

SoulSpace

THE GOSPEL OF THE FAMILY: JOY FOR THE WORLD

Season colour: **GREEN**

In this series, **Fr Gerard Moloney, C.Ss.R.** anticipates the World Meeting of Families which will take place in Ireland in August 2018.



Pope Francis uses the image of a field hospital to describe the church (291). The church, he says, must be like a field hospital that cleans and heals wounds. The family home must be the same.

So many families are hurt and wounded in one way or another - people who don't talk to each other, or who hurt each other verbally, sexually, emotionally, physically; people who disappoint those they love, or make decisions that let them down. The domestic church is the primary battlefield where these hurts are experienced, and so the domestic church must be the primary field hospital that cleans and heals these wounds. It means a willingness to forgive, to talk, to listen, to spend time together, to seek to understand differences, to encourage and appreciate one another. The domestic church is the field hospital that never leaves wounds untended.

THE CHALLENGE

The wonderful thing about Pope Francis's encyclical on marriage is that it doesn't just stop at reiterating church teaching on marriage and family. That's what church teaching did in the past. But Francis is a realist. He recognises that the ideal of Christian marriage and family life is hard to live, and marriages fail, and couples live in imperfect situations. He has an expression for families in these situations. He calls them "wounded families." Pastors must "avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations" (296), Francis says, and must "be attentive to how people experience distress because of their condition." This is good advice for all



“The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. Couples should be helped to realise that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead, it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union.**”**

Pope Francis, The Joy of Love, 232

The Holy Father

of us. None of us is perfect. No relationship is perfect. No family is perfect. We are all a work in progress.

We must always keep aiming towards being better people. As Francis puts it: "No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love ... All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse" (325). Francis describes this life-long process of growing towards perfection as "gradualism." Marriage is a dynamic process, hopefully always growing, always maturing. It's the same with all our significant relationships. All are works in progress. We must constantly help each other grow.

Families, therefore, must be field hospitals of compassion and mercy. This doesn't mean watering down church teaching. Jesus proposed a demanding ideal, Francis says, but "never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery" (38). This must be our attitude also. We are to show mercy and compassion even in situations that do not fully match what the Lord proposes. ■



Today's readings

GOD'S WORD TODAY

Amos 7:12-15
Ephesians 1:3-14
Mark 6:7-13

Unlike missionaries from other religions who travelled the dusty roads of Galilee weighed down by their baggage and possessions, the disciples of Jesus will move quickly from one place to the next. This group of preachers are setting themselves apart from the rest.

They are given their instructions. When hospitality is given in a town, then stay in that place until it is time to leave. However, when the disciples encounter criticism or unwelcome, they are to move on and "as you walk away shake off the dust from under your feet as a sign to them".

There may have been an atmosphere of excitement and a hint of trepidation amongst Jesus and his disciples as they set out to the villages of Galilee in twos to preach about the forgiveness of sins and to anoint the sick with oil.

The simplicity of this activity, bringing with them only their staff and sandals, is in direct contrast to the difficulties that have crossed their paths in Nazareth. Scripture scholar Ciaran O' Callaghan, CSsR states that the staff and sandals symbolise the urgency of this missionary journey. There is no time to waste.

THE FIELD HOSPITAL

Christian families must be field hospitals of compassion and mercy.

M*A*S*H was one of the most popular dark comedies on television in the 1970s and early 80s. The show revolved around key personnel in a U.S. Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) in the Korean War. By its nature, a MASH unit is able to set up camp as close as possible to the battlefield. The closer it is to the action, the more lives it is able to save.

