



The Dignity of Human Life

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It has been almost 19 years since Patricia Ma. Alejandra Franco Ramirez, her husband Jaime Ramirez Taboada and their daughter Mariana, originally from Mexico, came to live in West Michigan. Their family and faith story is a story that shows us the importance of respecting the dignity of people and how this dignity must be lived through the joys and sorrows, the successes and failures, the comforts and discomforts that life gives us.

The Source of Our Dignity

To begin talking about respect for dignity, it would be important to first answer the following question: Where does the idea of the dignity of human life come from? This

concept does not find its point of origin in the declaration of human rights on December 10, 1948. For Western culture this criterion has its roots in the Judeo-Christian faith from the creation stories found in Genesis 1, 26-31; and Genesis 2, 7-25; and also in the story of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ that we have in the New Testament. The Genesis account says that God creates us in his image and likeness by giving us his breath of life. In the incarnation of the Divine Word, God takes on our human condition by resting in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, elevating our condition from servants to children of God. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance for the Church to respond to the essential needs of human beings, among which are those that are directly related to their life and happiness (cf. *Humanae Vitae*).

Perspectiva Familiar de la Dignidad

Patricia and Jaime affirm that family life gives us the opportunity to experience all aspects of the dignity of human life because in it we not only participate in God's creative work, thanks to the gift of procreation (AL #81), but also because in its breast we experience this life in all its stages, from conception to natural death. Pope Francis in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) calls us to "...to value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience." (AL #5). Further on, however, he reminds us and warns us that "...if the family is the sanctuary of life, the place where life is conceived and cared for, it is a horrendous contradiction when it becomes a place where life is rejected and destroyed" (AL #83).

In order to live in a home where the dignity of human life is respected in all its facets, we must be aware that each member of the family possesses the same dignity, even if their roles are

different in everyday life. If we do not accept these two premises as true, we will end up developing dysfunctional families in which its members could fall into abuse or neglect of their primary duties. Speaking about spouses Pope Francis tells us that "...each possesses his or her own proper and inalienable dignity" (AL #155). And in reference to children he tells us that the child from the moment it grows in its mother's womb has an inalienable right to life, "no alleged right to one's own body can justify a decision to terminate that life" (AL #83)

An Example of Respect for Dignity

Listening to Patty and Jaime's testimony, we discover that being docile to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit leads us, even without realizing it, to build families where the dignity of the other is always respected and celebrated. Proof of this is that they met while they were studying and after a long engagement in which faith, although not totally absent, was not the center of their lives, they tell us that they began to live their faith thanks to a couple of Peruvian friends they met a year before getting married. These motivated them and accompanied them Sunday after Sunday to attend the Eucharist. Jaime expresses it this way: "The Spirit worked with them so that gradually we would go... to that living water so that it would refresh all our humanity and divinity that we have as humans and that we would return to the way of life which is Christ for he says I am the way, the truth and the life". Thanks to the influence of these friends, they married in the Church, becoming, as *Amoris Laetitia* says in #67, "a community of life and love".

As a couple, they have been able to overcome the loss of their jobs without reproaching each other, always seeking a solution to their problems through dialogue. Likewise, when it comes to creating new life through their lives, they have known how to respect the dignity of this new person. Patty tells us that she became pregnant 6 years after her marriage, something that they did not expect at the time but that they accepted without hesitation because they were aware of the dignity of the child that was beginning to form in her womb. On the other hand, during the time they have been married Patty has suffered from an illness that weakens her and does not allow her to function physically at one hundred percent, but throughout all this time Jaime has remained steadfast with her, fulfilling the vows they made on the day of their wedding 32 years ago.

We can see how through the years and trials, Jaime and Patty have remained close because of the respect they have for each other. They have known how to value and recognize their personal dignity and their need to be loved (cf. AL #157). As a couple they have recognized that "In the human family, gathered by Christ, 'the image and likeness' of the Most Holy Trinity (cf. Gen 1:26) has been restored, the mystery from which all true love flows. Through the Church, marriage and the family receive the grace of the Holy Spirit from Christ, in order to bear witness to the Gospel of God's love". (AL #71). And as father and mother they have witnessed and accepted the gift of life through their daughter Mariana whom they have cared for and educated according to their faith. (AL #84)