

“A Seedbed of Virtue”

I came across a story recently of an Italian youth who died at 18 from painful bone cancer. A writer described her life like this: "There were two years, her last, that were also full of suffering, but always in love and in light, a light that shown all about her and came from inside: from her heart full of God!" He concluded, "Humanly speaking, she was without hope, but she spread love, serenity, peace and faith. Evidently it was a grace from God, but this grace was also prepared and accompanied by human cooperation: Chiara's own cooperation, certainly, but also the cooperation of her parents and her friends. But first of all it was through the cooperation of her parents, the family. We need fertile soil in which to put down our roots," he noted, "a soil that is rich in nourishing elements that make the person grow."

The family is the seedbed of virtue. The family is the place where humility, courage, forgiveness, prayer, sacrifice, faith, hope, and love are taught, lived, pruned, and nourished. The apostle Paul praises the family of Timothy as the place where he learned the faith. Paul writes, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice" (2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy's mother and grandmother provided a seedbed of virtue, teaching the Word of God and building him up in faith.

Is the family important? Results from the American Academy of Pediatrics, University of Maryland, Ohio State University, and many others show the importance of the family. From health, learning, success, wealth, joy, protection against disease and abuse, the family is crucial to development. In contrast, the American Academy of Pediatrics showed how "paternal absence" is predictive of "multiple and sometimes lifelong disadvantages."

One of my favorite movie scenes is at the end of *The Magnificent Seven*. After Calvera has been defeated, the old man concludes that only the farmers have won. He then compares the seven gunfighters to the wind that drives away the locusts. But the wind does not remain to do the hard work of making something grow. Yul Brynner agrees with the last words of the film, saying, "The old man was right. Only the farmers won. We lost. We'll always lose."

Family life is rarely glamorous. It is hard work. It is also monotonous, doing and teaching the same things every day. But like the farmer working the soil and looking forward to the fruit, the plant will bear fruit in its season. It just requires the faithful tilling and working of the soil.

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