

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph December 27, 2020

On November 25, 1905, Luigi Quattrocchi and Maria Corsini were married in Rome. Though both were Catholic, Maria was more serious about her faith, going to Mass daily, and giving her time to charitable work. Though Luigi was not as devout as Maria, with time, Maria's example of love and goodness softened his heart to the point that he began to share her passion for their Catholic faith.

When Maria was pregnant with her fourth child, she was diagnosed with a condition that would make continuing her pregnancy very dangerous. The doctors warned her that if she did not get an abortion, it was very likely that she would die. That was unthinkable to Luigi and Maria, so they put their faith in God, prayed fervently, and hoped for the best. In the meanwhile, her doctors decided to deliver the baby early so that they could then treat Maria's condition. Luigi and Maria's faith and trust in God were rewarded when their fourth child, Enrichetta, was born healthy.

Luigi and Maria set an example for their children by going to Mass, praying in their home, and putting their faith into practice by founding several charitable organizations. As a result, one of their sons became a priest, another became a monk, and one of their daughters became a nun. Their fourth daughter, Enrichetta, the one whom doctors advised them to abort, lived such a holy life that she is now being considered for sainthood.

Because of their example of faith and the influence they had on so many people, Saint Pope John Paul II brought them one step closer to being declared saints by beatifying them on October 21, 2001. In fact, they are the first married couple to be beatified together as a couple.

In his homily for the occasion, Saint Pope John Paul II said, "Amid the joys and anxieties of a normal family, they knew how to live an extraordinarily rich spiritual life. At the center of their life was the daily Eucharist, as well as devotion to the Virgin Mary, to whom they prayed every evening with the Rosary."

There was nothing extraordinary about Luigi and Maria Quattrocchi. They were no different from any other family. What made their life extraordinary was that Jesus was at the center of their home. That made all the difference.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. Mary and Joseph, the greatest saints who ever lived, practiced their faith in the setting of a simple family life in Nazareth. Though they were the holiest couple of all time, they are not known for doing anything extraordinary. They really would not have stood out from the other families in Nazareth except that Jesus was at the center of their home. In that way, they teach us

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the secret of how to be a loving and holy family ourselves. And that is, to do everything possible to make Jesus the center of our marriages and the center of our homes.

The best way to do that is by praying together as a family. We all know that dreadful statistic that 50% of marriages will end in divorce. However, that figure drops to around 10% for couples who go to church regularly. Now, for couples who also pray together daily at home, the divorce rate is less than 1%. That is an incredible statistic that points to the power of prayer to make our home lives strong.

Unfortunately, many couples experience what Luigi and Maria did when they were first married. Just as Maria was more devout than Luigi was, so with many married couples, one is typically more committed to going to Mass and praying than the other is. It can be frustrating and disappointing. Spouses can sometimes be left feeling powerless.

The first thing we must realize is that we can never change our spouse. People only change when they are motivated to. It never comes as a result of nagging or criticism. We must always love our spouses unconditionally - whether they are practicing the faith or not.

The second thing to do is pray. Only God can reach deep into the human heart and change it. Praying with faith, even if we don't see any results, eventually will make a difference.

Then, we must be a good example for our spouses. Maria's example of goodness and love warmed Luigi's heart and we can do the same. St Paul teaches us how in today's second reading. "Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another." If our spouses see that by praying and going to Mass frequently we are changing for the better, then they will eventually come around.

So often, in married life, the demands of work and the pressures of daily life can get to us. Spouses begin to take each other for granted and take out their frustrations on each other. But that can have no place between two people who are called to love each other with the love of Jesus. As soon as we speak harshly, act insensitively, or are overly critical, we should ask for forgiveness. We should also be quick to forgive when we are hurt. Nothing is as poisonous for a relationship as harboring resentments. We need to let go of those grudges, forgive from the heart, and commit to loving one another unconditionally.

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Our marriages and families can be the source of our greatest joys and deepest sorrows. Loving each other brings intimacy and tenderness but it also makes us vulnerable to being hurt and being taken advantage of. The good news is that we can find healing in Jesus. He is the source of love for married life. He is the one who raised marriage to a sacrament. He is the one who is present through the ups and downs of married life. When His love is at the center of our family lives, then nothing becomes impossible.

If we want strong, happy marriages with well-adjusted children, and abundant love, then we must follow the example of Maria and Luigi Quattrocchi who followed the example of Mary and Joseph. We must put Jesus at the center of our homes through attendance at Mass, prayer at home, and practicing kindness and forgiveness with one another. It will not make our homes perfect. But it will mean that we will be the people God calls us to be - holy, loving, forgiving, and truly joyful.