

The ABC of Being the Love

Text: Deacon Bjørn Håkonsson

During the first weekend in May thousands of people step on each other's toes in Tivoli. It can be both a sour and expensive day for the family. Why not instead spend the weekend and your money at The Nordic Catholic Family Conference in Ishøj some 15 km south of Copenhagen? There you'll get food served; there will be a lot of fun for the kids, thoughts and discussions on family matters for the adults and the possibility of making new friendships. And not to forget – no sore toes!

Then what is a Catholic family? In my definition: a community where one or more pray to God, put their hopes in God and at least have not forgotten Him. It even applies as a definition of the Church. The church is indeed like a family. What are we but the Holy Family of Nazareth, Jesus, Mary and Joseph – just on a larger scale? That's why the Bible talks about "brothers" and "sisters" and calls God our "Father". "Single persons" is not really a Catholic term. They are us.

A particular size

But there is something special about the father, mother and children. A man and a woman become the source of new, flimsy life and protect it. To be to others and to become through others is The ABC of Love. These basic relationships cannot be erased, even if we are separated or hate each other. Although the father is a drunk or in prison, he is still my father. My mother and my father are God's gift to me - maybe I cannot get these words to pass my lips, but I will know the gratitude in my heart the day I stand at their grave. Therefore it hurts so much when we cannot figure out how to live with each other. We need inspiration from other families. Most of all, we need God - the source of all community.

The challenges

There has been a cultural radical mist over the country for about a hundred years. It has stifled the Danish Christian faith - you see neither the sky nor the sun any longer. Marriage and family feel like a drag. The kids are online and do not hear what we, the parents say. It is so to speak 'one's own project'; small close objects, within the range of a few meters that is the meaning of life. It is too poor. We need clean air again – a perspective view, hymn singing, romance and play. God to be back in the family and in society. We should not be ashamed of our faith. Our children will not belong to a religion that goes and hides.

All problems start in the morning, the time that God had created for prayer. But we have been hypnotized by so much else. We never taste God's blessing on the arrival of a new day. We see or hear news while we make coffee and get to know what the media thinks is important today. We are angry and grumpy and fight over the bathroom. The result: No one is happy even if we catch the bus on time, have had a good breakfast, enjoy good music on our way to work and have had time to comb our hair.

Children can teach us much! A boy hung a slip up over the bed that said "Morning!", so it was the first thing he saw when he woke up. You can also have a small bowl of holy water on the bedside table. You dip your finger in it and make the sign of the cross as the very first thing you do before you get up. This means: We enter the new day with God like when we enter the church. We make a home, go to work. Indeed, make the world into a church. Then there is the mother who has stomach ache.

When the Church does best

I have been asked to give a presentation about the family conference, which will form the basis for the discussions during the conference. I will say something about communication in marriage, the home as a sacred space, about life with young children, teenagers and grown-up children and life in a congregation. I

know that, as I speak, I can also think what they might be thinking as they sit and listen. Fortunately I shall know when we gather in groups afterwards. This is something I'm looking forward to.

What is my vision of the Church? Once we had an eager boy at a children's camp. His mother was so proud when he came home: His briefcase was perfectly packed, just as she had done when he left. The explanation was that the happy boy had not changed his clothes one single day. We leaders discovered it. Everything was for fun and at top speed. For me it is a picture of the Church at its very best. 'So be it' (the way it is translated from the Hebrew word: AMEN).

Deacon Bjørn Håkon's vision for the family and the Church will be the basis for discussions at the Nordic Catholic Family Conference in Ishøj in early May.