

He could, ...at the most, be

a Patron Saint for Renovation Contractors

Too many of us still mistake the house for the home.

Let us remind ourselves that.....

The house is built with “bricks and mortar, fittings and furniture” , which we can go out and buy, anywhere, anytime, as long as we have the money. The home is that place, which we have built with our spouses and children, with love, as a sanctuary for ourselves and our family.

God asked St. Francis of Assisi to “repair My church”.

After repairing and even rebuilding a couple of church buildings he realised that he had badly misunderstood God.

Had he not come to this realisation that “the Church” God meant was not the church buildings, today he would, at the very most, be the patron saint of renovation contractors. That he is today acknowledged as a Saint of peace, the paragon of man as an instrument of God’s love and peace, as the first to articulate man’s relationship with Mother nature - God’s creation. He is also accredited with reforming the Church from within, by living the example of what Christianity can be. All these result from him discerning early in his mission, the difference between church buildings, and, the Church - meaning the institution and community of the people of God.

Nowadays, we do not need to build our own house with our own hands anymore. Migrant workers build it for us. We go out and buy one. We take out a huge loan and spend perhaps the next 20-30 years of our lives working to repay the loan plus interests, for the house. As the value of the house is equivalent to work of more than 15-25 years of a worker’s life savings, too many of us still tend to regard it with an importance, and give it a priority it does not deserve.

Some newly married couples do not see this difference and invest too much for their first houses. As a result they have to work extra hard and sacrifice too much, such that they scarcely have the time to live in the “dwelling” and to the extent that they do not have time to build their home.

Kim was in Melbourne on a short assignment for her Company. She



decided “to call, - just to touch base with” an old friend and ex-colleague - Audrey, who had emigrated there with her husband some years ago. They met in the city near Audrey’s place of work. Audrey was insistent on taking Kim home to show her their house, and they took the long trip to the suburbs to see the house.

On return to Singapore Kim was sad to tell their mutual friends that Audrey’s house was definitely not a home. Kim could see that it was a large house, sparsely furnished, and although they have bought the house some years ago, large sections of the house still looked hardly lived in. She noticed that coffee mugs, left on side tables, were ringed with traces of the last drink, weeks old. The kitchen sink was full of unwashed crockery, and the garden overgrown. It is apparent the Audrey and her husband were too busy working to pay for the huge house that they have no time to make it their home. As it was too far in the suburbs, their only child was boarded in his school.

Many Catholics think that to have a Christian family home, all they need to do is to have a “holy” picture over their front door - preferably with a palm frond, crucifixes in all the rooms, a family altar, plus statues/icons – the more the better.

The Catholic Church teaches us that “the Christian family is a church in miniature”. This means that in the Christian family where love is shared among the members, and where sacrifices are made for one another without counting the costs or in expectation of any reward, - this is, or should be, (the example for) the larger Church (the community of the people of God).

Too many misunderstood this as “the Christian house should be a miniature church”.

Schooling and education

Many parents today also mistook schooling for education.

They erroneously believed that the schools today will give their children an education. Little did they realise that nowadays schools have such a wide and packed syllabus of information to impart in a given time that they have no time left to educate children anymore. All that the schools have time for is to load the children with technical information, to train and drill them in examination answering techniques, assess them, test them regularly, and then graduate them. Teaching them in un-testable, un-measurable “values”, and non-examination subjects such as honour, co-operation, empathy, etc. are not in the curriculum. They are at best, low in priority, if not considered a waste of schooling time. Most schools in Singapore nowadays are just “skills training centres”.

Teachers are recruited, trained, assessed, and rewarded for their ability to turn out children who can score well in “common examinations.” Teachers do not need to teach child about living life - by example, they do not need to have any “authenticity” any more. They are no longer the paragon of the old days as they are not recognised nor rewarded for it. They should now be redesignated as “trainers”. This is not to debase the teaching profession, nor to diminish their work and contribution to society. The economic demands of the world and the economy today are so high that all of a child’s time in school has to be devoted to skills and techniques training.

Parents have to realise this sea-change. However, due to the demand of their own careers and jobs they blithely abdicated **their responsibility as the primary educator of their children** and made the bad mistake of “leaving everything to the schools.”

The Social teaching of the Church instructs us that

“The task of giving education is rooted in the primary vocation of married couples to participate in God’s creative activity.....

“The right and duty of parents to give education is *essential*, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is *original and primary* with regard to the educational role of others, on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and it is *irreplaceable and inalienable*, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others. “

“A fundamental opportunity for building such a communion (of persons) is constituted by the **educational exchange** between parents and children, in which each gives and receives....

“They will be aided in this if parents exercise their **unrenounceable authority** as a true and proper ministry”. That is as **a service to the human and Christian well-being of their children**, and in particular as a service aimed at helping them acquire a truly responsible freedom, and if parents maintain a living awareness of the gift they continually receive from their children.”

.....various quotations from the Encyclical Christian Family in The Modern World

Reflections:-

As Christian parents, do we believe that

- a) as parents and being older, we already know a lot more than our children. Therefore, we can just tell them what they must do and expect or demand blind compliance OR
- b) we have to learn to be their mentor, and by improving ourselves daily and by our living examples (to them), the paragon of being parents, Christian adults, citizens.

Social Mission Conference, organised by the CSCC held at RELC on Saturday 26th July 2008.

It is a not-to-be-missed opportunity to learn the social realities of living in Singapore and our mission as Christians including our Catholic response.

Group leaders are strongly encouraged to attend

Contact CFMS Ex-Co member Francis Mane (6792 6701 or francismane@hotmail.com for details and registration ASAP.