



Knights of Columbus Council 9542

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Washington, DC 20064

In Service to One, In Service to All

I had the opportunity to visit my family this weekend, the first time in a few months. Though this meant putting my weekend plans on hold, I was grateful for chance to rapidly answer the dozens of questions from my parents, annoy my siblings, collect my mail, eat a full three meals, and throw all of my sister's crap out of my room. My family gathers together like this to celebrate joyous occasions—my father's 50th birthday this time— and more solemn ones a few times each year. We gather in times of jubilee and delight, trial and sorrow alike. We honor and support each other throughout our lives. Our love is imperfect, yet it sustains us through the occasional argument, insult, and pain. Though we value our independence, we have each other for better or for worse. This is my family life. This is #Wongmania.

In light of the University's recent Family Weekend celebration as well as the ongoing Synod of Bishops on the Family in Rome, tonight I'd like to speak to you on this critical building block of society. "How essential the family has been to the building of this country! And how worthy it remains of our support and encouragement!" Pope Francis reminded Congress during last month's apostolic visit to our Nation, "Yet I cannot hide my concern for the family, which is threatened, perhaps as never before, from within and without. Fundamental relationships are being called into question, as is the very basis of marriage and the family. I can only reiterate the importance and, above all, the richness and the beauty of family life."¹ This message was for everyone yet we can see— and experience— all too easily the breakdown of the family unit in society. We now live in a world where children are seen as disposable and marriage apparently is not much more than a civically-recognized friendship. We're all too familiar and even desensitized to the statistics on children born outside of wedlock, the growing divorce rate, spousal infidelity, domestic abuse, various addictions, and the reservation of the full gift of self, now substituted with the contraceptive love of convenience. People believe that this version of love will make them happy and free of trials or hardship, yet upon experiencing any they blame anyone and everyone, often leaving a trail of shattered relationships and broken hearts in their wake. One doesn't have to look far to see signs of this: I look upon the wearied faces, hear insults, see the loneliness and pain of passers-by every day on campus, on the Metro, when shopping, and even in church. In this light, it becomes all too easy to forget the noble and beautiful love that family life offers.

From time to time, we may think of the other members our own families as merely people we have to put up with since birth. Sometimes we're tempted to compare our own family with the seemingly better-off one of a friend. Maybe you can't wait to start your own family in ways specifically different than how you were raised. If you're like me, perhaps you are so comfortable with being independent at college that it's a bit of an adjustment to live under your parents' roof and follow their rules and schedules and will for you when at home. Instead of looking outward in this way, turn around and try viewing your family in a new light. Yes, each member of your family is a unique gift from God—

¹ Pope Francis. "Address to the Joint Session of the United States Congress." United States Capitol, Washington. 24 September 2015.

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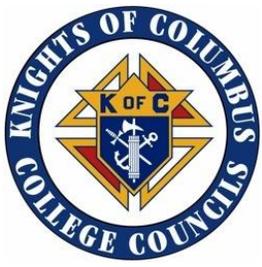


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you are too from the moment of your conception— that alone serves as a reminder of the inherent dignity and respect each of you deserve from the rest of the family. As for your parents, you’ve been entrusted to their care and their love. Their methods may be perceived as imperfect sometimes but so are they... and so are you! Don’t forget you can and will shape the manifestation of love they have for you, whether in the form of comfort, support, discipline, or education. The same goes for your siblings and elders. Yes, at times it will seem unfair or even outright cruel. Yes, sometimes it may seem to be too much of an effort with no appreciable return. Yes, it may appear that you’re the only one who cares or that your efforts are unreasonable. But familial love sustains us through each and every blessed difficulty we encounter and enables us to bear each trial with others. Familial love grows deeper after helping us overcome the bitter moments in our lives, especially with other family members. Familial love calls us to keep giving ourselves to each other, to never be complacent or absent in this regard. By working to realize and develop this love, we, in each of our families, can restore the integrity of the family unit and so build upon each other for the betterment of society.

To close, I had just said that love can seem unreasonable, that it is easier to dwell upon the shortcomings of others or to leave them behind in their suffering. Yet, look at the results around us of those who stopped loving, who stopped caring, who stopped giving themselves to others. We have a duty to remind others of the love each of them needs and deserves. Regardless of our own families’ situations, no matter the difficulties each of us faces, remember that we are not called to settle for the shallow, supposedly pain-free love of the world. Let us never forget the Act of unreasonable Love two thousand years ago offered for each and single person ever created: in the words of St. Alphonsus Liguori, “O Christian, should a doubt ever enter your mind that Jesus Christ loves you, raise your eyes and look at Him hanging on the cross.”²

May God bless you and God love you... and remember to call your parents!

Fraternally,

SK Thomas Wong

² St. Alphonsus Liguori, “On the love of Jesus Christ for us, and on our obligations to love him.” Sermon, Fourth Sunday of Advent.

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