



Newsletter – February 2022

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The Family in the World: What do Chinese New Year, Judaism and Catholic Faith have in common?

The Emphasis of Family Values in Traditional Chinese (Lunar) New Year

Also known as the Spring Festival, Chinese New Year (or Lunar New Year) takes place when the Northern Hemisphere starts its gradual warming, having already passed the coldest part of the winter (known as LìChūn: 立春 'Start of Spring' – the growth for the next agricultural year and there is an expectant atmosphere of the start of life in nature). Traditional agricultural communities which formed the backbone of historical China take a break from work and gather as a family and celebrate the passing of the old year (enjoying the produce of the land) and wish each other for a better year ahead.

Lunar New Year celebration starts with the Reunion Dinner – the last meal of the “old year” where all members of the family return to their (living) parents’ home to gather for a feast. On the actual day and the following 2 weeks, it is customary to visit family members, starting with the older family members: grandparents/uncles and aunts and auspicious greetings are exchanged with feasting and entertainment. The elders are accorded the due respect (symbolised through oranges, hongbaos etc) and homes adorned with red (especially on the doorposts and lintels) and other decorations. In the past, without distractions from TV and online entertainment, members have to converse or play simple games like Mahjong. The underlying intention, I suspect is to convey good times being associated with the family.

Whilst this is a secular ethnic festival, one can see some parallels to God's will for the first family in Genesis. The first man and his helpmate (the woman) were commanded to care for the garden (tilling and caring for the land). In our modern urban setting, it is just as relevant as metaphorically, we are to grow God's love and presence in our family and in the world (all lands). Perhaps that is why the Lunar New Year is so highly regarded, almost as if there is sanctity to it. It follows a natural law celebrating the cycle and cultivation of life: the family, community, goodwill and tilling of the land.

Importance of the Family in Society

It is not just the Chinese but many other societies celebrate the family in their respective festivities: the Malays, Indians etc. This is because the family is the basic building block of any society. Regardless of ethnicity, every civilisation that survives through the ages has to protect and promote the family as its basic unit of society. As the Emeritus Spiritual Director has said "If there is no family today, there is no Church tomorrow." It holds true for the Church as well as for the society at large. Intuitively every society knows this and hence celebrates the union of man and woman because that is the first step of starting a family.

The Family in God's Plan

We celebrate the Incarnation of Christ at Christmas through 2 levels of family:

- 1) In the eyes of our transient world, God incarnated through the family: the Holy Family so to be fully human. God chose to incarnate through the Chosen people – the Jews. The Jews, the ethnic race that God chose for His incarnation is known to place a strong emphasis on family bonds. They have survived for four thousand years, through subjugation and Diaspora, under difficult circumstances and still today contribute disproportionately in the countries they live and to the world. It is said that strength of Judaism throughout the ages has been the strength of their marriages, families and homes as they made the family their highest joy, the home their citadel, marriage a sacred covenant and parenthood their highest responsibility.

“It is there that we experience the Shekhinah, the Divine presence, there that we discover the power of love to transfigure life, there that we learn to care for someone else more than for ourselves, there that we grow into the people we could become.”

- Jonathan Sacks¹,

Being the New Israel, the Catholic Church fulfils the promises of the Old hence...

¹A message from the late Chief Rabbi Emeritus Lord Jonathan Sacks to the Jewish Marriage Council
<https://www.jmc-uk.org/chief.htm>

2) In the eyes of the transcendent, God's love for humanity wills us to be with Him as a family as stated throughout Scripture. In fact the Feast of the Epiphany reminds us that God extend His salvation to All Nations, therefore the Catholic Church (the New Jerusalem) is universal, inviting all to be baptised. By our baptism we become the new Chosen People of God -a fulfilment of the Old (ie Judaism), when we are made "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). Being incorporated into Christ we can share in His Trinitarian life. The essential effect of baptism, then, is our adoption into the family of God. As an adopted son or daughter, we can call God "Father," in union with the only Son.

According to St. Paul, the relationship between the members of the Church and Christ is analogous to the relationship between husband and wife in the sacrament of Marriage (Ephesians 5:21-33). It is like that of a Bridegroom for a Bride – God joins Himself to us, expressed in a marital embrace between husband and wife. In fact it is because of the Incarnation, we are privileged to have the Eucharist. The Son gives Himself to us in the Eucharist and so Catholics come together for a "Passover" meal remembering God's great love for us in the Sacrifice, partaking in being with God by having Him come into us and celebrating as a family with God.

Where in the Bible does it talk about the Family?

It is important to remember that the bible

1. starts with a marriage (and start of a family – between God and man and immediately thereafter, man and woman);
2. tells us the incarnated God commenced the act of our redemption from the moment He performed His first public miracle at a wedding (Cana) and began His journey to Golgotha where God would lay down His life for His people; and
3. ends with a wedding, where St John envisioned "the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

God exists as the Holy Trinity in a divine perfect family in that whilst Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three persons, they are united as one entity, even before creation. The human family, created in God's image and likeness is a reflection of the Holy Trinity. The family

consists of the husband and wife, though remaining two distinct persons, their conjugal union implies the total mutual giving of self in love and become the source of a third person (their children), also distinct from either of them and yet united to them also by bonds of love and forming with them the triune community.

Hence whilst the bible does not explicitly address family issues, it is the basis of the bible. The family is where social ills can be redressed in the long run and that constitutes our “caring/tilling” of the land.

What does the Church say about the Christian (Catholic) Family?

As Catholics we see ourselves as the chosen people of the New Covenant, and many of the Jewish practices come to fulfilment in our Catholic faith. What the above-described lends meaning to the Catechism of the Catholic Church² that -

2204 *"The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church." It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament.*

2205 *The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. (By doing that) the Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task.*

...

As spouses and parents, this is our calling so perhaps that is why the CFMS is relevant. Our primary vocation is to love; but within the vocation we are to love as spouse, parents and family so that there would be a next generation of God’s children doing His will. Yet there are many challenges facing the family today hence CCC calls out the need to build the family.

2210 *The importance of the family for the life and well-being of society entails a particular responsibility for society to support and strengthen marriage and the family. Civil authority should consider it a grave duty "to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and the family, to protect and foster them, to safeguard public morality, and promote domestic prosperity."*

²The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) was promulgated by John Paul II on October 11, 1992 - the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council.

From past discussions and articles, we are aware of the many challenges facing the Christian family, from ignorance of the spiritual reality and Church's teaching, to apathy towards our Culture of Death, to being caught up in the cares of the earthly life. We can use celebrations like Christmas, Feast of the Holy Family, Feast of the Holy Innocents, Epiphany and even Chinese New Year to reflect on what we as Christians, as families and as a ministry need to do.

- Andrew

See

1. How do we use festivities and ethnic celebrations to bond the family? E.g. National Day/ public holidays?
2. Are members of the family distracted by modern devices (for work, school-work, social media interactions and leisure)?

Judge

3. Do we take the time to reflect on the vows taken at our Holy Matrimony? Our children's baptism?
4. Do we reflect on the spiritual implication of our vows and the spiritual reality of the transcendent?

Act

5. What can I/we do to preserve and promote family values:
 - Head of the household?/parents?
 - Children of God?
 - Members of the Catholic community?
 - Members of the CFSM?

Announcements

1. CFSM members are reminded to pay their subscriptions for the year 2022. Base group leaders please collect from your base group members.
2. CFSM Annual General Meeting will be held on 5 March 2022 from 2.30pm to 5.00pm.
3. CFSM Singapore is celebrating its 60th Anniversary on 24 September 2022. A subcommittee has been formed to organise the event. If you wish to assist the subcommittee, please contact the Editor at 96521782.
4. Members are encouraged to give ideas on how we can utilise fully the CFSM website. Please email to gabrielsebastian995@ gmail.com