

## 13<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—Year A—July 2, 2017

01. *“Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me...”* In today’s Gospel Jesus seems to give us a very difficult message about family relationships — almost like He’s undermining the importance of family—and telling us not to place any value on family ties.
02. But nothing could be further from the truth — for Our Lord loves and values family **so much**—that **He chose family** as the means by which to come among us, and to reveal Himself to the world. He could have chosen any way to manifest Himself to us — but He chose the great institution of marriage and family life as the context by which He incarnates Himself **into our lives, and into our reality**. And He did so, because He wanted to make a powerful and profound statement about the significance of family.
03. But despite the great value that Jesus places on family life — Our Lord knows that family relationships, and family dynamics, are one of the most **difficult things to navigate in life**. As a priest, it’s something I hear a lot about—and coming from a dysfunctional, fractured family myself — it’s something that I am acutely aware of.
04. Because why is it that those closest to us can often cause us **the most difficulty, the most grief, and the most heartache**? And why is it that no one can press our buttons quite like family? And why is that even the most well-intentioned family members can really disappoint us and hurt us?
05. I think part of the answer to these questions lies in today’s Gospel. For the reason that Jesus gives such a seemingly difficult message about family is that He knows that family relationships only work **when God is NO.1 in each of our lives**. Because when God is **NOT NO.1**, when we place family **before God** — then all sorts of family dysfunction results.
06. In other words, when our relationship with God is out of order, then **all the OTHER relationships in our lives will fall out of order as well** — our relationships with people, and even our relationships with things.
07. And so, when God is not first and foremost in our lives, when we place family **before God** — it is then that we end up trying to **please our family rather than serving them** — it is then that we become **trapped and burdened by their expectations** — it is then that we end up trying to

**control and change our family** rather loving and accepting them **as they are for who they are.**

08. And when God is NOT the centre and focus of our lives—it is then that we expect family members **to follow the dictates of our own reasoning, and our own judgment**—as if we are responsible for all the choices and all the mistakes they make in life.
09. And when God is NOT NO.1 our lives — it is then that we treat family members like they belong to us, and that they have to answer to us — when they really belong to God, and have to answer to Him — and to Him alone.
10. I have seen these kinds of dysfunction played out **over and over again**—in my own family life, and the family life of others. For when God is not first and foremost in our lives — then we expect family members **to play the role of God FOR US** — or we try to play the role of God **for them.**
11. And when God is not the be-all and end-all of our existence — we tend to make members of our family the **be-all and end-all of our existence instead** — which is a completely unfair and unreasonable burden and expectation to place on them—not to mention that we will be disappointed because no human being can possibly be **the be-all and end-all of our lives**—even those closest to us.
12. And these kinds of things can happen in all sorts of family relationships — relationships between spouses, between siblings, between parents and children.
13. But none of us have the right **to play the role of God in the lives of others** — even with members of our own family. And more importantly, none of us have **the power and the ability to do so.** For as much as we love and care for our family—**NO ONE can love them as much as God loves them— and no one can care for them like God can care for them.**
14. And as important as family is, and as much as we are called to love our family—family was meant **to lead us TO GOD, NOT to replace God Himself** — which is why Jesus uses such strong language, and gives us such a seemingly harsh message — not because He devalues the importance of family—but rather, **because He has such a profound love and respect for the institution of family** — so much so, that He says these words not to attack family relationships, but to preserve and protect the sanctity, and the well-being of the human family.

15. For Our Lord knows that when we are devoted to God **first and foremost** — **it is only then** that our devotion to family is **pure, wholesome, and healthy**. And Our Lord knows that when we try to replace God **with family** — we do a tremendous disservice to them—harming them rather than loving and supporting them.
16. Notice that Jesus doesn't say: *whoever loves father or mother is not worthy of Me* — He says: *whoever loves father and mother MORE THAN ME is not worthy of Me* — because He does call us to love our family—but to love and care for them in a way that is healthy, and not disordered.
17. Just as He calls us to serve our family, but not necessarily to please them — to meet the expectations of **Our Heavenly Father**, and not necessarily the expectations of our earthly family. And just as He calls us to accept our family as they are, **and not to change them or recreate them in our own image** — to love and support our family, and not to manipulate or control them in the name of love and concern.
18. One of the important lessons that I have learned about family dynamics is that **the most difficult thing in the world with family is to practice loving detachment**. Loving detachment means that we love our family unconditionally — allowing them **to live their own lives and to make their own choices** without trying to control or manipulate the path that they choose — allowing them to be who they are without fear of judgment and unwarranted criticism from us.
19. In other words, loving detachment means to love our family without trying **to control them, change them, or cure them** — to allow them to make their own decisions and to make their own mistakes — to recognize that their fate rests in the Hands of God, and not in our hands — to recognize that they belong to God, and not to us — to love them without imposing our philosophy of life upon them. This is loving detachment—and this is the kind of love of family that God calls us to—and that Jesus tries to impress upon us in today's Gospel.
20. For as difficult as this may be, truly loving our family is **allowing them to make their own choices and to suffer the consequences of those choices** — to make their own mistakes and to learn from them.
21. When we fail to do so, when we try to manipulate and control the decisions our family make — then we are **enabling them rather than helping them**. Enabling is a misguided form of love in which we try to protect and rescue

others by NOT allowing them to learn from their own mistakes and to suffer the consequences of their own actions. But, despite appearances, enabling is not a loving thing to do — and enabling can be quite harmful rather than helpful — because enabling often results in the perpetuation of self-destructive behaviour.

22. And this is why Our Lord calls us **to help our family, not to enable them**—not to protect them from their own choices—or do things for them that they can do for themselves. And this is why Our Lord calls us to love our family, **not to save them** — for we **ARE NOT our families' saviour** — **just as surely as they are not OUR SAVIOUR.**
23. For we all have only one Saviour, Jesus Christ — **Who loves and respects the institution of family so much**—that not only did He choose family life as the means by which to come among us and reveal Himself to the world — He also made family life the very foundation of human society and of the Church.
24. And so, on this, the 13<sup>TH</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, let us do one of the most loving things we can do for our family — let us give our concerns and worries about our family over to God — let us place our family into the Hands of Our Lord—and entrust them to His Sacred Heart — believing that He has their best interest at heart **far more than we do** — and trusting that His love for them, and His ability to care for them, is far greater than ours will ever be. **Amen.**