

Homily based on the readings from August 17, 2025 (Jeremiah 38.4-6, 8-10; Hebrews 12.1-4; Luke 12.49-53)

Among all the human relationships we experience, none are more important than those that define our *family*. Our parents, our children, our spouses – these connections have an *incalculable* impact on the way we live our lives. For most of us – most of the time – these interactions provide strength and support. In some cases, sadly, they can also cause pain and heartache. Regardless of the balance between the positive and the negative, our identity within our family is *fundamental* to our deepest sense of self.

Over the years, the Church has used a variety of different terms to describe the essential role of the family within society – referring to it, for example, as a “school of deeper humanity” and “the original cell of social life.” In many respects, the family is also viewed as the fundamental unit of the Church. To quote the fathers of the Second Vatican Council:

The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state. (*Lumen gentium* 11)

Many of the Church's core responsibilities – particularly relating to religious *education* – are merely instruments for assisting parents in raising and nurturing their children in the faith.

On a more *substantive* level, the language of family is essential to our understanding of God himself – God is *Father*, God is *Son*. These terms are not just a matter of linguistic convenience, but a profound statement about God's inmost nature. God does not exist in solitude. His very *being* is an eternal, all-giving, all-loving *family*. In the words of our late Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI:

The Father gives everything to the Son; the Son receives everything from the Father with gratitude; and the Holy Spirit is the fruit of this mutual love of the Father and the Son.

As children of God – made in his image and likeness – our human families are a reflection of the *foundational* family that is the Holy Trinity. All parents – throughout human history – have been copies, replicas of our one *true* Father in heaven. Every time a father or mother cares for a child, he or she is acting as an icon – a living representation – of God’s love on earth. Likewise, every time *children* show gratitude or respect to their parents, they are emulating the love *Christ* has for his Heavenly Father.

From this perspective, it is difficult *not* to be alarmed by today’s Gospel reading:

a father will be divided against his son

and a son against his father,

a mother against her daughter

and a daughter against her mother,
a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

What is Jesus actually saying here? Is he telling us to harden our hearts against our closest family members – to treat them with hatred, contempt, or even violence? The answer, of course, is absolutely not. Christ is not demanding that we *forsake* the love of our family members. Instead, he is calling us to *consecrate* it.

As you may know, there is a passage in the Gospel of Matthew that is similar to the one we just heard, but with one key addition that is not present in Luke's Gospel:

Whoever loves father or mother *more than me* is not worthy of me,
and whoever loves son or daughter *more than me* is not worthy of
me[.]

The issue here is not *whether* to love our parents and our children, but *how* to love them. To put it plainly, the *original* must always take precedence over the *copy*. Authentic love, by its very nature, *emanates* from the timeless and immutable love embodied by the Holy Trinity. Any attempt at love that is not rooted in *God* is intrinsically transitory. Our love for our family members *must* be an outgrowth of our primal love for the Lord. As Saint John observes, “[w]e love, because he first loved us.” Jesus is simply requiring that *we* love the way *he* loves – that *our* hearts beat in unison with *his* Most Sacred Heart.

In reference to the Gospel reading, there is no *question* that Christ’s tone is intended to shock and confound his listeners. Sometimes a fiery message is necessary to shake us out of our complacency. As with everything Jesus does, however, his sermon is an act of love – instructing us not only to *absorb* the radiance of God’s love, but also to *reflect* it back to the precious kinsfolk he has entrusted to our care.