discipline he is able to mold souls beautiful with sanctifying grace, masterpieces far above the most extravagant dreams of any artist."

THE FAMILY BELONGS TO GOD

Address Delivered on March 16, 1952

My Dear Friends:

It is a privilege to speak to you about the all important subject of the Christian Family; and surely, it is no exaggeration to say that all men and women of good will are in agreement that today's world is very much in need of a better appreciation of the Christian Family. We all belong to a family and therefore it is a most practical thing to have an interest in the Family that is genuine and real. We like to think of Family Life that has dignity and quality—Family Life that is worthy of belonging to God.

For a brief review of the History of the Family it would be well to turn to the inspired word of God, the Holy Bible, and open the pages of the first Book—the Book of Genesis. There we can read the fascinating story of the world's first Family.

By God's special act Adam came into existence and became the Masterpiece of God's creation. He was to rule over all creation and all of nature was to be his kingdom. But the picture was not complete, one half of the human race was missing. Adam had been endowed by God with majesty and strength, but delicacy and sweetness and sensibility were not in evidence.

The first man was a powerful

ruler of nature, but he was alone and lonely, without hope of progeny. Adam had no one to share the glory and the delight of his vast empire, nor to confide the sentiments of his heart toward God. And then, as we read in the Bible, God changed all that, as he spoke these solemn words "It is not good for man to be alone."

Thus the human family was born. Eve was brought into the world to be the helpmate—the companion—the wife of Adam. The world was transformed for Adam; full of joy he exclaimed "This is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she is formed from man and a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife—they shall be two in one flesh."

It requires little imagination to realize that at that very time Adam promised his undying loyalty to his new-found wife, and then under the very eyes of God, he sealed his promise with love's first kiss. The human Family began at the bidding of Almighty God.

For a moment we can profitably consider that source of the Family which is Christian marriage. How familiar the following scene. It may have happened yesterday.

It is a bright cheery morning.

Little groups of friends are making their way to their parish church. On going inside they see the sanctuary is gaily decked with flowers and candles are burning brightly on the altar. There is an atmosphere of anticipated joy. It is a wedding celebration. The beautiful young bride in all her lovely finery is waiting at the rear of the church; her attendants are standing nearby; and then to the strains of wondrous music the wedding procession begins.

She makes her way down the aisle on the arm of her father. At the front of the church she is joined by her future husband. They approach the foot of the altar. One of God's Holy Priests is standing there and he speaks those unforgettable words, "You are about to enter into a union which is most serious and most sacred. It is most serious because it will bind you together for life in a relationship so close and so intimate that it will profoundly influence your whole future; it is most sacred because it was established by God Himself."

The Priest continues the exhortation and at its conclusion there is the giving and receiving of the marriage vows whereby young lovers — children of God — pledge themselves to each other — "for better or worse — in sickness and in health — until death do us part."

It has been said that such a scene is the happiest in all the world, and well might it be,

since even Heaven does not withhold its blessing as the young couple, kneeling at the altar, receive from the hands of God the Graces for all their wedded days. Such a marriage is not merely a casual temporary agreement, nor is it a capricious and uncertain companionship—rather it is a threefold contract between a man and a woman and God.

The cause of the Family today is suffering because there are too many who do not fully understand the sacred character of marriage. Marriage was always a holy thing, but at one point of human history it took on new sacredness—additional holiness. That was when Jesus Christ raised the contract of marriage to the dignity of a Sacrament. May we repeat that the institution we call marriage is not the outcome of chance development, but it is the definite creation of Almighty God. The author of marriage is none other than God.

In order that this union of man and woman might still better fulfill its purpose, marriage was from the beginning a union between one man and one woman only, and a union between them for life. We know this to be true from the very words of our Lord as recorded in the Bible. This original form of marriage was lost sight of, even among God's people. From the old testament we know that men began to have more than one wife and also to

break up their marriage and remarry while their first wife was still alive.

When Jesus Christ walked the ways of this world He gave many indications of His determination to set men aright on the question of marriage and the position of the Family. In the first place He ennobled the marriage at Cana of Galilee by His presence and He made it memorable by working His first public miracle there. For this reason, even from that very day, it seems as if a new holiness had been conferred on human marriages.

Later on He brought matrimony to the nobility of its original state by condemning—in language which all could understand—the terrible scourge of divorce. In the 19th chapter of St. Matthew we read: "I say to you that who so ever shall put away his wife, excepting it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and he that shall marry her that is put away committeth adultery."

There were other things which were decreed and handed down in respect to marriage by the authority of God. These are more fully and clearly given to us by Tradition and the written word of the Apostles—and of the latter I am thinking especially of St. Paul. From these sources we know that Christ our Lord raised marriage to the dignity of a Sacrament; husbands and wives have the power

to attain holiness in the married state since they are guarded and strengthened by the heavenly Grace which Christ merited for them.

In a wondrous way marriage is compared to the intimate and the beautiful relationship between Christ and His Church. Christ not only perfected that love which is according to nature, but also made the natural union of one man and one woman far more perfect through the bond of heavenly love. St. Paul says to the Ephesians. "Husbands love your wives as Christ also loved the Church and delivered himself up for it that he might sanctify it—so also ought man to love their wives as their own bodies—for no man ever hates his own flesh but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ does the Church, because we are members of His Body, of His flesh, of His Bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh. This is a great Sacrament and I speak in Christ and in His Church."

In like manner we learn from the apostles about the unity of marriage and its indissolubility—again we quote St. Paul "To them that are married, not I, but the Lord commandeth, that the wife depart not from her husband; and if she departs, that she remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband." And again "A woman is

bound by the law as long as her husband liveth, but if her husband dies, she is at liberty."

It is for this reason that marriage is a great sacrament, holy and pure and to be revered as a symbol of high mystery. When there is an increase of the appreciation of marriage after this kind of a pattern, family life will take on new meaning and new significance.

Hundreds of years ago, the great St. Augustine said "These are the blessings of matrimony, offspring, conjugal faith and the sacrament." That great saint might well have said the same thing about the blessings to the Christian family. The family is blessed and completed by offspring, by mutual trust and faith and loyalty and by the Grace of God's holy sacrament.

The richest endowment that can come to any marriage is a child, and each succeeding child only adds to the wealth of the family. There is nothing more precious or more valuable in all the world than the children that form the units of a family. Nothing more precious because gold or silver has no purchasing power in terms of the flesh and blood of an infant babe.

While it is true that there is an enormous amount of sin on the part of those who are preventing children from coming into the world, there is at the same time a vast army of husbands and wives who are childless and they would give anything if God would bless their

union with children. Go to any welfare agency in the country and you will find a long list of applications for the adoption of a child or children.

How precious are children! And at the same time what a great trust Almighty God places in parents in giving to their charges young lives to be moulded and fashioned through the delicate days of infancy, the tender years of childhood, the plastic years of adolescence that brings them to the threshold of manhood and womanhood.

And how valuable are children! And their greatest value is not because they are human beings endowed with the most wonderful life of body and soul. Their greatest value lies in the fact that by reason of their coming into this life, they will be enabled also to share in the very life of God in Heaven. So parents have the privilege of raising up fellow citizens of the Saints, boys and girls, men and women who will be citizens of Heaven.

Pope Pius XI mentions in his famous letter on marriage that "husbands and wives should receive their children with joy and gratitude from the hand of God, and should regard them as a talent committed to their charge by God, not only to be employed for their own advantage, or that of an earthly commonwealth, but to be restored to God with interest on the day of reckoning." Indeed children are precious and valuable in the

sight of man and in the sight of God.

Members of the family are blessed by the mutual faith and trust and loyalty they manifest toward each other. In the first place conjugal faith binds a husband and wife entirely to each other, and no other person enters the circle of that union that is dissolved only by death. The Council of Trent solemnly declares "Christ our Lord very clearly taught that in this bond two persons only are to be united and joined together when He said 'Therefore they are no longer two but one flesh.'"

In a less strict sense, but none the less real way the members of a family all share in a mutual faith and trust. Members of a family find great security in the loyalty that is shown to each other. The deeds of devotion and loyalty of mothers and fathers toward children, of brother toward brother and sister toward sister and children toward parents forms the very fabric of our civilization. These deeds have been immortalized in song and story through all the years. When there are exceptions to this rule it is not the family that fails, but individuals who fail, and in their failure they do most harm to themselves.

The unity of family living is a great blessing in as much as it accompanied the members all along the way of life. Family loyalty goes farther than that; it reaches out beyond the grave as mothers and fathers, sisters

and brothers are remembered in Masses and prayers and good works even to the depths of Purgatory.

The third great blessing that comes to Christian Families is the Grace and Strength that is derived from God's Holy Sacrament. Now the Grace of Holy Matrimony gives spiritual strength for a well rounded, full and holy life on the part of husband and wife, and also to the children born of that union. This Sacrament is alone called by St. Paul the "Great Sacrament."

Need Christians be reminded of the meaning of that word Sacrament as related to marriage? Jesus Christ made this giving and receiving of marriage vows in the presence of an official witness of the church a sign and a source of Grace by which is perfected natural love. More than that, it sanctifies and makes holy man and wife and "it opens up for them a treasure of sanctifying grace from which they draw supernatural power fulfilling their rights and duties faithfully, holily perseveringly even unto death" (*Casti Conubii* — Paragraph 40).

Too often is this fact forgotten. Married couples realize the Grace that comes to them on their wedding day, but they forget that the special sacramental grace is available to them all the days of their life, for themselves and their families. All they need do is to call upon God and their hearts and their souls

will be lavished with His Goodness as long as they are in His Friendship.

As St. Augustine teaches, "just as by Baptism and Holy Orders a man is set aside and assisted either for the duties of a Christian life or for priestly office and is never deprived of their sacramental aid, almost in the same way the faithful once joined by marriage ties can never be deprived of the help and the binding force of this sacrament" (*Casti Connubii*—Paragraph 41).

How much easier it is then to live a Christian Family life in keeping with the laws of God. How much easier to accept the burdens and difficulties of life. For not only is it a matter of God being on our side, He gives us His strength, His courage, His power (for all that is contained in His Grace) to face life valiantly and to live it splendidly.

One cannot help but admire the Wisdom, Holiness and the Goodness of God who has provided so wonderfully for the happiness of families and who has also taken every care for their needs. To those who may say — "this doctrine sounds good but it is not practical in our modern world" — we only answer that God's grace is sufficient for any situation. If God was interested in the family 200 years ago or 100 years ago, He is no less interested today.

Our modern world, despite its errors and fallacies is still God's world and modern families are His families. He will not abandon them, although many modern families may forsake Him. May our Lovely Lady Mary and the stalwart St. Joseph and the Christ Child Himself, members of the Holiest of Holy Families bless us and keep us close to them always.

THE FAMILY APOSTOLATE

Address Delivered on March 23, 1952

FATHER BYRNE: The past three Sundays I spoke on this series on Religion and the Family from St. Louis. I am pleased that this particular broadcast has been arranged for Columbus so that, with the assistance of representatives of the National Catholic Conference on Family Life who are here for the organization's annual convention, we may have a panel discussion on the family apostolate.

The family apostolate is a term applied to the various activities that are being carried on under the auspices of the Family Life Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Conference and its cooperating groups, such as the National Catholic Conference on Family Life, the Lay Organizations Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference; that is, the National Council of Catholic Men and the National Council of Catholic Women, and the Youth Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, with its various associated youth organizations.

Happily, we have representatives of most of these organizations or agencies here with us this morning. Before turning to the varied activities they engage in, or to the program of the national convention that is about to begin here at Columbus, let me introduce them to our audience. First of all, there is Mrs. John S. Reilly of New York City, President of the National Catholic Conference on Family Life. Next, I see Mr. James Charles, Member of the Columbus Diocesan Holy Name Union. From the capital city of the nation we have Miss Margaret Mealey, Executive Secretary of the National Council of Catholic Women, and Rev. Dr. Edgar Schmiedeler, of the Order of St. Benedict, Director of the Family Life Bureau, National Catholic Welfare Conference, and Executive Secretary of the National Catholic Conference on Family Life. Your moderator, as already noted is Director of the Family Life Bureau of the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Incidentally, there are today ninety such diocesan directors cooperating with the Family Life Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Conference.

Perhaps it would be well that at this point we heard briefly about the organizations or agencies that our panel members represent. Mrs. Reilly, it might perhaps give us some idea what the work of the National Catholic Conference on Family Life is if you told us who constitute its membership.

MRS. REILLY: The membership of the Conference consists for the most part of professional

people; that is, individuals who are experts in certain fields pertaining to family life. Among them are, for instance, teachers of family or marriage courses, or of home management courses, in colleges and universities.

Again, there are teachers in the field of child psychology, workers in children's centers or child guidance clinics. So too are there experts in such fields as marriage counseling, economics, the liturgy and theology. These all help in our work by writing and speaking, by relating their particular field of activity to the family. A considerable number of them will be heard here in Columbus over the next three days. Certainly there are also among our members mothers and fathers who bring to the Conference a rich store of Catholic practice in family living.

FATHER BYRNE: And what is the Family Life Bureau, Dr. Schmiedeler?

DR. SCHMIEDELER: The Family Life Bureau is a full-time agency devoted to the promotion of the Family Apostolate. Its Director happens also to be the Executive Secretary of the National Catholic Conference on Family Life. A very important part of his work consists in keeping informed in the family field. But certainly no less important is his task of fostering or promoting activities in behalf of a better family life. Naturally, in both these capacities he has need for a very considerable amount of expert guidance and assistance. That suggests why he founded about two decades ago, the National Catholic Conference on Family Life.

The members of this organization, as Mrs. Reilly stated, are informed in various fields that impinge on marriage and family life. They serve in an advisory capacity to the Family Life Bureau and have played an important part in the development of the family apostolate through their teaching and writing, and through participation in local and national programs.

FATHER BYRNE: Miss Mealey, what of the federation you represent, the National Council of Catholic Women? Its title would suggest that it might not be strictly a family organization.

MISS MEALEY: That is correct. It is not an organization of families, nonetheless it has much interest in the family apostolate. It has a special National Committee on the Family and Parent Education, and this National Committee, through the National Council of Catholic Women's approximately 7,000 affiliates does much to bring the thinking and the content of the studies made by the experts to the attention of the great body of Catholics throughout the United States. It does that,

for instance, by promoting marriage and family forums, institutes, discussion groups, conferences and conventions. In some of these activity groups only mothers participate; in others both fathers and mothers.

FATHER BYRNE: Mr. Charles, how does the National Council of Catholic Men fit into this picture?

MR. CHARLES: Units of the Council also promote some activities pertaining to the family; that is, they do this for men's groups alone. But there is a strong feeling that it would be better if the two Councils, that of the men and that of the women, would work together more closely in the promotion of activities that relate to family life.

For my part, I think that more joint participation by husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, in study groups and forums and conferences, and institutes, would be very much in place. In other words, the idea of the Mr. and Mrs. club we hear about seems to be a good idea.

FATHER BYRNE: Do you agree, Miss Mealey?

MISS MEALEY: As I recall, the National Council of Catholic Women approved several years ago, quite as heartily as did the National Council of Catholic Men, a resolution favoring the Mr. and Mrs. club idea which was passed at a meeting of the National Catholic Conference on Family Life. So I think we are at one on this. Perhaps Dr. Schmiedeler will recall the resolution to which I refer.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: Yes, I recall it vividly. In substance it ran as follows: "It is our conviction that in this day when husbands and wives are so frequently separated by force of circumstances, preference should be given in the family apostolate, generally speaking, to activities in which both spouses can participate jointly." Then it went on to say: "We feel that a great impetus would be given to the "Mr. and Mrs. Club" if the two great Catholic lay federations of the country — the National Councils of Men and of Women — would carefully seek out and plan activities in the important field of the family that could be carried out in unison by husbands and wives."

FATHER BYRNE: Mr. Charles?

MR. CHARLES: I think we are making some progress along that line. To be sure, one would expect that a change from separate discussion groups for men and for women to groups favoring joint participation would come rather slowly. However, the number of joint groups is growing.

Moreover, I note that women's discussion groups dealing with topics pertaining to family life are making more and more provision for at least some special meetings in which the men can participate with the women members.

MRS. REILLY: Family retreats are of course all for husbands and wives together.

MISS MEALEY: That is also true of Holy Family Guilds, found quite extensively in the Southwest. And there are other examples.

MRS. REILLY: There are several small groups in Columbus. My daughter and her husband belong, and I have attended their sessions and have been much edified by the beautiful spirit of charity and helpfulness toward one another in solving their problems which I have found among the young parents. A panel of the Conference program which begins here tomorrow will be conducted by these young couples, and I am sure they will enlarge on their small club activities and their accomplishments.

FATHER BYRNE: I assume that the small clubs that Pope Pius XII approved last year are quite in line with this Mr. and Mrs. club idea.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: If you refer, Father Byrne, to his words on this subject in his 1951 Pre-Lenten Address to the Pastors of Rome, I think there is no doubt about it. His Holiness spoke explicitly of small groups who gathered in homes or elsewhere for study and discussion purposes.

Here are a few of his words: "We know of some lay Catholics who, at the suggestion and under the direction of the priest, have formed small societies or clubs in which on one or two occasions each month, according to circumstances, professional colleagues, relatives and friends get together for the purpose of considering and discussing religious questions as well as other things. We praise this apostolic labor of the laity with all Our heart."

FATHER BYRNE: This should all be in the right direction. Certainly such joint activities should in themselves contribute something to family unity.

MR. CHARLES: I would think so too. They should emphasize the fact that, while indeed the tasks of the husband and wife in the home may not be altogether identical, the office of parenthood is nonetheless a joint office.

MISS MEALEY: What precisely do you mean by that, Mr. Charles?

MR. CHARLES: Well, take the matter of teaching the child his religion in the home. That

should be an undertaking participated in by both parents. In fact, that is very clearly indicated by Pope Pius XII in the encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ. In it he clearly notes that the sacrament of matrimony implies a solemn dedication of the contracting parties to a *joint* teaching office in the Mystical Body.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: Having just used in a family retreat the reference you allude to, Mr. Charles, I believe I could give you the words Pope Pius used in this connection. "Through matrimony," he stated, "in which the contracting parties are ministers of grace to one another, provision is made. . . for the correct religious instruction of children without which the Mystical Body of Christ would be in grave danger."

FATHER BYRNE: Those words would suggest too, that the parental task is indeed, a high and most honorable one. I think it was the noted European scholar, Karl Adam, who referred to this teaching office of parents as the "lay priesthood in its most glorious form."

MRS. REILLY: I would like to add a special word about teaching by example in the case of the young child. While teaching by verbal instruction and by example are both in place, I feel that in his early years the latter exerts a considerably greater influence over the little one than the former. In other words, it is a vibrant living of the faith by the father and the mother in the home that really influences the child deeply and permanently.

MISS MEALEY: I am sure Mrs. Reilly is speaking from experience. And I am certain, too, that any trained child psychologist would heartily agree with her.

FATHER BYRNE: There is a worthwhile lesson, too, for all parents in what Mrs. Reilly says. It were well for them to realize that it is the actual living of the faith by the father, who represents Christ in the home, and by the mother, who represents the Church, that is the key to success in the all-important teaching office in the family circle.

MRS. REILLY: I would say, Father Byrne, because she is so close to the children in their early years, the mother is the one to instruct them in their early prayers. But, insofar as teaching by example is concerned, it is very important that neither father nor mother fail the child.

MR. CHARLES: I am sure that the recollection of both his parents at prayer in the home of his childhood will mean much to a child in his later years.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: I think the remark of Father Byrne about the father representing Christ and the mother representing the Church is well worth noting. It helps to bring out the meaning of the words of St. John Chrysostom, when he tells us that the Christian home is "a church in miniature."

MISS MEALEY: Is there scriptural warrant for the view you express, Father Byrne?

FATHER BYRNE: What would you say, Dr. Schmiedeler? I think you have written on that subject.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: The whole idea of the Christian father representing Christ, and the mother representing the Church is based on the fifth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. That is the place in which the apostle of the Gentiles refers to the sacred union of Christ with His Spouse, the Church, as the model for the union of husband and wife in Christian marriage.

You will probably recall some of the oft-quoted words of the text — "Let wives be subject to their husbands as to the Lord. Because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church." And again: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for her that He might sanctify her."

FATHER BYRNE: Now I recall that Pope Leo XIII, referring to those words of St. Paul in his encyclical on Christian marriage, stated our point very clearly. "Since the husband represents Christ and the wife represents the Church," he says, "let there always be both in him who commands and her who obeys a heaven-born love guiding them in their respective duties. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church."

MRS. REILLY: In view of such idealistic teaching, it might well strike one as strange that there are at times differences between husbands and wives, even in some Christian marriages.

MR. CHARLES: In all probability such couples have in considerable measure lost sight of these ideals.

MISS MEALEY: One would think husbands and wives would be so preoccupied with ways and means for showing each other the high regard and respect for each other that their respective positions as representatives of Christ and the Church demand that they would have neither time nor inclination for difference.

FATHER BYRNE: I am sure all can easily agree to that, Miss Mealey.

MR. CHARLES: Perhaps I could bring in a rather practical note here, Father Byrne, by reminding that a year or two ago the National Council of Catholic Men adopted a resolution calling upon its affiliated groups to join hands in an effort to restore the Christian father again to his position as head of the home. This was done because it was felt that much was wanting in this regard in our day, and that a good deal of the justified criticism that was being leveled at the home today is traceable to it.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: I recall the resolution distinctly.

MISS MEALEY: I remember that the press gave it rather a considerable amount of attention.

FATHER BYRNE: Could you give us at least the substance of the resolution, Mr. Charles.

MR. CHARLES: It ran somewhat as follows: "It is our profound conviction that we can do nothing more fundamental and truly beneficial for family life than strive to bring about again at the earliest possible moment a universal recognition of the father's obligation to accept all the responsibilities that his respected and authoritative position in the home demands."

FATHER BYRNE: Does that strike a responsive chord, Mrs. Reilly?

MRS. REILLY: Yes, indeed; I am sure mothers generally would be quite in agreement with that. Fathers of families could do few things that are "more fundamental and beneficial," as Mr. Charles says the resolution stated.

FATHER BYRNE: I suppose the conference that will be held here at Columbus the next three days will bring out some of these Christian views we have been discussing or referring to.

MRS. REILLY: Yes, and many more. Specific religious practices will also be given attention.

Actually, half of the sessions will deal with the place of religion in the family circle. For instance, fundamental teachings, such as the sacramental basis of Christian marriage, the family as a unit in the Mystical Body of Christ, the duties and responsibilities of the members of the family, the possibilities for the practice of the Christian virtues in the home, and a very considerable variety of religious practices suitable for the family circle will be discussed.

- MISS MEALEY: We happen to be in the season of Lent. I wonder whether there might be some devotions particularly suited to the family during that season.
- MR. CHARLES: I would appreciate a word on that particular subject too.
- DR. SCHMIEDELER: Well, first of all, it must not be forgotten that the season is one of penance and self-denial. The family members should encourage each other in self-denial and, of course, from the high spiritual motive of love of God.
- FATHER BYRNE: I think the singing of such fine lenten hymns of the church as the "Stabat Mater" might well be in place in the home during Lent.
- MRS. REILLY: Taking a look in the Missal for the text of the Mass for the following morning should be a praiseworthy practice before retiring in the evening. As we know, the beautiful texts of the daily Lenten Mass are suited to the season.
- MR. CHARLES: I am sure some additional family prayers in common also deserve mention.
- MISS MEALEY: In some homes there is the practice of burning the blest palm of Palm Sunday of the preceding year. As we know, the ashes of blest palm are used by the church on Ash Wednesday to remind us that death eventually awaits us all.
- DR. SCHMIEDELER: Burning the old palm in the home can also serve to confirm children in their determination to remove from their lives the faults and failings which are made the subject of their Lenten resolutions.
- FATHER BYRNE: Nor is it amiss to recall, even to children's minds, that we are dust, and that all shall return to it in God's good time.
- MR. CHARLES: I find there are a number of excellent little publications available today for Holy Week. At least one of them has a short commentary on the Lenten Mass for each day.
- MRS. REILLY: There are many other possibilities for Holy Week, too. For example, Easter water, blessed on Holy Saturday, should be taken to the home, where it can be used to bless the Easter food, and for other purposes.

- FATHER BYRNE: Since Easter Saturday is the great baptismal day of the Church, the family members might well renew their baptismal vows.
- MRS. REILLY: Happily, there are also practices that are appropriate to other seasons of the year.
- MISS MEALEY: For instance, Mrs. Reilly? I am sure we are all interested.
- MRS. REILLY: Well, let us turn back to the season of Advent, the beginning of the Church year. In that connection, we find that the advent wreath is rapidly coming into its own again. Incidentally, the wreath should be made, not bought. Usually it is made to hang from the ceiling.
- MR. CHARLES: I suppose one of the main features of the wreath is the four candles.
- FATHER BYRNE: That is right. But let me add here that there is a beautiful blessing for the wreath. The father of the family might well read it on the Saturday evening before the first Sunday of Advent. Then the mother might light the first of the four candles. The children in order of age might light the others on the succeeding Saturdays.
- MISS MEALEY: I assume portions of the Sunday Mass might also fittingly be read in conjunction with this little home ritual.
- FATHER BYRNE: That should be much in place.
- DR. SCHMIEDELER: The feast of Christmas, of course, is rich in family religious traditions. But there is one that is quite universal; the crib is given a prominent place in the home, usually under the Christmas tree. Observance of these inspiring little practices in the home mean much to the children. Making use of one or more of them will always do much to create a true Christmas spirit in the home.
- MRS. REILLY: The fact is that a religious spirit can be created in the home by a variety of religious practices at all times of the year. Family prayers and devotions can play an important role here. But there is also a great variety of sacramentals that are perfectly suited to home use, and that do much to create what might be called a religious mentality. They help us to keep God and the things of God to the fore in the family circle.
- MISS MEALEY: As I recall, sacramentals are at times referred to as the "Little sacraments."

I know there is a very real difference between a sacrament and a sacramental. Perhaps we had better define the latter term.

FATHER BYRNE: It might be defined as "an object set apart and blessed by the Church to excite good thoughts, to increase devotion, and thus to remit venial sin."

DR. SCHMIEDELER: It is "an action or object which in its performance or use bears some resemblance to a sacrament. If used in accordance with the mind of the Church, sacramentals are the means of receiving actual grace to do good and avoid evil, of protection of soul and body, and the remission of venial sin."

MISS MEALEY: Mrs. Reilly, what would be some of the sacramentals customarily found in the Catholic home of our day?

MRS. REILLY: There are some differences, home by home. But these, I should say, would be found in many homes; pictures or images of Our Lord and our Lady in every room; medals the children can constantly wear; holy water and holy water fonts throughout the house; rosaries suited to the size and capacity of each child; prayerbooks if the children can use them, and from early years picture books of the Mass before they can read. The latter will help give them a love and understanding of the Mass and much joy in participating in it. Of course, all these things, to bring their full sacramental help, should be blessed.

FATHER BYRNE: There is a very considerable variety of excellent sacred pictures for the home. Much in place would be pictures of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Family, the Blessed Mother, and patron saints of the family members.

MR. CHARLES: Father Byrne or Doctor Schmiedeler remarked a moment ago that actions as well as objects are sacramentals. I assume then that the sign of the Cross that the Catholic makes so frequently in the course of a day is a sacramental.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: That is right, Mr. Charles. And such is the case whether it is made with or without holy water. The blessing a priest gives us is, of course, also a sacramental.

MRS. REILLY: That remark brings to my mind the parental blessing. It is a beautiful and inspiring custom. And, of course, it is also a sacramental.

MISS MEALEY: Just what do you mean by the parental blessing, Mrs. Reilly?

MRS. REILLY: The practice of the father and the mother blessing their children in the home; for example blessing them before they retire in the evening, or before they leave the home to go on any considerable journey.

MR. CHARLES: Yes, and even before they go out into the dangerous traffic of the street.

FATHER BYRNE: Well said, Mr. Charles. And there are other occasions besides.

MISS MEALEY: I understand that among the members of at least one group of people in this country it is customary for bride and groom to receive together the blessing of the parents of both before they go to the church to receive the sacrament of matrimony and the nuptial blessing.

MR. CHARLES: Only recently I read of that. It reminded me of the opening words found in the Introit of the Nuptial Mass—"May the God of Israel join you together," words which I understand were pronounced by the venerable Raguel as he placed the hand of his daughter into that of the young Tobias.

FATHER BYRNE: Yes, these words are taken from the Book of Tobias.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: I would like to refer to an instance of the parental blessing that seemed particularly impressive to me. It probably comes to my mind because it came to my attention not far from here.

The aged father of a Monsignor—let us call him Monsignor John—while still living, was regularly visited by his son. As it would come time for the Monsignor to take his leave, his father would speak to him somewhat as follows: "Very well, John, if you must go, I will not keep you; my blessing for a safe journey." Then the Monsignor would kneel for his father's blessing. And, in turn, the father would kneel for the blessing of his priestly son.

This is all taken as a matter of course by the two. It had been the custom of Monsignor John to ask his father's blessing on the occasion of such leave-taking ever since he was a very young child. It was just the expected thing to do.

MISS MEALEY: That reminds me of a story in the Catholic press some time ago concerning a bishop in India. The news item referred to his return to his home town after his consecration as a bishop. It stated that a great concourse of people was waiting to greet him at the railroad sta-

tion. As the train stopped the bishop saw his mother in the waiting throng. He went directly to her and knelt for her blessing. That had also been his custom since the earliest days of his childhood.

MRS. REILLY: Surely, where these beautiful practices have been lost, we must bring them back again.

FATHER BYRNE: Mr. Charles: would you perhaps have some other sacramentals to add to our list?

MR. CHARLES: Well, at all events, let us not forget the blessed wedding ring. It is a treasured sacramental. Then there is the blessing of the home itself. I understand it can be given at any time. And there is a special blessing for the dwelling place of the family given in connection with the Feast of the Epiphany, or, as it is often called, the Feast of the Three Kings.

MRS. REILLY: The words of all these blessings are truly beautiful and inspiring.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: Some people still have the priest bless their homes during the Octave of the Feast of the Three Kings. But, all in all, it is perhaps most faithfully carried out today in the conventual or monastic homes of religious families. I have often seen it carried out in monasteries. The blessing is exactly the same as that provided for the domestic home.

MISS MEALEY: Would you describe it for us?

DR. SCHMIEDELER: Gladly. With chalk, especially blessed for the occasion, the priest writes the following at the top of the door of each room: 19-C-M-B-52. The three letters, C-M-B stand for the three kings who were traditionally known as Caspar, Melchior and Baltassar. The numbers, of course, indicate the year in which the blessing is given. Incense is used in giving the blessing, presumably in remembrance of the incense offered by the Three Magi or Kings.

MRS. REILLY: What are the words of the blessing?

DR. SCHMIEDELER: The main ones read: "Bless O Lord, Almighty God, this home that in it there may be health, chastity, strength of victory, humility, goodness, and industry, a fullness of law and action of graces through God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and that this blessing may remain on this home and on those who frequent it." Then there is the usual termination of prayers of the Church—"Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

FATHER BYRNE: There are, of course, a number of special blessings for members of the family.

MRS. REILLY: I suppose the Catholic bride and groom never forget the nuptial blessing given them at the bridal Mass on their wedding day.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: I would not be surprised. Over and above the beauty and dignity of the words of the blessing there is the very unusual fact that the Mass is interrupted to give it. That is a very extraordinary thing in the liturgy of the Church.

MISS MEALEY: I understand it is considered one of the greatest sacramentals of the Church.

FATHER BYRNE: That is correct, Miss Mealey.

MR. CHARLES: As a father, I know the Church has a number of special blessings for children. I must say these always impress me very much. I suppose all parents would say the same thing.

FATHER BYRNE: Would you, Mrs. Reilly?

MRS. REILLY: Yes, indeed: Beginning of course, with the Church's blessing for the expectant mother and her child. Anyone can readily see how much this blessing would mean to a Catholic mother.

MR. CHARLES: Appealing, too, is the special blessing of the Church for a sick child. While this blessing is given the child on the occasion of a visit by the priest, I am sure that parents, too, will wish to read the inspiring and consoling words of the prayers of the blessing over their sick child.

FATHER BYRNE: I recall that toward the end of this blessing the priest places his hand on the forehead of the child, saying these concluding words: "May Jesus, the Son of Mary, the salvation and Lord of the world, through the merits and intercession of His apostles Peter and Paul and of all His saints be merciful to you and full of tenderness. Amen."

MISS MEALEY: A touching blessing, too, for children is that given in church at a special service held for them on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, a very special feast of children.

MRS. REILLY: In some places that is also done on the Feast of the Guardian Angels. And the children's mothers come and are also included in the blessing.

MISS MEALEY: I think a fine practice, and a particularly useful and wholesome one today, because of the secularist spirit of the time, is the use of religious expressions in the home. They were formerly very common in homes. But one does not hear them so frequently today.

MR. CHARLES: Could you give us a few examples of what you mean?

MISS MEALEY: Very common have been the expressions: "God willing"; "Our Lady, help me"; "God bless you"; "God reward you"; "Praised be Jesus Christ"; "Remain with God."

MRS. REILLY: The celebration of religious milestones in the family are also highly important, both to the individual members and to the family group as a whole.

FATHER BYRNE: Such as wedding anniversaries and the yearly celebration of baptismal days,

Mrs. Reilly?

MRS. REILLY: Yes, and there are others; for instance, the observance of the patronal feast days of the children. Certainly, too, the anniversaries of deaths in the family should be remembered, the family going to Mass and Communion together.

MR. CHARLES: Yes, I think these observances are all very fine. They usually call for some devotional practice in common by the family members, for the gift of a religious article of some kind, for family assistance at Mass, or, again, for the singing of sacred hymns in the home, or a bit of religious instruction on the part of the parents. All these things do much to quicken the religious life of the family from time to time.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: Precisely the same is true of such special media for renewal as the recitation of the pledge to Christian marriage, the renewal of the marriage vows by husbands and wives, and the family retreat for parents or for both parents and children.

MISS MEALEY: It is also inspiring to witness the Family Holy Hour and to see family groups together at Mass and the Communion rail.

MR. CHARLES: I notice from the program of the family convention that a Family Holy Hour will bring its sessions to a close at St. Joseph's Cathedral.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: Yes, and hundreds of parishes in other dioceses of the country will have a similar service the same evening.

MISS MEALEY: In that way I suppose it can truly be said that many thousands who could not come to Columbus will have at least some part in our conference program.

FATHER BYRNE: There is no doubt about that.

MRS. REILLY: I have been looking at the form that is used for the renewal of the marriage promises at this service. I feel certain our radio audience would be interested in hearing it. Mr. Charles have you a copy there?

MR. CHARLES: Yes, I have. I see it reads much like the form used at marriage. The husband says: "I, your husband, reaffirm my marriage vows to you, my lawful wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part." Then the wives present make a similar reaffirmation to their husbands.

DR. SCHMIEDELER: We can be very thankful that there is rapidly mounting evidence that all these things are experiencing a rapid growth in our day.

MRS. REILLY: We will hear a good deal more about these matters at our convention here the next three days.

FATHER BYRNE: And that, ladies and gentlemen of the panel, is very fortunate, because we will now have to bring this discussion to a close. I am sure the three days' convention opening here tomorrow at the kind invitation of Bishop Ready, will give us ample opportunity to thrash out in detail all the points we have made, and also to add many more.

SUMMARY

FATHER BYRNE: A general summary of our panel discussion this morning can easily be made. First of all, the members of the various organizations represented on the panel briefly described their respective organizations and their relationship to the Bureau and the Lay Organizations and Youth Departments of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, to the Diocesan Directors of Family Life and the National Catholic Conference on Family Life.

A great number of activities constitute the family apostolate itself. Many of those that we considered today were in the field of religion, because the theme of the national convention that begins here tomorrow is a religious one; namely, "The Home, a Church in Miniature."

Many media are being used locally throughout the United States to promote these activities. Outstanding among them are discussion clubs, forums, institutes, marriage preparation courses, family retreats, workshops, conventions and a variety of conferences.

We feel that this entire apostolate, viewed both from its organizational aspects and its program of activities has very much to commend it. Indeed it may well be considered no less than providential today, due to the great need of our family life today for help and encouragement, for strengthening and renewal and a quickening of its spirit.

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