

Family of families: The domestic church

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The word

[Jesus said to his disciples], "Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Mt 18:19-20

The context

Family is a beautiful thing. It's also a complex thing. Family is our greatest joy, but it can also be our greatest sorrow. It is where we feel safe, but also where we can feel most vulnerable. It is where we experience unconditional love shared through every heartbreak and accomplishment, and where we can experience the deepest pain of betrayal and disunity. Family is where the faith is nurtured and handed on through the generations, and where the faith can be easily weakened and lost. Family is the most important and most precious commodity in the world.

Vital though it remains, we know that family life in 2026 is more complicated now than in the past. Not only are there many different types of families today - blended families, lone parent families, couples living out of wedlock, same-sex families, single people living alone - but society is also more secular and complex.

An Irish priest once famously said, "The family that prays together stays together." But the myriad pressures and challenges that parents and families face today make it harder for them to find time for God or even to practice the faith. Often, it is anxious grandparents who take it upon themselves to pass on the faith to their grandchildren. Without regular prayer in the home or regular contact with the local church, faith and family quickly grow apart. Without the opportunity to spend good quality time together, families struggle and can find it hard to grow in love.

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The challenge

What does it mean to say the Christian family is the domestic church?

It means, first of all, that the family is the teacher of the faith, the first and most important teacher of the faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: "The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason, the family home is rightly called 'the domestic church,' a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity."

Even in the early days of the Christian church, the family home was viewed as the place where children learned to be good followers of Christ. We teach the faith through a life of prayer that includes all family members; praying every day - if only for a few minutes - before going to bed, before starting on a journey, before each meal. We teach it by having religious objects in the home and by knowing what they represent: a Bible, a holy water font, rosary beads, religious icons, and pictures. We teach it by going to church together and celebrating our faith with the larger Christian community.

Second, it means doing our best to live the Gospel. The family is the teacher of the faith, but to make this a reality in our day-to-day interactions with our children, we need more than words and prayers. We need practical example, concrete love in action. It's easy to say, "I love you." Harder to show I love you. It's easy to buy chocolate and flowers. Harder to empty oneself for another in love and service. Parents hand on the faith not only by what they say but, even more, by how they treat others inside and outside the home, and by how they treat each other. The domestic church grows in holiness through the daily choices we make and the concrete example we give.

The connection

When we are baptised, we are no longer simply part of our own blood family, sharing a common DNA, but of the wider Christian family, united by water and the Holy Spirit. That is why Pope Francis described the church as the family of families. Every family is a microcosm of the church, a mini church. It is in the context of our family that we come to know God and grow in the faith.

The synod priority

Family: supporting the domestic church as the primary place of faith transmission and belonging, and strengthening its connection with parishes and schools.