

It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the sanctuary of life. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Centesimus Annus (1 May 1991), 39.

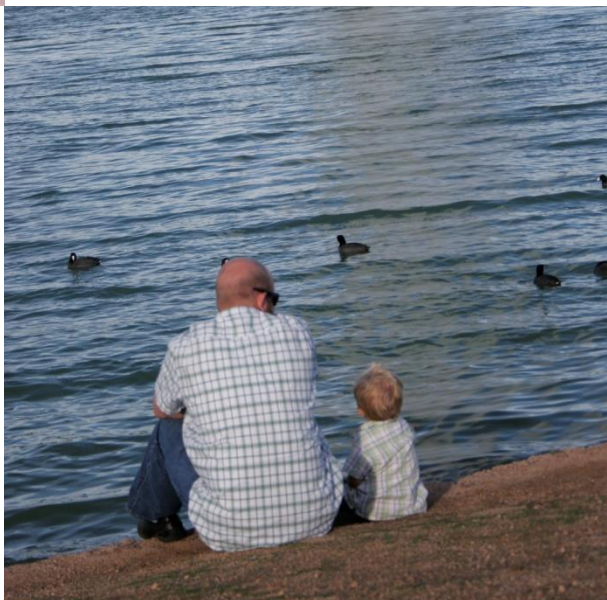


The Most Important Person on earth is a mother. She cannot claim the honor of having built Notre Dame Cathedral. She need not. She has built something more magnificent than any cathedral—a dwelling for an immortal soul, the tiny perfection of her baby's body . . . The angels have not been blessed with such a grace. They cannot share in God's creative miracle to bring new saints to Heaven. Only a human mother can. Mothers are closer to God the Creator than any other creature; God joins forces with mothers in performing this act of creation . . . What on God's good earth is more glorious than this: to be a mother?
- Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty



He didn't tell me
how to live; he
lived, and let me
watch him do it.

~Clarence Budington Kelland



God took the strength of a mountain,
The majesty of a tree,
The warmth of a summer sun,
The calm of a quiet sea,
The generous soul of nature,
The comforting arm of night,
The wisdom of the ages,
The power of the eagle's flight,
The joy of a morning in spring,
The faith of a mustard seed,
The patience of eternity,
The depth of a family need,
Then God combined these qualities,
When there was nothing more to add,
He knew His masterpiece was complete,
And so, He called it ... Dad
- Author Unknown

Excerpts from Pope John Paul II's Letter to Families (February 2, 1994)

13. Dear families, the question of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is an integral part of the "civilization of love," which I now wish to discuss with you.

. . . . **the family is the center and the heart of the civilization of love.**

Yet there is no true love without an awareness that God "is love" and that man is the only creature on earth which God has called into existence for its own sake. Created in the image and likeness of God, man cannot fully find himself except through the sincere gift of self. Without such a concept of man, of the person and the communion of persons in the family, there can be no civilization of love; similarly, without the civilization of love it is impossible to have such a concept of person and of the communion of persons. The family constitutes the fundamental cell of society. But Christ—the vine from which the branches draw nourishment—is needed so that this cell will not be exposed to the threat of a kind of cultural uprooting which can come both from within and from without. Indeed, although there is on the one hand the civilization of love, there continues to exist on the other hand the possibility of a destructive "anti-civilization," as so many present trends and situations confirm.

Who can deny that our age is one marked by a great crisis, which appears above all as a profound "crisis of truth"? A crisis of truth means, in the first place, a crisis of concepts. Do the words "love," "freedom," "sincere gift" and even "person" and "rights of the person" really convey their essential meaning?

. . . . Why is the splendor of truth so important? First of all, by way of contrast: The development of contemporary civilization is linked to a scientific and technological progress which is often achieved in a one-sided way and thus appears purely positivistic. Positivism, as we know results in agnosticism in theory and utilitarianism in practice and in ethics. In our own day history is in a way repeating itself. Utilitarianism is a civilization of production and of use, a civilization of things and not of persons, a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used. In the context of a civilization of use, woman can become an object for man, children a hindrance to parents, the family an institution obstructing the freedom of its members. To be convinced that this is the case, one need only look at certain sexual education programs introduced into the schools, often notwithstanding the disagreement and even the protests of many parents; or pro-abortion tendencies which vainly try to hide behind the so-called right to choose (pro-choice) on the part of both spouses and in particular on the part of the woman. These are only two examples

It is evident that in this sort of a cultural situation the family cannot fail to feel threatened, since it is endangered at its very foundations. Everything contrary to the civilization of love is contrary to the whole truth about man and becomes a threat to him: It does not allow him to find himself and to feel secure as spouse, parent or child. So-called safe sex, which is touted by the "civilization of technology," is actually, in view of the overall requirements of the person, radically not safe, indeed it is extremely dangerous. It endangers both the person and the family. And what is this danger? It is the loss of the truth about one's own self and about the family, together with the risk of a loss of freedom and consequently of a loss of love itself. "You will know the truth," Jesus says, "and the truth will make you free" (Jn. 8:32): The truth, and only the truth, will prepare you for a love which can be called "fairest love" (cf. Sir. 24:24, Vulg.).

The contemporary family, like families in every age, is searching for fairest love. A love which is not fairest, but reduced only to the satisfaction of concupiscence (cf. 1 Jn. 2:16) or to a man's and a woman's mutual "use" of each other, makes persons slaves to their weaknesses. Do not certain modern "cultural agendas" lead to this enslavement? . . .

The civilization of love evokes joy: joy, among other things, for the fact that a man has come into the world (cf. Jn. 16:21), and consequently because spouses have become parents. The civilization of love means "rejoicing in the right" (cf. 1 Cor. 13:6). But a civilization inspired by a consumerist, anti-birth mentality is not and cannot ever be a civilization of love. If the family is so important for the civilization of love, it is because of the particular closeness and intensity of the bonds which come to be between persons and generations within the family. However, the family remains vulnerable and can easily fall prey to dangers which weaken it or actually destroy its unity and stability. As a result of these dangers, families cease to be witnesses of the civilization of love and can even become a negation of it, a kind of countersign. A broken family can, for its part, consolidate a specific form of "anti-civilization," destroying love in its various expressions, with inevitable consequences for the whole of life in society.