

"A HOME ISN'T BUILT IN A DAY"

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago I came upon a capsule summary of Edward Gibbon's reasons for "the decline and fall of the Roman Empire" in his monumental historical study by that title. There are five of them, and it takes no preacher's exposition to point out their alarming relevance for our time. Listen to the historian's reasons why the vaunted power of Rome collapsed:

1. The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis for human society.
2. Higher and higher taxes; the spending of public money for free bread and circuses for the populace.
3. The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting, more brutal, more immoral.
4. The building of great armaments when the real enemy was within - the decay of individual responsibility.
5. The decay of religion; faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life, losing power to guide the people.

Every one of them could become the basis for a sermon, but I ask you to ponder the first of them as the beginning of this sermon, "The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis for human society". That this applies to America in 1978 as well as to Rome fifteen centuries earlier needs no documentation. The institutions of marriage and the family are under attack, and are often ridiculed as antique and archaic. And even in the homes of those who are outraged by such heresy as that, there are stresses and strains at work which make many a marriage fragile and many a home insecure.

From the modern attack on marriage itself - to the high incidence of divorce and desertion - to the tensions within homes that maintain a semblance of unity, there is valid cause for concern about what is happening to the American home.

COMMERCIALISM OF MOTHER'S DAY

Day.

One aspect of the problem is symbolized by the commercialism that accompanies Mother's

We've been exhorted to demonstrate our devotion to Mother by the purchase of furs or furniture, flowers or perfume. Love to Mother is often equated with the dollar sign, and the not-so-subtle suggestion is that the more dollars you spend, the more devotion you show. Which, of course, is symptomatic of a prevalent mood in our homes - the idea that we can always buy the things that matter most, and that money is the medicine for any malady. "If your family is drifting apart" read the ad in the magazine, "Buy a television set". And I wanted to buy equal time and space and reply, "If your family is drifting apart, throw out the television and start talking to each other".

Of course, the financial undergirding of a home is important, and it is unrealistic to pretend otherwise. For money is more than money - it is food that we eat; it is education for our children; it is books and music for our souls; it is help for those we love in times of need; it is extension of ourselves in good causes. Money is important to a home, but it is not all-important, and we

had better "check up once in a while and make sure we have not lost the things that money cannot buy".

GIFTS: PARENTS TO CHILDREN

Let's think about the gifts that we give in our families and come at this from two different directions. First, what are the most valuable gifts that parents can give to their children?

Rollo May, in a recent book, writes about children "who are given motor cars but no moral values...who pick up sensuality, but are not taught sensitivity in life".

In contrast to that, listen to this heartwarming recollection of Dr. Fosdick, a giant Christian of this city and this century. He wrote:

"I recall my mother weeping once because having reduced our standard of living as low as she thought she could, she found she had to lower it still another notch, but I had a lovely home...were I to be born again on earth I would not ask a better. Today I see households with everything that cash can buy, that in comparison awaken pity, or disgust. For in the long run what makes a great home lies in the unpurchaseable things, listed in no market, rated on no exchange, not for sale."

What a contrast between the home that could afford to bestow motor cars, but failed to give moral values - and the home that was poor in things, but rich in the things of the spirit.

Some broken-hearted parents once shared with others a letter that they had received from their prodigal son and it began:

"Dear Folks,

Thank you for everything, but I am going to Chicago and try and start some kind of new life. You asked me why I did those things and why I gave you so much trouble, and the answer is easy for me to give you, but I'm wondering if you will understand...remember when I was about six or seven and I use to want you just to listen to me? I remember all the nice things you gave me for Christmas and my birthday, and I was really happen with the things - about a week - at the time I got the things, but the rest of the time during the year I really didn't want presents...I just wanted all the time for you to listen to me like I was somebody who felt things, too, because I remember even when I was young, I felt things...but you said you were busy..."

Now I'm sure there may have been another side to the story, and I hope that young prodigal does not go through life feeling sorry for himself and dodging responsibility for himself. But I also suspect that he may have a valid point - simply because too many people today are too busy or too blind to see that in the long run, what makes a great home "lies in unpurchaseable things...listed on no market, rated on no exchange, and not for sale."

And like Rome, we need to remember that a home is not built in a day! You

can't put a dollar sign on some values that are caught as well as taught in a home - the art of seeing and listening, a sense of humor, a respect for oneself and for others, honesty, tolerance, compassion, love, a sensitivity to spiritual values, some depth of being. Those are the roots of a home. You cannot buy them. You can only grow them - day by day, with a large investment of love and care. A home is not built in a day.

GIFTS: CHILDREN TO PARENTS Move now for a few minutes in the other direction, as we think about the most valuable gifts that children can give to parents.

I do not mean to disparage those tangible expressions of love that children present to parents on Mother's Day or on Father's Day. As parents, we all respond with gratitude to our children's thoughtfulness on these special days. But children, too, need to be reminded that the most treasured gifts have no price tags attached to them.

I think one of the most remembered Mother's Day gifts in our home came a number of years ago when an eight year old boy pressed a handful of slips of paper into his mother's hand. They were like promissory notes - payable on demand - and they had some brief inscriptions on them such as: "I will make my bed every day for a month". "I will keep my room picked-up". "I will bring you breakfast in bed one morning a week for a month". "I will not fight with my sister". Now, as I recall, this represented something of a minor miracle at a time when a boy was not over-enthusiastic about home chores of any kind, and here he was volunteering to go a second mile. The great thing about it was that it was love being shown in its own spontaneous form, and love that did not cost a cent in any way of money.

~~I believe there's a little parable there about the greatest gifts that children can give their parents - even as the children grow up and become adults. - Indeed, even after their parents are gone. |~~ The great tribute to a home is in terms of spontaneous thoughtfulness, because a person wants to show his grateful love, not because he feels some heavy sense of oughtness.

One Sunday morning a couple of years ago, a little child sat here in Church with her parents. She was too young to understand much of the sermon and she wriggled and squirmed a bit throughout the service. But maybe she heard one word that kept creeping into the service that morning more than usual. At any rate, she took a pencil out of the rack in the pew and on the front of the bulletin she wrote a note to her mother. It simply said, "I love you" and signed her name. She passed it to her mother who then wrote in reply, "I love you, too." The mother shared it with me and it seemed to me one of the loveliest acts of worship that could take place in the House of God. In a way, it is a miniature of what worship is all about - love received and love relayed - love from God - love to God - and love to men.

And in something of that spirit, Mother's Day or Father's Day can be a healthy, meaningful observance. And we best express our love and gratitude for all they meant - not by some calendar-prompted gift, but by spontaneous love and thoughtfulness that has no particular day or season and even after our parents are gone, by the manner and meaning of our lives.

CLOSING Have you ever stopped to consider what a beautiful tribute Jesus paid to His home and his parents. He moved out from that home, lived His own life, but when He came to describe the God to whom He was

consistently closer than anyone in all of history - the God of wisdom, of love, of justice - the best human term that Jesus could find to suggest the nature of that God was in terms of an earthly parent - "Father". And it could well have been "Mother".

PRAYER O God, who has set us to live together in families, forgive us that so often those nearest and dearest relationships become all snarled up - from busyness, selfishness, or tarnished values. Help us to use this day again to see the love that has been given to us, the love of God, Your love, breaking through to us in your Son, Jesus Christ. It is a love without any price-tag. Help us to respond in priceless ways. Amen

May, 1978

Dear Friends:

A new group of Vietnamese refugees needs our help.

They are the intrepid "Boat People" who are leaving Vietnam at the risk of their lives to escape economic and political persecution. The U.S. has recently agreed to admit at least 25,000 of these people during the next year. But until sponsors are found, the refugees must remain in camps in Southeast Asia.

Three years ago, our church responded to the refugee crisis by sponsoring several young men, including Hoang and his brother, Quoc, and by assisting the family of Nguyen Minh. Today, all of them are prospering in jobs and in college.

We acted three years ago in faith -- faith that God was leading us, and that He would give us the material and spiritual resources to carry the project through.

God responded to us then. And He will again.

But it's up to us to make the first move.

It costs an average of \$1000 for our church to provide one refugee with food, clothes, a place to stay and a job. The number of refugees we can sponsor depends directly on the generosity of each of us.

Please share in this effort by making a gift to the church for the Vietnamese Friends Project and by volunteering to help in the resettlement.

Sincerely,

Ken Barclay
Vietnamese Friends Committee