



Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Pastor's Column

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Embracing the Joy of Love

On Sunday, September 4, a Listening Session was held in our Parish to help us, as a Parish, prepare for our Diocesan Synod, "Embracing the Joy of Love," to be held on October 29/30. This Synod will be discussing Pope Francis' Apostolic Teaching, "The Joy of Love," and finding ways to implement it in our Diocese.

Our Parishioner, Sheila McKinley, will be representing our Parish at the Synod in October. Below are her remarks from the "Listening Session" in which she talks about Pope Francis, his Teaching, "The Joy of Love," and thoughts about her extended family (which in all candor sounds like my family and most of our families!

That is why the "The Joy of Love" is and should be a comfort to all of us!

Thank you Fr. Mike for giving me the opportunity to represent STM and thank you all for being here today... For those of you who haven't read "The Joy of Love," make it your next book club book, it's incredibly easy to read! Pope Francis is the man of the people. He understands this era and the use of technology for that matter. I think I read somewhere that he used the phrase "surfing on your mobile phone" and he refers to "helicopter parenting" and "getting along with your in-laws." I marked up so many pages I could have highlighted the entire book. The only difficult part now is how best to summarize so many of the wonderful thoughts he has.

So what I've come to gather from this book is that through the two Vatican Synods that were held in the last two years he wrote this to find out how WE as a church can better serve, better support, families, married couples, and single people. He wants OUR feedback! I truly believe that he also is saying, look I know that the Gospel is hard to follow, Canon Law is way up here; and where we all are, down in this world, it can look and be very messy. And that's okay. And I hear him say over and over again to have mercy; and, of course, this is the "Jubilee Year of Mercy" so hopefully it's becoming engrained in all of us! He wants the Church to be supportive and non-judgmental. On this feast of St. Mother Theresa's canonization, Fr. Karl quoted her this

morning at Mass saying, "If you judge people, you have no time to love them." Pope Francis says, "All family life is a shepherding in mercy" (p,252). That's pretty powerful. If you can teach your children anything, mercy is an essential virtue. He wants us to love people where they are at in life, get rid of our ego, our pride, whatever it is that's holding us back from being open to love, maybe it's fear. He reaches into the core of the family, understanding that family life is very messy. So again I'm humbled by this invitation and it's truly God's perfect timing that He has called me to do this. So I will give you a little background on who I am and why this experience has truly touched my soul.

As I was growing up my family had always been a positive, loving place other than the fact we certainly had our share of arguments. But I have warm memories of my childhood. To this day my siblings (I am the youngest of four) are my best friends. We all joke about wanting to move back to Indiana, where we are from, since it's so much more affordable with more land to roam, but we don't want to leave each other. So we will just do what we can to handle the cramped space for the sake of family times together. So I thank my parents for keeping us close and instilling the

faith in us. My parents took prayer and Sunday Mass/family time very seriously in our home and I am so grateful that they did and didn't give in to our complaints about Mass, etc... In fact, I had a best friend growing up who was Lutheran and I had many Saturday night sleep-overs at her house, therefore resulting in attending her church service the next morning. However, my dad would still take me to Mass later that evening.

There is no better gift than prayer and how to pray. Growing up I saw my parents pray together, just the two of them and I was a part of our family prayer time, not just at meals but every now and then when we would say the rosary as a family or circle up for our morning prayer before school. Our family is very close and I know that's the reason why. Whenever times were or are tough we all naturally go back



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to that place of prayer, it's comfortable, it's what we know, it's been engrained in us. Countless times to this day I've prayed novenas with my brother or sisters for intentions we have in our life. My dad, sister, brother, and I all work together at our estate family law practice. We pray for our business and pray for our clients who have died. It's what seems like the right thing to do, to bring prayer with you wherever you go!

My parents were/are the best of friends and that love was in the center of our family. Because of their witness we, their children, have sought out that same type of love in our spouses. We see that it's attainable and good. It's rooted in us and we know that God lies in the heart of it all.

Well... "The Joy of Love" begins with that same call to family, to love, to prayer, to lasting unions... Pope Francis says "The close bond between married life and the Eucharist thus becomes all the more clear. For the food of the Eucharist offers the spouses the strength and incentive needed to live the marriage covenant each day as a domestic church" (p.249). I feel that is exactly why my parents took prayer and Sunday Mass, as a family, so seriously. Chapter 4 gives a beautiful description of love in a marriage as he breaks down 1 Cor 13: love is patient, love is kind...

Now did I have the perfect family...absolutely not. Pope Francis says "no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love" (p.325). With the help of my sister, I have created an alphabet soup of challenges we've had in our family. Not just our nuclear family as Pope Francis refers to it, but to the larger/wider extended family, aunts, uncles, cousins. So here it is starting with A... addictions, ADHD, alcoholism, anxiety that needs meds, arrests, Asperger's, children born out of wedlock, cancer, clinical depression, death of a child, divorce, DUI, drug use, dyslexia, falling out with family members, financial stress, family members who are LGBT, family members who left the Catholic Church, family members who married non-Catholics, infidelity, marriage annulment process (some did/some didn't), and the most recent: suicide.

A few of those I just mentioned have recently been challenges that I have had to face while simultaneously reading this book (thank goodness!!), which is why I truly feel God called me to this to help me be more merciful and to choose to love. I so easily could have held onto bitterness and fear and veered in the wrong direction. But literally I found myself, one day, in a state of un-forgiveness or perhaps a judging heart, and then I read in page 240: "Even if it seems clear that the other person is at fault, a crisis will never be overcome simply by expecting him or her to change. We also have to ask what in our own life needs to grow or heal if the conflict is to be resolved." And then, I

recalled one day feeling concerned over my children and what I would teach them about this conflict and didn't want them to hear what was going on and I started to notice myself, as Pope Francis writes in page 187, "creating small nests of security, where others are perceived as bothersome or a threat. Such isolation, however, cannot offer greater peace or happiness; rather, it straitens the heart of the family and makes its life all the more narrow." Pope Francis was calling me out! What a lesson I learned and it couldn't have been clearer for me. I recently heard someone say we need to stop talking about what we are against and talk more about what we are for.

So my final thoughts lead me to the focus of my working group. Again when I meet with the San Diego Synod there will be five focus groups and I will stay with my focus group the entire time to discuss our questions, which are regarding the challenge to bring spiritual depth to family life. So if I could sum up this section in the book (which is the last chapter) I would do so with one word...tenderness.

Tenderness is how I remember my childhood, it's how my parents disciplined me and loved me. This is how I felt growing up and Pope Francis states in page 323: "Our loved ones merit our complete attention. Jesus is our model in this, for whenever people approached to speak with him, he would meet their gaze, directly and lovingly. No one felt overlooked in his presence, since his words and gestures conveyed the question: 'What do you want me to do for you?' This is what we experience in the daily life of the family. We are constantly reminded that each of those who live with us merits complete attention, since he or she possesses infinite dignity as an object of the Father's immense love. This gives rise to a tenderness which can 'stir in the other the joy of being loved.' Tenderness is expressed in a particular way by exercising living care in treating the limitations of the other, especially when they are evident."

Sheila, thank you for your witness. Our Parish will be praying for you as you prepare for the Synod. We look forward to your sharing its results with us!

F. Mike