

123007 FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY & JOSEPH (With Thanks To Fr. Pat Umberger)

To those who read this rather than hearing it voiced after the Gospel, I refer you to the readings at the bottom of this Homily. And for those who attended Mass, you've heard the beautiful readings on this, the feast honoring The Holy Family. This is also oriented to sharing with us God's inspired words about loving relations within the family... family built upon respect and obedience. Let me share a quick experience to get us started. Today, I'd like to concentrate on the gifts of our own personal families – and the gift of our Church family. Let me set the tone for this: We know that family usually brings us warmth and joy.

But family doesn't always mean this. Even in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* – there was pain and struggle and challenge within the family. My wife has a sign at home that says: "Families are like fudge - mostly sweet with a few nuts."

It's not easy to belong to any family. Even the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph had its challenges. Jesus was born in a manger in the middle of a cold desert. His mother was a teenager. His foster father Joseph was tempted to divorce Mary quietly since Mary wasn't pregnant from relations with Joseph.

Even after his birth, the troubles for Jesus weren't over. Herod was out to get the child. And there was the episode of Jesus not going home with his parents and getting lost for a few days. So – you and I can buy holy cards which depict the Holy Family with those circle indications above their heads – that's how things look when artists do them. But the truth is – even in this Holy Family there were troubles, tensions and problems. However -- the message we may first take from this particular family is that they were people of God – they listened to God. A lesson that comes to us from Scripture is that in a family of God there is respect – there is obedience.

All of us need to be obedient to God – and we must be obedient to the authority figures in our life. Most of us don't want to knuckle under to anyone. We treasure freedom in this country for it is the sign under which this country was founded. Here again – let me share something with you – it is a private moment that I normally wouldn't speak about – but I want you to know how important obedience and respect for authority is for me. This past summer when it was clear to us that we were likely going to move to this community, I had a personal meeting I had with the pastor, Fr. Bill. After we discussed matter, I got down on my knees and asked for his blessing.

I wanted him to know that despite any differences or problems we might later have – he is our spiritual Abba here in this parish... he is the one given to us by God to help us – to guide us – to pray for us. He is our father in this parish family. As the father of our family – he has the obligation to listen and consider all that is brought to him.

Those who espouse freedom to do anything are very mistaken. God help our good policemen and firemen and military forces who have seen the worst aspects of situations where some people, through moral decay or mental illness feel they can do to others whatever they want.

To our adults here – parents and grandparents: Are you and will you demonstrate the holy loving authority and respect called for in today's readings? To our young people here today – I urge you to please listen to your elders. So many cultures honor older people and older customs. Sad to say – our people are being formed to dishonor and disrespect anyone over 30. My grandfather was a dreamer – a man of many ideas and grand schemes – most of which would never happen. BUT -- how I wish to God I could sit on his front porch and hear him share and tell his stories today.

There was obedience in the Holy Family. And as our Psalm today says, "Blessed are they who fear the Lord and walk in his ways."

And the beautiful second reading says, "Put on ... heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another... as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do." If we truly listen to these words and follow them, a holy family will be formed.

Do you have people in your personal family or in this parish family who disturb your peace? Are there ones that you have trouble being close to? What I have found is that when I pray for others – most especially the ones who vex me, who challenge me... who are thorns in my pride or my ideas – I find I cannot stay mad at them. I lift them up in prayer --- and God continually surprises me when he lets me see new aspects of these people... I see them anew and in some way – I see them a little bit as perhaps God sees them.

I have one short story to end with. This is about a 75 year old woman who became a Catholic. We became friends – and I was so proud of her. She loved being a Catholic and doing all the Catholic practices and 'things.' She loved the smells and bells. But the irony of the story about this woman is that because of a disagreement she had within the Church, she left the the Church. She didn't understand one very important fact. She didn't see how privileged we are.

Privileged? Yes -- privileged to be part of God's family. All of us hope to join together as the family of God in heaven. We are given the chance to start that process by building holy families here in this life... in our homes... and in this parish. But what happens is – some forget that we are **familia** – sitting here in these pews... Perhaps we don't always see eye-to-eye. And from time to time, we think how great it would be to be able to choose new family members. But WE ARE FAMILY. We need to learn to live with and to love our own. We must love family in the good times. We need to pray for them (or about them) in the not-so-good times. How blessed we are when we do that.

This may sound old-fashioned – but would you consider buying a picture of the Holy Family and installing it in a visible place in your home? Then each day, walk by it and repeat the old prayer: “Jesus, Mary and Joseph – we put our trust in you.” Invite the Holy Family into your home & family. A new family will be reborn inside your home.

To those who read this, I want to refer you to some Internet radio-type broadcasts that you can either play on your computer – or that you can load on your portable MP3 type player. These are about family and they are very good. They include Catholicfamilypodcast.com, Catholicmom.com, Catholicinasmalltown.com and others. Give them a try.

Reading 1

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14

God sets a father in honor over his children;
a mother's authority he confirms over her sons.

Whoever honors his father atones for sins,
and preserves himself from them.

When he prays, he is heard;

he stores up riches who reveres his mother.

Whoever honors his father is gladdened by children,
and, when he prays, is heard.

Whoever reveres his father will live a long life;

he who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother.

My son, take care of your father when he is old;
grieve him not as long as he lives.

Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him;
revile him not all the days of his life;

kindness to a father will not be forgotten,
firmly planted against the debt of your sins
—a house raised in justice to you.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5

R. (cf. 1) Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in
his ways.

Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork; blessed shall you be, and favored.

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your home; your children like olive plants around your table.

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways. Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD.

The LORD bless you from Zion: may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

Reading II

Col 3:12-21 or 3:12-17

Brothers and sisters: Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another,

singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged.

Gospel

Mt 2:13-15, 19-23

When the magi had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, Out of Egypt I called my son. When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." He rose, took the child and his

mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee. He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, He shall be called a Nazorean.