

Dr. Kuhner spoke of the family as our first and most formative "school of life," giving us our initial read of reality and teaching us what it means to be a human being. He noted that before we are even aware that we are being formed – and whether our parents directly intend to influence us or not – we are learning models of either authentic or inauthentic humanity. In searching out the lessons learned from our first school of humanity, Dr. Kuhner posed the following cases for reflection: Was love most frequently given freely in our family, or were we often asked to earn or win love? Was marriage taken seriously as a sacred bond, and was it lived out healthily? How did our family mediate an understanding of goodness, truth, love, faith, and commitment? Dr. Kuhner challenged us to "work through our own blessings and crosses so that we may bring them to the altar of God, that they may bear fruit in our life."

In following his invitation, consider one blessing and one cross from your upbringing. First, consider the blessing – an example of authentic humanity that you received from your family. Name this lesson, bring to mind the specifics of the manner in which it was imparted, and reflect upon how you benefit from it in your life at present. Think also of how this model has strengthened you to share the same teaching in your community, either explicitly or through the way that you live. Praise God in gratitude for this gift, and ask him how you can deepen its expression for the good of others. Carry the fruits of the prayer forward to be applied on the ground today!

Also find an area in which your family failed to model authentic humanity. Now, take this one with the caution that Dr. Kuhner advised, recognizing that all families fall short of modeling love, truth, and relational virtue in their fullness. (As Dr. Kuhner also mentioned, we do not reflect upon these matters for the purpose of critiquing our parents!) Name this area truthfully. Bring to mind the memories – perhaps painful – that you connect with this shortcoming in your formation.

But now, rather than lingering with the hurt, turn to God in thanks. 'Giving thanks' may come off as the inapt response. But you have thanks to give, at the very least because God has granted you awareness: he has given you the light by which your family's shortcomings becomes manifest in their darkness. Consider these questions: How have others helped you to grow in this area of your wounding or miseducation? How has your relationship with Jesus Christ encouraged you – encouraged you towards courageous acceptance and/or towards necessary healing? How are you working through this difficulty today? What comes to mind first: the effort to forgive your family for their shortcomings, or the path towards virtue in your own life? Pray for continued growth; pray that you may be drawn into deeper communion with the Father and the Son, as well as deeper communion with those towards whom the Father and the Son draw joy. Pray for the strength to share of yourself – namely, to share about this challenging area – with the brothers and sisters of your community: For where the

necessarily-incomplete familial school of life drops off, our Christian communities
– grounded as they are in divine communion – are to fill in...