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Editorial

Family: Cradle of Mercy

Rapid changes in the social and economic systems have characterized the Indian families who go through the turmoil of constant adaptation and modification of their practices which is an antecedent for problems. During the past few decades, the Indian families have gone through phenomenal transformations. "The tensions created by an overly individualistic culture caught up with possessions and pleasures leads to intolerance and hostility in families" (P 33), and India who is moving into an individualistic culture is no stranger to factors that work against stability and good decision making.

We are drawing into an instant gratification affective relationships that treat people, material objects, and environment as disposable- exploit to the last drop and throw (P 39). A person growing up in this situation fears loneliness and mixes it with ones natural desire for stability and fidelity- a dangerous concoction that can hamper one's growth in a relationship. Pope Francis in His Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* mentioned "All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together." The timely message of the Jubilee Year of Mercy focused on two things. First He invites families to value the gifts of marriage and family and to preserve in commitment, fidelity, and patience. Then He encourages everyone to be a sign of mercy wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy. The Year of Mercy calls on all Church, and individuals "to be a witness of mercy"- an invitation to love, kindness and unbounded generosity.

The tone of mercy was initially set by Pope John XXIII in his *Spiritual Itinerary* and later in his popular opening address to the Second Vatican Council. He talked about Mercy as a medicine for healing. Pope John Paul II wrote the second encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, Latin for 'Rich in Mercy' where he examines the roles of mercy both in terms of

God's mercy and the need for human mercy. Through the Parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15: 11-32), he reminds us that mercy is intended to give value and not to humiliate the man. He reminds the Church to practice mercy through the teachings of Jesus Christ. Benedict XVI, too, said: "Mercy is indeed the central nucleus of the Gospel message; it is the very name of God... May all that the Church says and does manifest the mercy God feels for mankind. When the Church has to recall an unrecognized truth or a betrayed good, she always does so impelled by merciful love, so that men may have life and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10:10)".

The pastoral energy seems to be wasting away on being upbeat in findings ways to true happiness. The discrepancy exists in the point of view of people who feel that the message of marriage and family set forth by the Church does not clearly reflect the preaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ modeled a demanding ideal yet He never failed to show compassion and closeness to those who sin like the Samaritan woman or the adulterous woman (P 38). Pope Francis famously said "Who am I to judge?" when he talked about gay people in the Vatican- in this context, it is very much applicable and justified in the context of the family.

The confusion seems to exist among many who think that forgiveness is about being able to correctly justify the partner of doing the wrong or denying the wrong-doer the responsibility for the pain that they have caused. Forgiveness does not excuse but acts on the love from the heart that lets go of the feelings of resentment towards another person. Christian theologian Chesterton gives a message that can throw light on this situation: "To love means loving the unlovable. To forgive means pardoning the unpardonable. Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless." As important is forgiveness, is the virtue of patience. The real power of God is His 'patience' shown in His mercy towards sinners (P 91). It is necessary to bear in mind that being patient does not mean letting ourselves be constantly mistreated, tolerate physical aggression or even allow others to take advantage of us. Problems are encountered whenever the couples expect the relationship or their partner ought to be perfect, or when they put themselves at the center and expect things to turn out their way. Each individual needs to humble themselves and realistically acknowledge

that at times the way they present their Christian beliefs and approach other people may contribute to problematic situations (P 36).

Pope Francis looks for guidance in 1 Cor 13: 4-7 as he describes love relevant for the situation of each and every family. From the Pauline test, he goes deep in the practice of love that is patient, which is at the service of others, is generous and forgives, rejoices with others, bears, believes and endures all things. He goes further by asking to avoid dark practices of jealousy or boastfulness, rudeness, irritability or resentment, so as to make the relationship work. "...since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4: 11) and "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love this brother and sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 John 4: 20).

There is a modern rise in the trend of both the man and the woman working to earn, putting off children until the couple has reached their success in career. While pre-synod discussion about divorced and remarried couples is important, it is also important to focus on family-friendly work hours and family planning with the couples. The ever-advancing scientific field enables the parents to decide things from the color of the hair of the child to whether they want a normal baby or a designer baby. In all this the Pope Francis urges people to know that only the Father, the Creator, fully knows the child; He alone knows the child's deepest identity and worth (P 170). He also doesn't fail to remind the synod that "...marriage was not instituted solely for the procreation of children" but also for the existence of mutual love between the couple that it "...might be properly expressed", one which "should grow and mature" (P 125).

The challenges of married life go on after having children, way past into having and or loosing job, retirement and old age. "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent (Ps 71:9)" (P 191). In India, this is a very relevant area that the synod can work on. There had been reports on how children after marriage would throw their old and frail parents to beg on the road because the newly-wedded cannot take care of them. Pope Francis seems to be looking forward to a church that would challenge "the throw-away culture by the overflowing joy of a new embrace between young and old!" (L'Osservatore Romano, 2015). The Church can act to find ways to join the curiosity and adventurous

nature of the young with the experiences and wisdom of the old through activities, conducting workshops, and teaching them to accept old age as the way of life that everyone goes through.

Pope Francis understood that it was in relation to a family that people most needed the church to be merciful. Many were happy to see the church open itself to the conversation and encourage vigorous debate among the bishops. Yet the synod also suggests the difficulty of moving beyond controversial issues. Attempts to soften the language used to talk about gay and lesbian Catholics, as well as a return to the sacraments, were greeted with jubilation by some and great dismay by others. “The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements, and associations live in harmony” (P 202). In addition to this, the synod also viewed that seminarians should receive a more extensive interdisciplinary, and not merely doctrinal, formation in the areas of engagement and marriage. Today’s priests should have the multi-cultural competence to deal with the various issues and challenges of pastoral care. Their training does not always allow them to explore their own psychological and affective background and experiences. Some come from troubled families, with absent parents and a lack of emotional stability. There is a need to ensure that the formation process can enable them to attain the maturity and psychological balance needed for their future ministry (P 203).

Pope Francis emphasized that family is the “fruitful covenant between a man and a woman”. This family could play a significant role in the sustainable and integral ecology as God placed the man and women in the Garden to be fruitful and take care of it. The *Amoris Laetitia* can be used by the pastoral ministry for guidance in their work with families. Pope Francis said, “Marriage and family must be the central theme in pastoral care because the family is the way of the Church.”

I am pleased to place on record our sincere gratitude to Dr. Kurian Perumpallikunnel CMI, the outgoing Chief Editor of Vinayasadhana Journal for his commitment and generous contributions to our journal. May God bless all his endeavours.

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