



God is Calling Us

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Marriage and Family in the Catholic Church

In talking with Antonio and Delfina Sanchez natives of Oaxaca, Mexico and members of Holy Name of Jesus parish, and their children, we realize that married and family life is full of challenges. In our conversation we see that they, like so many other couples, try to follow the teachings of the Holy Church regarding marriage and family life, even though it is not easy.

As we look at various church documents that speak to us about marriage and family, we find that what they show us are ideals to which every couple and family should aspire. The goal of these ideals is the happiness of the family as a whole and of each individual in order to ultimately attain eternal life.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church #2204 calls the family a "domestic church" (see Lumen Gentium #11. Familiaris Consortio #21) and the reason is that it reflects the various aspects of the life of the church on a smaller scale. That is why it is important to foster a healthy family life in our communities, based on Christian and moral values. However, these values are lived out in very different ways according to each couple and each member of the household; each spouse comes to the relationship with expectations which change as time goes by, as they get to know their partner more deeply as well as with the arrival of children. For example, Antonio told us that before getting married he thought that when he did, "... he would be happy and that he would never have any obstacles" and that he

pictured himself as a loving father to his children. Delfina assumed that once they were married, her life with Antonio would be very similar to the experience she had lived with her parents and that she wanted to spend some time without children to "enjoy her marriage". But soon after, they realized that things would not be as they had imagined.

The Challenges of Marriage and Family Life

As time went by in the early years of marriage between Delfina and Antonio, some conflicts began to arise due to alcoholism and lack of understanding.

Communication and the arrival of their first child added stress to their family life to the point of thinking about separating, but thanks to the advice of Delfina's mother, her Christian principles and their desire to make things work, their marriage moved forward. After a few years of marriage and with two children, Jose Antonio and Carolina, they decided to emigrate to the United States. In those early years Delfina's faith was still alive, but Antonio's faith seemed to be fading. She attended Sunday Mass every week, but he did not attend as often. Delfina dreamed and prayed to God that they could serve as a couple in one of the church's ministries, but things did not happen as quickly as she would have liked. Delfina tells us: "we were married and living as if we were single, that is, sharing a house, but each of us was on our own". In spite of everything, they kept trying as best they could and after a few years their family grew with the birth of Deisy Gabriela and then Jesús.

Marriage Encounter

The changes brought about by participating in the Marriage Encounter not only affect the participants but the whole family. Those who live it, can better fulfill their obligations as the Catechism of the Catholic Church asks in #1646 "By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses" And in #2222 " Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God's law."

After many unsuccessful invitations, things begin to change for Delfina and Antonio when he finally decides to participate in a Marriage Encounter with his wife. This rekindled the flame of faith in Antonio and now he also takes the

initiative to instill ideals in his children that will help them grow in their faith. Antonio tells us that now he is the one who gets up early on Sundays to get the children ready and take them to mass. Besides this, there are many other things that change for the better in their lives and in the lives of their children. Delfina now has a partner who shares her dreams and with whom she can dialogue and thanks to this they begin to help the church more and even become leaders of the Marriage Encounter. In addition, Antonio is becoming the loving father he wanted to be, and his children find in their parents the support they need to grow in their faith and as human beings.

Change is evident to the friends and family of the Sánchez family. Antonio and Delfina begin to make decisions that are very different from the ones they made before the Marriage Encounter. Because of this, there was a temporary withdrawal from the social activities they used to attend that were not beneficial to their life as spouses and as a family. At first this situation is difficult to accept for some of their family and friends. Even for their children it is difficult to understand the reason for this change and despite some negative comments from other people they remain firm in their decisions. With time the environment around them is changing and gradually they are able to reintegrate many of the activities they used to attend, but now they are living them out in a way that is more in line with the principles with which they want to govern their lives and slowly their family and friends are getting used to their new way of seeing the world. Antonio and Delfina are a living example of what St. Paul tells us " You were taught to cast aside the old self of your former way of life and to clothe yourselves with the new self created in God's image." (Eph 4:20-24).

At the end of our conversation Antonio reminds us that God is calling us at every moment. He also invites all couples to participate in a Marriage Encounter Weekend so that everyone can share with them the happiness they found in encountering Christ and their spouse.