

## **LENTEN NOVENA – THE FAMILY OF GOD**

HOLY REDEEMER PARISH – BERGVLIET

### **EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES**

FR GERARD McCABE C.Ss.R

THURSDAY 19 FEBRUARY 2026

---

Good evening everyone. A very warm welcome to our opening evening of our Lenten Novena series. We intentionally chose this year to use our period during Lent to reflect on family life, the gift of family life — but also the reality of family life, its joys and its sorrows, and to seek for the Lord in our own homes and in our hearts.

There has been a recent survey about TV series on Netflix. I believe that long series, eight or ten seasons, are no longer what people want. What people want are short mini-series, maximum of six, for the best impact. So we have six weeks. Not too long. It is only for one six-week period, once a week. The opening session is usually called the pilot episode, and sometimes, if it is a complete failure, you just give up on it.

But it is also important as we begin this evening to recognise that this is only one evening out of six. It is part of our Lenten journey. It is part of our journey together. So whatever this evening might be like, we will only truly benefit from this Lenten series if we can commit to coming each week and to following where the Lord might choose to lead us.

So welcome to our opening evening.

**I would like to begin, as always, with the Word of God — a short passage from St Matthew's Gospel:**

*Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise person who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house, yet it did not collapse because its foundation was on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish person who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed — it collapsed with a mighty crash.*

**The Gospel of the Lord.**

What are the foundations of our family life?

What are the foundations of our family relationships?

Are our foundations built on rock?

Or are they built on sand?

That is the question the Lord poses to us this evening, to look into our hearts and to truly answer before Him: where do our foundations lie? Is the Lord our rock, or is the world our destruction?

Everything we are going to cover over these weeks stems from the Pope's apostolic letter on the family, which will be available to the parish on the website and on Facebook. One of the beautiful things he says right at the very beginning is this: families are not a problem. They are first and foremost an opportunity.

That is very important, because let us acknowledge from the very beginning that family life begins in grace. Grace is the beginning of family life. Family life is sustained by grace. And family life leads us to God and His kingdom.

When I speak about family life, obviously the main focus of these weeks is the actual families here at Holy Redeemer, recognising that the parish also is something of a family, and that within the family of the parish there are many single people who live through their own family members and through the family of the Church.

But let us hold on for a second to the idea of family as a gift, an opportunity, not, in the first instance, a problem. We forget the grace. We forget the closeness of God to every human situation. The grace of God, it is everything.

And it is within that context that Jesus' words from this evening's Gospel begin to make sense. If our family life is built on the grace of God, then we are built on a rock that will survive any storm, any battering of the waves, any tragedy.

But if our family life is based purely on worldly values, it will not survive. It cannot survive.

I do not want to sound extremely old-fashioned, but we have to be aware that our spiritual life and our family life are under threat at all times from the evil one, from Satan, to call him by his name. Because if family life is God's chosen way for us to draw close to Him, then clearly Satan's best strategy is to do everything he possibly can to disrupt, to destroy, and to break up family life.

So without trying to sound overly dramatic, it is useful for us to remember that we are engaged in a spiritual battle. And our family life is meant to be our way of living together in the grace of God over all evil.

That is a starting point.

A family whose house is built on rock is a holy family, not a perfect family. We do not have such things. But if we strive to live under the grace of God, our families, no matter the struggles we face, are already holy. They are sacraments.

For just as much as we receive the Body and Blood of Christ when we come to Holy Communion, we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in one another, as a husband, as a wife, as a child, as a grandchild, as a member of a family. We are caught up in something beautiful and holy.

It is important to hear the ideal. It is important to hear God's plan for us. Because otherwise we will be swept away. Family life will disintegrate piece by piece.

This is why, I think, all over the world, the Church is beginning to recognise that if you neglect the family, you are neglecting God. It is our way forward.

Family life is like God's dream for us.

We have all known those moments in family life, the beautiful moments, the good moments, where you can almost touch something sacred, where you know you are caught up in a sacred moment that can only come from God. We should treasure those times. They are not always there, but we should treasure them and bring them before the Lord.

God's dream is to be the Master of every family, the Master of all our homes, including our parish. That beautiful vision in the Book of Revelation: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them and they with me."

What a stunning vision of what God is inviting us to in family life. If only we open the door, family life becomes a celebration, with Jesus sitting at our table, washing our feet, serving us. It is all waiting. It is not just a pipe dream. It is God's plan.

To open the door, that is all it takes. Open the door and let the Lord come in. Let Him sit down with us.

Just imagine: every meal would be holy. Every time together would be sacred. Every conversation would be grace. He is knocking at our door this evening. We only need to open our hearts.

The gift is that we have all experienced those moments before. We have all felt the presence of the Lord. He wants that to become the pattern of our homes, the pattern of our lives.

We do not have a guest visiting us. We have Jesus, our brother, our Redeemer, living with us always, every day.

That is the gift.

But the theme of this evening is also to recognise the challenges. And those challenges are all too real. They are familiar, I am sure, to all of us.

The overriding challenge, of course, is sin. Sin destroys the human heart, destroys relationships, destroys families. The whole history of the Bible, from beginning to end, is God's original dream for humanity being destroyed by pride, by sin, and by disobedience. It leads to hundreds and hundreds of pages of horror stories in the Bible, violence, hatred, murder, genocide, infidelity, adultery, massacres, lying, destroying reputations.

All of this is part of life. And all of this has been there since our first parents, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, violence, hatred against God's invitation: "Please open the door. Let me sit down with you."

This is a battle in which we are engaged.

Let us look at some of the challenges we are facing in our lives today.

We have to be honest and say that the easiest thing in the world is to be a Catholic who lives an external life. We all know the person who comes to church every Sunday, attends Mass regularly, is described as a practising Catholic, practising, because they hang up their public faith, while their private lives are in sin.

Until faith is made real within the heart, we will always be ambiguous spiritually speaking.

When sin dominates a person's life, when sin dominates a family life, a Catholic home becomes a battleground, and a battleground where evil thrives. I do not think I am exaggerating to say that most of us have experienced this in our own family life, the harsh words, the refusals to forgive, the anger, the violence, the hatred deep within a Catholic home.

There is evil in the world. And that is our biggest challenge today.

Where do we build our house, on the rock of Christ, or on the shifting sands of the season?

Family life has always been under pressure at every stage of history. But we are not living in the world of two hundred years ago. We are living in today's world, where young families struggle to find food, where unemployment is rampant in our own community, in our own parish, where expectations to live up to the perceived standards of the world — the nice cars, the nice clothes, the good appearance, become more important than what lies within the home.

These are pressures that have no value. And how much of our lives do we actually waste on what is useless?

We can talk about ways of escaping from reality in family life. We can talk about the horror of drug addiction, not only among children, but in families, a particularly evil circumstance in Cape Town where so many families have been torn apart by drug addiction, alcohol addiction, addiction to pornography.

All of these are forms of escape, escape from the difficulties of family life, but never a solution. We listen to false gods when we succumb to the idea that life will be made better if we just escape for a moment.

These are real challenges today.

Let us talk about social media. Let us talk about living virtual relationships rather than real family life. Let us talk about the fact that families, especially young people, are under pressure to find relationships through social media instead of across the table from one another.

Ordinary, healthy family relationships are being distorted by ideals they will never find. The world is great at creating illusions, and we fall into the temptation.

We are also living in a time where having boundaries is itself under question. We are living in an age of great individualism. We are told we can choose who we are, our gender, our orientation, our lifestyle. There is little guidance. These are real issues for people in our parish and in our homes.

Identity does not come simply through choice. Identity comes from who God has made us.

That is a whole issue in itself. But be aware of the noise. Be aware of the way the media presents these crucial life choices, life choices which are destroying the fabric of family life today.

So what do we do?

We wait for Jesus, knocking at the door. When you get home tonight, He will already be knocking. Open the door. Let Christ in. Welcome Him to your table. Sit together with Him as families in prayer, families in prayer, not just individuals.

These are the saving graces that highlight God's dream for us.

Despite every problem, the opportunity is right now. And during this Lent, we will look more deeply at how to open the door, how to welcome the Lord in, and how to become what God wants us to be, His children, His brothers and sisters.