

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 44

Love and the formation of a community of persons 1

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Today we move into Chapter 5, IIIa of the *Compendium* "Love and the formation of a community of persons". This topic will be dealt with in three parts.

Individualism has become characteristic of today's society. Everyone is concerned about getting ahead; each of us has to balance work, studies, chores and whatever else that manages to pop up. Sometimes persons are too busy to show genuine concern for those around them even their own family members.

Most of us live in homes with others and sometimes days pass by before we actually see one another, or have a genuine conversation with another family member. Today's excerpts from the *Compendium* tell us that the family is the place where individuals learn to love, respect and treat each other with dignity.

If we do not spend time nurturing our family where we are to learn to love, live charitably, feel accepted and truly bond, then by extension our dealings with persons outside of the family (society as a whole) will leave much to be desired. If we do not bond with our own family members, we cannot bond with others outside, truly love, understand and accept them – we cannot be a true community.

"The family is present as the place where communion – that communion so necessary for a society that is increasingly individualistic – is brought about. It is the place where an authentic community of persons develops and grows (*Familiaris Consortio*), thanks to the endless dynamism of love, which is the fundamental dimension of human experience and which finds in the family the privileged place for making itself known. "Love causes man to find fulfillment through the sincere gift of self. To love means to give and to receive some fulfilment through the sincere gift of self. To love means to give and to receive something which can be neither bought nor sold, but only given freely and mutually" (*Families Gratissimam Sane*)."

"It is thanks to love, the essential reality for defining marriage and the family that every person – man and woman – is recognised, accepted and respected in his dignity. From love arise relationships lived in gratuitousness, which "by respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value... takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service and deep solidarity" (*Familiaris Consortio*).

The existence of families living this way exposes the failings and contradictions of a society that is for the most part, even if not exclusively, based on efficiency and functionality. By constructing daily a network of interpersonal relationships, both internal and external, the family is instead "the first and irreplaceable school of social life, and example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love (*Familiaris Consortio*).

The elderly in the family

“Love is also expressed in the generous attention shown to the elderly who live in families: their presence can take on great value. They are an example of connections between generations, a resource for the well-being of the family and of the whole of society: “Not only do they show that there are aspects of life – human, cultural, moral and social values – which cannot be judged in terms of economic efficiency, but they can also make an effective contribution in the work-place and in leadership roles.

In short, it is not just a question of doing something for older people, but also of accepting them in a realistic way as partners in shared projects – at the level of thought, dialogue and action (*Familiaris Consortio*).” As the Sacred Scripture says: “*They still bring forth fruit in old age*” (Ps 92:15).

The elderly constitute an important school of life, capable of transmitting values and traditions, and of fostering the growth of younger generations, who thus learn to seek not only their own good but also that of others. If the elderly are in situations where they experience suffering and dependence, not only do they need health care services and appropriate assistance, but – and above all – they need to be treated with love.”

Another critical point to note is that the family is the “first and irreplaceable school of social life”. The family creates opportunities for sharing knowledge between individual family members, and between families. A critical pillar in this knowledge-sharing is the elderly, our aunts and uncles, grandparents and great grandparents.

Young people need advice on a variety of topics – love, medicine, childcare, patience. Instead of turning to friends only – the elderly in families and in communities can provide a wealth of information based on experience. Many young people do not tap into this resource voluntarily; the advice is either foisted on them or simply not given.

We must ask ourselves why? Is it because of poor family relations, where communication between the generations is not encouraged? Do young people feel that the information the elderly have to share is outdated? Do elderly persons feel unappreciated by others who think they have served their time? Even in work settings the same sentiments are echoed.

The discussion on love and the formation of a community of persons will continue in next week’s article.