

Letter to the Family 3/2008

Letter of Mgr. Mario Grech
To all the Gozitan Families
On the occasion of
The Opening of the Diocesan Mission

“Each family should learn to make a *tent*”

My dear,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!” (Rom 1, 7)

When the night comes in and the family’s youngsters come together to sleep, usually the parents leave a little light in the room for their children so that if one of them wakes up during the night he would not feel the fear of the night. This light remains not only to break the darkness of the night but also to remind everyone that shortly the sun will rise and the darkness will disappear entirely.

I trust that many of our families cherish another type of light so that they are able to see in the darkness of their lives. Many cherish the Word of God – “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119, 105). Even when the dark night seems long and heavy, the Word of God encourages us because it gives us the certainty that for us the day will come when the Sun will rise but not set: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light”(Ephes 5, 14).

As you know, this coming Friday, the 10th of October, the people of God on the island of Gozo are to come together so that we will begin the Diocesan Mission. We are celebrating this Mission in order to help each and every family to put on this light – not only for their children, but for all the family.

Not only this – but I also believe that there are among you couples that the Lord has chosen and called to follow him on the example of Aquila and Priscilla – a couple that, as we find in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul, had an important role in the life of the early Church because they did their utmost so that this light of the Word would be lit in the hearts of many other persons and families.

The Christian Family in today’s world

Like many other Christian couples of today, Aquila and Priscilla had to face many challenges because of the simple fact that they were disciples of Christ. At the beginning they lived in Rome but Emperor Claudius expelled them from Rome because of the lack of agreement between the Jews and the Jewish Christians that evolved in imperial city (cfr. Acts 18, 2-3). Since they confessed faith in Christ Jesus, Aquila and Priscilla found themselves abandoned, silenced and even denied of their rights. They intruded into their life: their work, their home, their friends... but they could not take away their faith in Christ. I believe they experienced the same sentiments of Paul: “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ

Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him” (Phil 3, 7-9).

We are living in an age when the Christian family has to make certain decisions which are not always easy since a choice in favour of the values of the Gospel entails a high price. In these circumstances we are urged to feel encouraged to grow in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the Christians of Colossae, Saint Paul had this to say: “As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col 2, 6-7). He who is full of Christ does not keep Christ to himself but gives him to the others: “The love of Christ urges us” (2 Cor 5, 14) so that we make Christ known more and loved more by others.

The Gospel preached in the Family

From Rome Aquila and Priscilla went to live in the city of Corinth. When Paul arrived in that city they welcomed him and he stayed with them (cfr. Acts 18, 3). In the person of Paul they welcomed in their house a preacher of the Gospel which is “the power of God for the salvation of those who believe” (Rom 1, 16). It is a big blessing indeed for a family to have a visit by someone sent by Christ to preach to her the Good News itself.

During this Mission a visit to each family will take place so that the Word of God can be preached to it with the hope that that family itself will receive this grace and then it will preach the Word within itself by reading an extract of the Bible everyday.

Since he exercised the same craft of Aquila and Priscilla, Paul stayed working with them. Their craft was to make tents (cfr. Acts 1, 3). From the bottom of my heart I wish that every family will learn to make “tents”. I am not referring to a tent made of leather or silk but “the tent of the Presence” (cfr. Ex 40). As the Chosen People, when on its way to the promised land, put up a tent for the presence of God and the Almighty dwelt among them, so each family should try to make out of its home that “tent” where God comes down and lives. There the family comes together to pray together and would be able to hear him speak to her and its members talk to him.

The Church takes form in the Family

When Paul left Corinth on his way to Syria, Aquila and Priscilla were with him (cfr. Acts 18, 18) because they wanted to help him in his mission. In fact when Paul continued his journey to Antioch, they remained in Ephesus to do catechetical work which left its fruits. When after some time Paul passed again through Ephesus, he found a community of disciples (cfr. Acts 19, 1-7). Paul said this to the people of Corinth: “Aquila and Priscilla together with the church in their house send you greetings in the Lord” (1 Cor 16, 19); this means that in the house of this family the Christian community used to come together to hear the Word and celebrate the Eucharist. The Church began to take its form from within this family, “the church in the house”.

Everything shows that the fact that Aquila and Priscilla were married and had a family not only did not hinder them from giving themselves entirely for the preaching of the Gospel but this actually helped them. Even though like all other families they had to provide for their daily needs, they still had time to serve the Lord and the Apostle.

In the same way that Aquila and Priscilla had a share in the foundation and strengthening of the Church in Ephesus, so the contribution of each family of ours is necessary so that the Church in Gozo continues to be built into a real building. The family is not only that which receives the Word but is also that entity that preaches the Word of God to others, particularly to other families. The family has its own proper ministry and our Church will remain poor until this ministry is not owned by more and more families. I cannot express enough appreciation for the good pastoral work that is being done by various lovely couples in the fields of catechesis, liturgy, charity and pastoralia of the family.

Catechesis strengthens the Family

When once Aquila and Priscilla heard a learned man from Alexandria called Apollo teaching about Jesus, they became aware that his teaching was not correct and therefore he was not precise. They “took him with them and expounded to him the Word of God more accurately” (Acts 18, 26). This means that Aquila and Priscilla had a well-founded Christian formation. It was not the case that everything was acceptable for them or that they would content themselves with little! Though Apollo had “been instructed in the way of the Lord” (18, 26), Aquila and Priscilla did not feel inferior to him and inspired by courage and love they helped him to correct his error. It was because they had the courage to preach correctly that they could help Apollo to “powerfully confute the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus” (Acts 18, 28).

Today we have many wise people who are competent in the various sciences and who seem to speak with authority. However it is a fact that there are among us those who think that wisdom and God cannot stand together. Therefore one should have the responsibility of weighing and analysing what he hears. To uncover error in order to set truth free, as Aquila and Priscilla did, is a great service indeed. In order to be able to do this in today’s culture, like Aquila and Priscilla we need to store the good doctrine. Therefore one can never underestimate the importance of continuous formation in faith, especially the catechesis of the adults.

Receiving the grace of the Diocesan Mission

I must confess that it was such a beautiful experience being able to meet in the past few days so many lay people among them couples who are members of groups and movements where good biblical catechesis takes place – the Catholic Action, the Legion of Mary, the MUSEUM, the Charismatics, the *Lectio Divina* groups, the Eucharistic Communities and the Neo-Catechumenate. One hopes that as a result of the Diocesan Mission more people would feel attracted to make an experience with one of these groups I have just mentioned or that other new experiences of catechesis in parishes might take place.

Since Aquila and Priscilla went back to Rome, where they also had a church in their home, at the end of his letter to the Romans Paul greets them, recognising them as those who “worked with him” and thanked them (Rum 16, 4).

Like Paul I also thank you for the great help you offer to the Church. I encourage you to take part in the Diocesan Mission that it may strengthen in us the urge to talk about the Lord Jesus Christ with everybody. With his enlightening Word our hearts can instil a light which will be stronger than any other darkness which might enter into our lives.

“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel,... be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen!” (Rum 16, 25. 27)

Thursday 2nd October 2008
Feast of the Guardian Angels

+ Mario Grech
Bishop