

## The Domestic Church<sup>i</sup>

There is a certain gravity to this conversation because of who is involved. Why are we all here after all? Well, because we are asking that question regarding social media; am I doing a good job with my family? I have to ask myself the same thing about my parish; am I taking care of my parish? The people involved are of infinite value so I am and should be concerned.

### **To look at the intertwining of the family and social media I want to look at two questions:**

What is the Domestic Church; what is the family?  
What is social media?

To answer both these questions even remotely well in this short time we need to get right back to the basics.

#### **1- What is the Domestic Church?**

- a. The family is the original cell of social life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society (CCC, 2207).
- b. The nugget I want to pull from that quote is the Domestic Church, the family, is a place for identity. It is a place where parents can help their kids come to know who they are. It is to help their child hear these words from God Himself- “Here is my beloved Son, Here is my beloved daughter”. From God alone comes my meaning, value, worth, and dignity.
- c. Identity is that which grounds me no matter what life throws my way because whatever that might be - good or bad - no person, thing, or situation is the source of my worth, my value, my meaning. Paul describes what this reality looks like in Philippians: “I have learned, in whatever situation I find myself, to be self-sufficient. I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me. (Philippians 4:11-13).
  - i. The family (and the parish) is thus the place where we learn who we are and then live that identity. **I think I should note that it is much messier in reality than that one sentence makes it sound!**

## 2- What is social media?

- a. **It is a tool** - to be used for good or ill. Insofar as it helps the family in its role, it is a tremendous blessing. Certainly, it offers new ways to be connected and stay connected, to deepen relationships that are already in place.
- b. Regarding its potential negative impact on the family - **I am reminded of the line from Ecclesiastes that there is nothing new under the sun.** Social media is just a new medium where sin, which is old as Adam and Eve, can grow and distort. As has been mentioned earlier, social media isn't the source of all ills- just a new opportunity.
- c. Things to particularly watch out for in the family:
  - i. **How is social media touching identity?** It is dangerous when my social media platform becomes the basis for my identity, when it begins to be the source of my value, dignity, and worth. Again, nothing new here about that. You have to do the same thing to help your kids learn that their value doesn't come from how good they are at sports, what kind of grades they have, etc. My social media presence cannot fill the God shaped hole in my life anymore than other things can. We need to help kids learn how to use it in a balanced, healthy way.
  - ii. **When social media blinds us to what we have, to reality.**

Danger when it goes from being a way of communicating to a way to compare ourselves to others.

    1. **Blaise Pascal** "All human evil comes from a single cause, man's inability to sit still in a room." If we become addicted to constant stimulation, social media fits the bill nicely. Social media, if we use it in an unbalanced way, can stir an unsuitable restlessness that blinds to what we have, our family, our blessings, etc. We can be sitting right in the midst of a beautiful family, be incredibly blessed, and be unhappy because we can't see what we have and how blessed we are.
    2. **1<sup>st</sup> Samuel** recounts when Israel decided they wanted an earthly king in place of God. Samuel reminded them of how blessed they were and warned them about what a king would demand of them. Here is their telling response "No! There must be a king over us. We too must be like all the nations, with a king to rule us, lead us in warfare, and fight our battles." (1 Samuel 8:20). That phrase- "we too must be like all the nations". The Israelites had spent too much time on Pinterest and they lost sight of how blessed they were and threw it away.

For the family then - keep on providing a fertile ground for your children to grow up in, rooted strongly in the knowledge of who they are so they can live securely in the world. Teach them how to use the many, many tools our world throws our way, including social media, to live the life God meant for them to have.

Solutions:

1. Balance!
2. Make practical rules in the household about when technology is left away. Fight for unplugged family time.
3. Great Lenten practice to fast from social media.
  - a. Pope Francis has great quotes- do I spend as much time praying as I do reading the bible?
  - b. Lift up your hearts, not your cell phones.
4. Use social media to pray and to grow in your faith. There are many, many great apps.

*Fr. Todd Koenigsknect. Notes from an address given at “Life! Posted: Social Media & Its Impact on the Modern Family.” March 10, 2018. This half-day conference was the inaugural effort of the Familiaris Consortio Lecture Series sponsored by Father Gabriel Richard High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Co-sponsored by Ave Maria Radio, Emmaus Health, ArborWoman, and the Notre Dame Club of Ann Arbor.*