

How do **you** and your **family** show **love** for one another?

'Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God for God is love.'
1 JOHN 4: 7-8

Home is a holy place because God as love is present

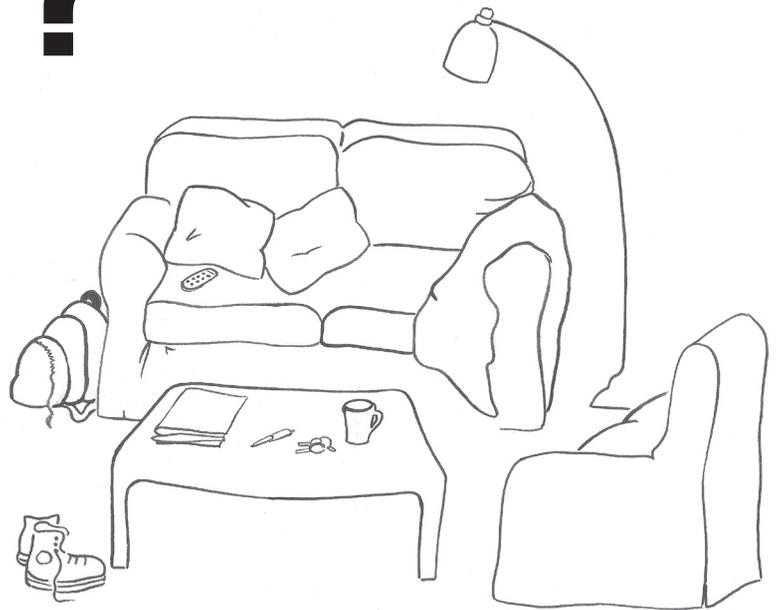
From our earliest years as Christians we learn that God is love, and that we are to love our God and our neighbours as we love ourselves. We also learn from Jesus' life, death and resurrection what it means to fully love others. This central Christian understanding forms the basis of family and marital spirituality. Families are holy because God is love. When true love – real love – is present, God is there. And the more real that love becomes in marriage and family life, the clearer it is that God is present.

On the DVD that accompanies this resource we hear Joe describe family love as 'not just about whatever the world perceives as love, you know that mishy mashy washy thing.' How would you describe family love? How do you show those in your family that you love them?

Showing Love

'By supporting them, by giving them things they need, by cooking for them, by cleaning up for them and listening to them when they have problems... there must be hundreds of things...'
Jack, husband, father and grandfather

'...what we do with our bodies...what use we make of them, these are spiritual tasks which we are called to carry out in the name of holiness.' (Donald Nicholl)



Talking it Through:

Does Family Love Matter?

'Families are where love is written not in poetry but in prose. What is love? Watch a parent caring for a handicapped child. See a spouse coping with a partner suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Watch a family playing together in a park on a sunny afternoon, or a toddler taking its first steps and falling laughingly into outstretched parental arms. There is a beauty, undemonstrative, unselfconscious, that lives in a thousand small gestures of listening, caring, helping, giving, for no ulterior motive other than the fact that here we are "we" not "I". The family is where... if we are blessed, we become most like God himself, bringing new life into the world through and for the sake of love. It is our first school, a miniature welfare state, a healthcare centre, a tutorial in responsibility. And yes, there is something spiritual about it. It is solitude redeemed... The family is where selves touch and are transformed: life joined to life in love.'

This is an extract from a Times newspaper article for the International Day of Families written in 2004 by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. Have you ever been transformed by family love? If so, how and when?

Responding to the challenge

The call to discipleship is often understood as a call to follow Jesus by *leaving* our homes. Yet for most of us, our Christian vocation is first of all and most of all and all the time experienced *at home* with our families. As writer Marjorie Thompson points out: *“There is nothing abstract or easy about expressing consistent respect and care for one another, especially amid the mundane, repetitious routines and daily stresses of life together. That’s what makes family spirituality such a challenge.”* What does your parish do to support the vocations of married and family love as lived out at home? What do you need to help you sustain family love amid the ‘mundane, repetitious routines and daily stresses’?

‘Over and over again, way ahead by far of any other family joy (or difficulty) expressed, we heard of the joy of simply being together, sometimes in times of gathering and celebration, but often

More Questions

■ **In the DVD John-Paul and Margaret sing: ‘And the only measure of your words and your deeds, Will be the love you leave behind when you’re gone’. What have you learned about love from your parents, grandparents, siblings and extended family and friends? What understanding of love do you hope your family will receive from you?**

■ **We hear in the DVD a comment from a participant in *Listening 2004*: ‘I think we as parents can teach the Church something here about real love.’ The Church agrees with this view: ‘Thanks to love within the family, the Church can and ought to take on a more homelike or family dimension, developing a more human and fraternal style of relationships.’ (*Familiaris Consortio* 64) How can your parish draw on family love in order to take on a more homelike dimension?**

For Groups:

I Family Focal Point

Invite your guests to bring an object from home that best represents for them an experience of love at home (eg a gift, a favourite item, a photo, a memory). Cover a small table with an ordinary tablecloth. Light a candle that is usually found at home—the small, squat variety are best. Invite everyone to place their object on the table and to say a few words about their choice and what it means to them. Say a short prayer of thanks to God for each person having experienced love at home.

in the ordinary daily routines of eating together or watching TV. This discovery is surely something to celebrate in a church that understands “being together” as “the good par excellence” of marriage and family life.’

(Not Easy But Full of Meaning 27)

‘All Christians, in the conditions, duties and circumstances of their lives and through all these, will grow constantly in holiness if they receive all things with faith from the hand of the heavenly Father and cooperate with the divine will, making manifest in their ordinary work the love with which God has loved the world.’ (*Lumen Gentium* 41)

Anointing Ritual

Materials needed – some aromatherapy oils in small bowls, tissues, soft music.

Invite your guests to think of all the uses their hands are put to in the course of a day at home, especially the range of services our hands provide to others and to ourselves. Invite your guests to anoint each others’ hands in turn, saying quietly a short prayer such as... ‘May God bless you for all that you do for one another by the use of your hands. May you be assured of God’s loving and abiding presence in your family life.’

Further resources available:

www.homeisaholyplace.org.uk