**Strengthening the Family through Word and Eucharist**

**Bible Sunday Message 2019**

**Introduction**

When the family gets together, the two things they do most are: **eat** & **talk**. This is especially so when long-scattered family members are reunited on festive or special occasions. And most certainly the case for the Asian family. ‘Eat’ is so deeply ingrained in our culture because it satisfies one of our most elemental needs and is the most basic care that parents/elders provide for their children/younger. ‘Talk’, meanwhile, is the primary means that we use in order to communicate love, ideas, experiences, knowledge, traditions, amongst many other things. And we don’t just eat & talk; we eat heartily and talk animatedly because it is during these occasions that we feel most alive and connected.

**Eucharist (Eat) and Bible (Talk)**

It is small wonder then that the two most precious graces given by God to mankind are exactly these: Eucharist (eat) & Bible (talk). After all, Jesus and the Jews are Asians. The Eucharist, in particular, has its origin in the Passover meal, the most important annual Jewish family ‘makan’. Hence the Eucharist recalls that family get-together and reminds us of the maxim that ‘The family that prays/eats together, stays together’. This family-orientation is very strong indeed in the Eucharist.

The Bible, on the other hand, is often described as the love letter from the heavenly Father to his beloved children. In it, the Father shows forth his great, patient and unfailing love throughout the history of humankind. He even goes to the extent of nagging his children incessantly in the hope that they may inherit eternal happiness by heeding his advice, but the children often fail to pay any attention to Him at all - not unlike the experience of many parents today.

**Bible: Family Book**

One way that the Bible shows forth its particular focus on the human family are the two words that it uses most frequently in the Old Testament: ‘Yahweh’[[1]](#footnote-1) and ‘son’[[2]](#footnote-2). The Father God and son relationship is what God has in mind as He helps His children with much practical advices and wisdom for each family member, individually as well as collectively[[3]](#footnote-3), while at the same time teaching them how to build better relationships with others[[4]](#footnote-4). It consoles in times of difficulty and pain, strengthens and encourages in times of weakness and admonishes in times of errors.

Yet the Bible does not just dispense great wisdom and spirituality; more fundamentally, the Bible is in itself ‘ … full of families, birth, love stories and family crises.’[[5]](#footnote-5) It feels real to the family because in it are found their journeys of hope and disappointment, love & betrayal, joy & despair, triumph and failure. And throughout all these spiritual journeys and struggles, the ultimate triumph of good over evil and truth over falsehood are comforting thoughts for today’s families besieged by the complexities and challenges of the modern world.

For those who feel that the Bible contains only empty words, the Bible itself assures us that ‘The word of God is alive and active … (Hebrew 4:12)’. When a family (indeed, any group) reads the Bible together prayerfully, the words come alive for them. What touches them are not just mere words, but the presence of the Spirit of God among them. Moreover, Jesus himself promised that ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).’ Thus when a family prays the Bible together, the Trinity[[6]](#footnote-6) - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - are present with them and move them with their presence (cf. John 14:23).

**Eucharist: Word in Action**

More importantly, Jesus does not just teach other people what to do; he lives what he preaches. He laid down his life for his people, the ones he loved, each and every one of them. This is an example of love very badly needed by so many broken families today: a head of the family who keeps his promises and sacrifices himself for his family (cf. Ephesians 5:25-33). This self-giving act of Jesus is remembered and indeed re-enacted every time the Eucharist is celebrated, as we obey his commandment of ‘Do this in memory of me (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24-26).’ It reminds everyone what it takes to live together in love and harmony while at the same time it strengthens all those present with its grace and efficacy.

Hence if the Bible were but just a mere record of the promise of salvation from the Father, then the Eucharist is the fulfilment and acting out of that promise as well as its everlasting proof. In this sense, it can be said that the Bible and the Eucharist complement each other the same way that Word and Action go hand-in-hand - without the Action, the Word can appear empty and without the Word, the Action is not easily understood.

It is in the context of a holy Mass that the Bible (in the Liturgy of the Word) and the Eucharist are most intimately connected[[7]](#footnote-7). It might be fruitful also to reflect upon the other two Real Presences of Christ in the Mass, besides the Bible and the Eucharist, i.e., the Presider and the People of God gathered for the celebration**[[8]](#footnote-8)**. As far as the Bible and the Eucharist are concerned, Christians are at the receiving end, i.e., we receive graces, help and benefits by our encounter with, or participation in, them. Yet ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35)’; hence in order to continue to grow and to continue receiving these graces, one needs to bear witness[[9]](#footnote-9) to and to give back in some way what one has received.

**Conclusion**

As we have eaten and been filled from the double-tables of the Word and Eucharist of the Lord, it is our turn to do the same. The lessons that have been learned and the graces that have been received must be applied and given back to those around us: the Church community (represented by the Presider) and family, friends, colleagues, fellow citizens (represented by the People of God) regardless of whether they are believers or not. Every Mass is, therefore, an opportunity for growth and receiving gifts but also an encouragement to share these to people around us, the first of which is, of course, our family. As the dismissal of the Mass reminds us: ‘Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.’ or ‘Go and announce the Good News of the Lord.’

**Questions for Reflection**

1. God’s word has power. Our words too have power to heal or to hurt, especially those closest to us. How aware are we of that? How often do we put our words to good use?
2. The bread-provider of the family is the one who exercises the power, but he/she is also called to make sacrifices, even to the extent of laying down his/her own life (like Christ in the Eucharist) in order to provide for the family. Are we convinced that with greater power comes greater responsibility and servanthood?

1. The name of God in Hebrew as revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14-15, usually translated as ‘LORD’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘ben’ in Hebrew; see Amoris Laetitia, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ‘Husband … must love his wife as he loves himself; and let every wife respect her husband (Ephesians 5:33)’; ‘Parents, never drive your children to resentment … (Ephesians 6:4)’; ‘Honour your father and your mother … that you may have long life and may prosper … (Deuteronomy 5:16)’; ‘Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to all believers … (1 Timothy 4:12)’; The good wife in Proverbs 31; Ps 128; Song of songs 2:16; 6:3; etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ‘Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. (Luke 23:34)’, ‘… be reconciled with your brothers before presenting your offering at the altar (cf. Matthew 5:24)’; ‘Take the plank out of your own eye first … (Matthew 7:3-5)’, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Amoris Laetitia, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Which is a family in itself; see Amoris Laetitia, no.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. If by ‘Eucharist’ we refer to the ‘Liturgy of the Eucharist’ alone and not the entire Mass. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The four Real Presences of Christ as mentioned in Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 7 and The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. John 1:7-8; 12:17; 15:17; etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)