LARGE FAMILIES: A Sign of the Parents’ Generosity

“Father, my husband and I are expecting our second child, and if God so wishes, we would like to have a large family.”

Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, the late Prelate of Opus Dei, listened attentively as the young Polish mother began to speak. It was late October 1993. Bishop del Portillo was in Warsaw to meet members of Opus Dei and their friends and to encourage them in their apostolic work. Several family get-togethers were organized during this trip and it was in one of these meetings that this mother shared her thoughts with the Prelate.

The young lady continued: “As you know, our country is undergoing a difficult economic period, and many families are short on money. We also have housing problems. These factors, along with lifestyles that have become rather widespread, explain why many married couples want to have no more than two children. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that large families are a sign of God’s blessing and are favourably looked upon by the Church. What can we do to spread the favourable attitude of the Church towards large families?”

The young lady’s questions gave the 79-year old bishop the opportunity to comment on a topic he, following the example of his spiritual father Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, often talked about whenever he spoke to married couples: the need to be generous in welcoming the children God may wish to send them.

In his reply to the young lady, he encouraged her to pray for married folk. He told her to entrust herself and her husband to the Blessed Virgin so that they fulfil their mission as Christian spouses with the generosity that inspired their desire to have many children. “God is our Father,” he said. “A father wants nothing bad for his sons and daughters. As your family grows, and you begin to have more children, God will also give you the grace to take care of them.”

The audience applauded warmly after Bishop del Portillo finished his reply, showing thereby their unity of sentiments with the Prelate.

I was struck by the strong faith that inspired the question raised by the young Polish mother, the reply that Bishop del Portillo gave, and the response of that audience of Polish couples. It is not common to find this faith today. Married couples, when making family decisions, all too often make them with a purely human outlook, devoid of supernatural sense. They forget the unseen but no less certain realities that become as clear as daylight when we look at life, marriage, and the trials of day-to-day living with the eyes of faith.
This, to my mind, is the deepest reason why so many Christians today find it difficult to understand the encouragement the Church gives to married couples to accept parenthood with generosity. Lack of faith has made them too careful, calculating, cautious. On the other hand, they look at those who are magnanimous enough to follow the Church’s exhortations as unrealistic, impractical, even irresponsible.

**Generosity should be prudent**

A quick look at the teachings of the Church regarding the criteria to follow in deciding when to have another child, or whether or not to have another one, shows that the Church does not ask married couples to be unmindful of the responsibilities that the proper upbringing of their children involves. Nothing can be further from the truth.

The Church has always reminded parents of their role as primary educators of the children they bring into this world. She has always exhorted married couples to be prudent, realistic, and responsible in planning their families.

At the same time, however, she never fails to add that this prudence must always be accompanied by generosity. If prudence is to be correctly understood as the virtue enabling us to choose the right means to reach the right end, then prudent family decisions are always to be made with big hearts.

St. John Paul II has pointed this out on a number of occasions. “In deciding whether or not to have a child,” he said once, “married couples must not be motivated by selfishness or carelessness, but by a prudent, conscious generosity that weighs the possibilities and circumstances.” On another occasion, he affirmed: “Husband and wife must take their decision and realistic assessment of the welfare of the child to be born.”

Clearly, it is not the quantity of children that the Church is chiefly concerned about when married couples decide on family size, but the spirit, the attitude and the outlook on life that inspire their decision. What matters more than anything else is that couples realize that “marriage must include openness to the gift of children.”

What is important is that couples “see parenthood as a privilege” and look at each child as a “witness to their love for each other and to their openness to God, an enrichment of their marriage and a gift of God to themselves and to their other children.” So essential is this attitude that St. John Paul II does not hesitate to single out “generous openness to accept children from God” as “the mark of the Christian couple.” - Rev. Fr. Caesar Santos, a Theology Professor at the University of Asia & the Pacific.
A MAN ‘IMMERSED IN GOD’

One of the many great things about St John Paul II was his willingness to disregard protocol when reasons of the heart required it. One such example took place on the late afternoon of 23rd March 1994 when the Polish pontiff left the Vatican to go to a Roman suburb to pray at the corpse of a Spanish bishop who had died that same day. Popes might send telegrams of condolence (and John Paul II had already done just that). It was almost unheard of that they went in person to pray by the deceased’s body.

The fact that the Pope did so was a sign of his enormous affection for the man he was going to pray for, and the organization this person had led until that day. He was Bishop Alvaro del Portillo and he died that morning after 19 years as head of the Opus Dei prelature.

Thus it is so fitting that both men should appear on the same declaration announcing Vatican approval of miraculous cures carried out through their intercession. Whereas the cure for Blessed John Paul will lead to his canonization, that of Del Portillo opens the way to his beatification.

St. John Paul II thought very highly of Bishop Alvaro. Indeed, on that same visit he declined to say a responsory prayer for his soul, preferring to pray a Salve, three Glorias and then finally the very brief requiem aeternam dona ei prayer. He seemed convinced that the bishop was already in heaven. Thus, it is not surprising that Del Portillo looks likely to be raised to the altars 20 years after his death.

As someone who met Bishop Alvaro on a number of occasions, I certainly am not surprised. He stood out as a man of enormous warmth and kindness, passionately in love with Christ, and with a burning desire to serve the Church. The word that is constantly applied to him is “fidelity.” For almost 40 years he was the closest collaborator and most faithful spiritual son of St. Josemaria Escriva, founder of Opus Dei. As Escriva’s death in 1975, he took over as head of the organization and remained so until his death.

His one and only concern was to keep Opus Dei faithful to the spirit God had inspired St. Josemaria to see, and he considered himself merely the “shadow” of the founder. Indeed, he would often use the metaphor of the orchestra conductor: he was just the baton, while Escriva continued to conduct from heaven. Under his lead Opus Dei expanded to numerous new countries and promoted a wide range of initiatives for the poor. He was also very keen to second any initiative promoted by St. John Paul II. A good example of this was how seriously he took to heart and encouraged the Pope’s 1985 call for the “re-evangelization” of Europe.

He had a profoundly theological love for the Roman Pontiff whoever he might be, simply because he was the Vicar of Christ, and spoke of his figure with both doctrinal depth and an almost boyish enthusiasm. But he clearly had a particular personal love and affection for Papa Wojtyla.

Bishop Alvaro and St. John Paul II had a lot of fun together. For example, a particular aide of Del Portillo, himself quite close to St. John Paul and who would usually accompany the Prelate to visit the Pope, was somewhat bald. The Holy Father gave him a blessing on his head, largely in jest, to see if it could make the hair grow. Sure enough the aide’s pate remained as hairless as before. Bishop Alvaro would describe this as “the Pope’s only failure,” a joke which clearly he had shared with the Pope himself.

In fact, however, however, Bishop Alvaro was quite a serious man, and certainly a shy one. One reason he chose to study engineering as a young man was to avoid having to speak in public. It is ironic that he spent almost the last 20 years of his life doing just that. But he would do whatever was required to bring souls to Christ and to spread St. Josemaria’s message of the need to seek sanctity in everyday life and work. (Taken from www.josemariaescriva.info.)
FORMATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR FATHERS AT SOUTHRIDGE

HOLY MASS
- Daily 12 noon Mass at the Chapel of the Holy Family.

RECOLLECTIONS
- 1st and 4th Sunday Recollection for Fathers (Holy Mass for the Families at 11 am)
- 3rd Thursday Recollection (with Benediction) at Molave Study Center

BASIC CATHOLIC DOCTRINE CLASSES
- Every Saturday, 10:15 – 11:00 am at the Academic Office Conference Room, 2nd Floor of the Southridge Main Building (for fathers)
- Every 4th Sunday, 8:30—9:00 am (for Afternoon School fathers)
- Every 4th Sunday, 9:15 - 10:45 am (for Afternoon School mothers)

CONFESSION/SPiritual Direction With Chaplain
- By appointment

RETREAT SCHEDULES FOR FATHERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 25-27 (Mon-Wed)</td>
<td>Makiling Conference Center (Main)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 28-31 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Makiling Conference Center (Main)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1-3 (Mon-Wed)</td>
<td>Makiling Conference Center (West Wing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 8-10 (Mon-Wed)</td>
<td>Makiling Conference Center (Main)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 18-21 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Laguna Hills (Tagalog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 18-21 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Tagaytay Conference Center (invitational)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 25-28 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Lataq (Young Professionals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 16-19 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Makiling Conference Center (Main)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 16-19 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Makiling Conference Center (West Wing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 6-9 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Lataq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 13-16 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Lataq (Young Professionals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 27-30 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Tagaytay Conference Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 28-30 (Fri-Sun)</td>
<td>Sangandaan Cultural Center (Open)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1-3 (Mon-Wed)</td>
<td>Makiling Conference Center (West Wing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 4-7 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Makiling Conference Center (West Wing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 11-14 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Makiling Conference Center (Main)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 11-14 (Thurs-Sun)</td>
<td>Makiling Conference Center (West Wing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For reservations and inquiries, please contact Ms. Leila Lerios of the Philippine Foundation at 817-2318 local 201 or 0928-5063688 or email philfoundation@pldtdsl.net.

FORMATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR MOTHERS AT WOODROSE SCHOOL

THEOLOGY CLASS - every 1st and 2nd Thurs, 9 to 10 am, Function Room
RECOLLECTION - every 3rd Thursday, 9:15 - 11:00 a.m. & every 4th Thursday, 4:30 - 6:30 p.m.
CONFESSION - Monday to Friday except Wednesday, 9 am - 12 noon

For inquiries, you can contact PAREF Woodrose School at 850-6380 to 83; 809-5508 or 807-6735 (local 123 for the Chaplain’s Office or 118 for the Family Orientation Office or locals 120,151,152 for the Central Communications Office)

The Parents Formation Office welcomes personal write-ups about parenting principles and experiences.
Please email them to mrinawat@southridge.ph