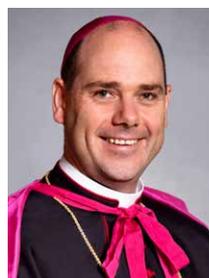


Inviting God into our Messy Families



The Bishop Speaks

“No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed.” (*Amoris Laetitia* 325) With these realistic words Pope Francis talks *to* families, not *about* families. I too want to speak *to* you about the reality of your family life, not talk *about* you. Your family life is not perfect, but it’s beautiful. You love each other, not perfectly, but the best you can and you’re trying every day to do even better.

It’s in your family more than anywhere else where you give, receive, and learn kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, bearing with each other, and love (CF Col 3:12-14). We all want to receive these things, so we have to be able to give them too. And if we don’t experience and learn them in our families where will we learn them?

It’s also in your family, more than anywhere else,

where you pass on your faith and values to your children. Our parishes, schools, and catechists can only do so much. It is, it always has been, and it always will be the parents who pass on the faith in the overwhelming majority of cases. The family truly is the Domestic Church – where faith, hope and love are nurtured and where we learn how to be good and virtuous.

Now as well as being beautiful, our Domestic Churches, our families, are also messy. You know there’s something not quite right about a family home that’s always spotless. I feel sorry for the children who live there! A family home that’s lived in and where the children feel happy and free, easily and quickly gets a bit messy. We tidy it up and then it gets messy again. This is normal. So too it’s normal for our family lives to get a bit messy – there will be the unavoidable problems, challenges, set-backs,



and hurts. As soon as we fix them more troubles emerge. It's a normal part of every family life.

It's important to realize that God comes to us in our messiness. God, who is Himself a divine family of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and who in the Son became part of a human family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, loves *your* family and wants to be part of it too.

I want to suggest three things every family can do to keep this presence of God active and strong.

The first is to pray, and to pray with regularity, familiarity, and personality. What I mean by these three words is that you form a habit of family prayer in which you pray at a *regular* time every day (after dinner and the washing up works well), follow the same *familiar* pattern of prayer every time, and that you include every *person* and their own personal prayers which then become part of the whole family's prayer.

In your family this might mean each person getting to lead a decade of the rosary and praying it for some particular prayer intentions; or it might mean each person saying in their turn one "Thank you", one "I'm sorry", and one "Please help" prayer to God at the end of the day.

There are many different ways your family can pray. It's important to find a way that suits you and then stick to it so that it becomes the way that *your* family prays.

The second thing to keep God's presence active and strong in your family is to come to Sunday Mass as a family. Your Domestic Church is not a Church in isolation but is part of the local Parish and Diocesan Church which is part of the Universal Church. Your family is part of something big, and it too is both beautiful and messy!

If you are bringing little ones to Sunday Mass I suggest you sit near the front so they can see what's happening rather than looking at people's backs. And please don't hesitate to bring them some picture

books of the Mass, to explain things to them during the Mass, and even to bring them a snack if they are still very little.

I know parents busy with little ones at Mass sometimes go home feeling that you haven't said a single prayer! Don't worry, go home at peace and at rights with God. You have made a bigger effort than anybody else to get to Mass and you have done something truly wonderful – you have brought your children to Jesus!

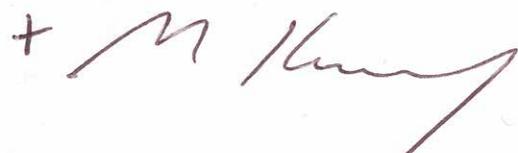
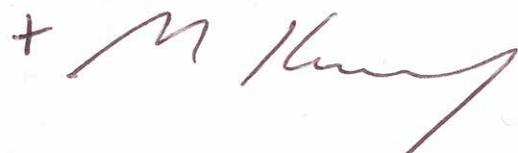
The third and final thing I suggest is to always speak well of the Church, even though she is messy! Your own family is not perfect but you love it and stick up for it. Our family the Church is not perfect but we love her and stick up for her.

It is especially important these days for parents and grandparents to speak well of the Church when so many others are criticising her all the time, even when some of these criticisms are valid and deserved. If parents don't draw their children's attention to what is good in the Church, who will? And remember, the Church is not just the Pope and the Bishop -



it's you and me; it's all of us.

Jesus said, "Where two or three meet in my name, I am there with them" Our God wants to draw close to us and wants to draw us close to him. Praying together as a family brings God into our family and our home every evening. What peace and joy this can bring to our messy family lives.


+ 
Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Armidale

This is an edited version of Bishop Michael Kennedy's Homily for Marriage and Family Sunday at Saints Mary and Joseph Cathedral Armidale, 30th July 2017