



## Roundtable 2 *Stable families, happy families*

### *Austerity*

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The family is the best school of values and is where we can learn to live with austerity. It is the basis of all human virtues. It regulates our sensitivity, emotions, preferences, and desires. A truly “austere” person is not severe or strict, but rather strong, fair, and prudent.

We shouldn’t confuse austerity with miserliness, any more than we should confuse wealth with greed. One’s attitude toward possessions should determine whether one is considered generous or greedy. The austere person is not simply one who owns less than others; the greedy person is not simply one with many possessions. Imagine two schoolchildren. One brings five toy cars to school. The other brings just one. The latter has decided to safeguard his only car and is fearful of sharing. In contrast, the other child is looking to organize a car race with the other children in the class so that everyone can have a good time. He knows that there is a high risk of returning home without cars. Let’s put the emphasis on the attitude of each child to understand the fundamental value of what we are talking about.

In families, a parent who wants to pass on the value of austerity must first live it personally, then in union with a spouse, and finally with others. How? He or she must have the strength to say no to all those things that take us away from what really matters. This requires a clear set of values. Additionally, power and duty don’t always go hand in hand. Just because you can do something, doesn’t mean you should. For example, families shouldn’t waste money on nonessentials no matter how wealthy they are. Furthermore, parents may need to turn down social or professional invitations in order to devote more time to their children. Such decisions help parents demonstrate their values through their actions, building character in children through example. Children are fine observers. They see the sacrifices that parents make for them and for others. Children also pay attention to details. They take account of their parents’ generosity both at the material level and in the way they give up their own time and preferences.

Now, simply to be an example of austerity for the children is not enough, and parents should clearly explain the reasons for their actions and decisions. When parents get in the habit of explaining their underlying motives to their children, they gain peace of mind. It becomes easier to allow children their freedom. And to get to that point, parents should try to guide their children with peace and joy (even in difficult times), placing more emphasis on the efforts than on the results and trying to avoid the use of material goods to reward and punish.

It is important to note that when a family is growing in virtue, that growth is not limited to the family circle. It also has a strong social impact on the economy, politics, and the environment. When we decide to optimize resources, we make a subtle statement against the “use and discard” culture. Instead, we invest in durable, better-quality products that we are more eager to care for and make good use of. At the same time, the way we consume goods and spend resources sends a message to our politicians about family life and needs. Finally, when we reuse rather than discard, we minimize our impact on the environment because we avoid filling landfills with trash, which negatively affects the natural world.

Mankind’s worth stems from the being and not in the having. The person who lives in austerity is a person who owns herself, without being misled by desires and always aspiring to do the good.