

## Holy Family Sunday – Dec. 30-31, 2017

This Sunday, after having celebrated the birth of Christ, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. The Holy Family is certainly a unique family as it has a Son who is God and a mother who is the immaculate virgin Mary. One person said that sometimes they feel sorry for Joseph. What must it be like, they said, to be the only sinner in the family? --- It would seem that whenever something went wrong in the Holy Family, it would be Joseph's fault.

However, just imagine also how much Joseph was loved by Jesus and Mary in his failings and sinfulness. And it is that love that would have allowed Joseph to grow in holiness. Holiness does not mean that we have our lives all together; holiness means that we have presented our broken and weakened humanity to the Lord for healing and been helped through his grace.

The feast of the Holy Family is not the celebration of an ideal family. The Holy Family, we know, went through all kind of difficulties. Mary was in danger because she was pregnant with Jesus before Joseph and her were fully married and living together; Jesus was born in painful poverty; the Holy Family had to flee to Egypt to avoid Jesus being killed by King Herod; on a visit to Jerusalem one year, Jesus was lost for three days before they found him in the Temple, etc. –

What a lot of worry and concern all these struggles must have been. A holy family is not a family without problems or heartaches. It is how we deal with those problems that really matters. The Holy Family is not the ideal family but it is a model in showing us how we must be faithful to God at all times and must deal with each other with fairness, patience and love.

Today's feast of the Holy Family reminds us that being a family is a journey of many changes and challenges -- and that it is the love of spouses

and parents and children and brothers and sisters and community that enables us to negotiate and survive those changes and to conquer all the challenges.

Our belonging to a family means that we reflect for one another the unconditional love and forgiveness of Christ, both in good times and in bad. The Holy Family is a model for our own families as we strive to be, as the Catechism of the Church says, “a community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, make good use of freedom and live in such a way that its members learn to care for the needs of others.”

It is also a model for us as we struggle together to adapt and to deal with the many tensions and crises that threaten the stability, peace and joy of family life. They struggled with many of same issues we have today.

So today’s reading invite us to reflect on the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph on how God is present with us in our family difficulties as well as theirs, and how through them and through the care of his parents, Jesus “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and favor of God was upon him,” and how likewise, the members of our family might grow strong in character, and be rich in wisdom and eager for God’s blessing and favor.

That being said, the cycle B readings of this year also invite us to look beyond just the Holy Family or our own family. Today’s readings actually speak of three different “holy families.” The first of course, is Joseph, Mary and Jesus. The second is the holy family of Israel, and the third is the holy family of the world which moves even beyond that of Israel.

And more than that, in today’s gospel, when the Holy Family are at the temple, they encounter two people, Simeon and Anna, a widow for many year after only a short time of marriage, who

represent all those who have no family, and the first reading has as its subject one of the most famous childless couples – Abraham and Sarah. There we find God promising Abram a new family that will be rooted in faith. Ultimately this will be the family of Israel, the chosen people and family of God.

Abraham, because of his acts of faith, we hear, is blessed with descendants “as countless as the sands on the seashore.” But Simeon and Anna in today’s gospel do not get the gift of children. They get the gift of meeting Christ. These two did much the same thing as Abraham did -- they left their home for God, offered up the children they had or they never had and received Christ in return.

After the rite of purification and the consecration of the first born, Joseph, Mary and Jesus receive the prophecies of Simeon and Ann which extend beyond Joseph, Mary and Jesus by identifying Jesus as the revelation to the Gentiles and glory of Israel. These prophecies show how Jesus will be the fulfillment of God’s promises, which extend as far back as Abraham. What St. Luke is emphasizing through this story is that Jesus has come for the salvation of all peoples. Ultimately, it is the world that is the family of Jesus.

So the readings this year for the feast of the Holy Family urge us to think beyond Nazareth and the small family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus and beyond the limits of our own family. The story of Jesus is how he left his small local family and created a new family based on faith and discipleship. The beginning of St. John’s gospel says that, “to those who did accept Jesus, he gave power to become the children of God.”

While Jesus gave hints that his new family of disciples was to move in new and wider directions, it was the early Church communities of Paul and others that pushed this new understanding of family to include the Gentiles

**and all peoples who would accept the teaching of Jesus and be willing to put them into practice.**

**All three forms of holy family are interrelated – Joseph, Mary and Jesus – the Israelites – and the world-wide family of the Church. They urge us to be inclusive rather than exclusive. It begins as a tiny group but soon expands to encompass all people.**

**The mission of the family is the same as the mission of the Church. --- How can we grow in wisdom, faith and love in our homes and families and then extend those blessing to include all in our parish, and then, finally, all people of the world?**