

Holy Family

Introduction

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family.

I believe we need to consider the Holy Family as a pretty normal human family –

that experiences its good times and its difficult times... like any family... a family that is trying to live faithful to God's call.

I Difficult Times

Remember the Holy Family was not without suffering and pain. Let's not idolize this family.

- Even before the birth of Jesus we have the difficult situation of Mary's pregnancy and Joseph's struggles regarding marrying his fiancée who was pregnant, but not by him.
- Then we hear about the birth of Jesus in a manger during a difficult journey for a couple who could find no normal lodging... homelessness.
- Remember their flight into Egypt as refugees, fleeing Herod's persecution.
- In today's Gospel we have Simeon's strange prediction at the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple: Mary's son would be opposed and *"you yourself shall be pierced with a sword. (Lk 2:35)*

The Holy Family was not without suffering and pain.

After these adventures in the early days of the Holy Family, they enter a calm period in their lives

and Jesus follows in the footsteps of his foster father... he becomes a carpenter.

You know the rest of the story... we will hear it in the New Year.

II What Kids Learn

I want to reflect for a few moments on family life.

Remember, when we see and hear Jesus we see many of the influences of his family life with Mary and Joseph –

how their life together influenced Jesus.

Families influence the children that grow up in them... there is a challenging reflection by Dorothy Law Nolte that puts it this way:

Children Learn What They Live

- *If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.*
- *If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.*
- *If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.*
- *If a child lives with shame, he leans to feel guilty.*

- *If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.*
- *If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.*
- *If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.*
- *If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.*
- *If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.*
- *If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.*
- *If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world.*

Ideally, the family can be a school of compassion, training a child for living in our world and making the world a better place, learning to share and be kind and respect, and learn to disdain what is dark and evil and sinful, like bullying.

St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have reflected on the family as the domestic Church... for first experience of being a Catholic which the children will experience.

The family is where the children
first learn about God,
first learn how to pray, I
first learn love for the Church.
They learn gratitude and compassion.

At the October 2017 Synod of Bishops which discussed the Church and the Family,
Pope Francis said this to the bishops and to all of us:

...When families journey along the way of the Lord, they offer a fundamental witness to God's love, and they deserve the full commitment and support of the Church...

In the family we learn of the bonds which unite us, of fidelity, sincerity, trust, cooperation and respect, even when difficulties abound. Indeed it is in family life that the most vulnerable of society are cared for...

Some questions for all of us to consider:

1. Who is one person in my family whose faith has shaped my own faith?
2. What are some ways that our family tries to live out belief in God and his Church?

3. Which virtue seems to be particularly strong in our family – faith, hope, charity, kindness, patience, compassion?
4. What strengths do the children or grandchildren in our family have?

None of our families are perfect.

All of our families have experienced suffering and pain and sinfulness.

I know my family certainly has had its experiences of divorce, addictions and mistakes.

But we try to support each other

and be there for each other if needed...

and my family members try to do the right thing and live good, virtuous lives

and pass this onto their children.

Is my family perfect? Are any of our families perfect? NO!

Has my family made mistakes? Of course.

But our goal, our ideals and our values are to be good virtuous people and pass that onto the next generation.

Let me share a story...

about my friends Tony and Maureen... and Rosy.

I have a number of wonderful friends in New York City.

Among them are Tony and Maureen.

They live in a middle-income neighborhood in Queens.

A number of years ago when their four kids were small, ranging in age from 12 to 4 years old, Maureen's mother died – she was the last remaining grandparent of the children.

Tony's family grieved Peggy's passing... the kids missed their grandma.

Several months after grandma passed Tony and Maureen packed the kids

into their car and drove to the nearest nursing home, about a mile away.

Upon entering the nursing home they asked to see the manager. When the

manager arrived they asked the manager for a list of women who seldom

received visitors.

The manager quickly gave them a list –

regrettably too many elderly seldom entertained visitors.

Tony and Maureen and the kids visited a number of the women on the list, then went home and had a family pow-wow, deciding which of the women they would "adopt" as their new grandma. They couldn't solve the problem of lonely elderly... that was too much. But they could "adopt" one lonely woman as their new grandma. Her name was Rosy.

They returned to the nursing home and invited Rosy to be their new grandma. Rosy was delighted to have this new family. They would visit Rosy every couple of weeks, and bring her home with them for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter... and of course, St. Patrick's Day.

Years later my friends' kids are grown have kids of their own. Are they perfect? No. But they have a kind, considerate and compassionate style of living and are not closed in upon themselves and their own problems and difficulties.

Conclusion

No family if perfect.

But we as Catholics do have our ideals and our values which we try to nurture in our families and pass onto the next generation.

We aren't always successful, but we still try.

We are a people of relentless hope, because we know that our loving God will not abandoned us and we know that Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

We are also a people of prayer and trust in God.

We certainly entrust our families to God each day and we can pray for each other's families.

As we continue with this Eucharist we entrust our families and loved ones into the hands of Mary, Joseph and Jesus.

May the Holy Family protect our families... Amen.