

## The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph – 12/31/17

**My dear people of God: Today, as we celebrate Holy Family Sunday, allow me to pray for all families. We know that the family is the basic cell of society.**

**Please know that we have several options for our first and second readings today. I chose the Book of Sirach for our First Reading and the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians for our Second Reading.**

**I want to present to you the first reading in its entirety from the Lectionary. This is an excellent piece of advice to a son on how to respect and honor his parents: *“ 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.”*

**The second reading is very clear too. Saint Paul says: *“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.”*

Saint Paul beautifully spelled out the basics of a happy family life. If a devoted wife is subordinate to her loving and God-fearing husband, and if children are respectful towards their parents, the home truly becomes a miniature church.

This celebration of the Holy Family is one that puts the birth of Jesus into an important context for us. When God sent His Son, He did not drop down to earth from Heaven or mysteriously appear from nowhere. Jesus came to us as a part of a family. In the Prologue of John’s Gospel, we are told that *“the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”* The Redeemer is God Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity, WHO is also the Word of God-made-flesh. HE is the creating power that made all of creation.

Jesus, who is God Himself as Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, is the Divine Word, Who took on flesh and was born into the world just like those unto whom He came to re-create. We have just celebrated His birth to Mary in Bethlehem.

Today, we want to feel and realize how they truly were a HOLY FAMILY. How were they as a family? This Gospel describes an Old Testament ritual prescribed in the Book of Leviticus, chapter 12, verses 1-8. It would take place forty days after a woman gave birth to a son. Joseph and Mary were obedient followers of their Jewish faith.

In our Catholic Liturgy, we celebrate this event on February 2nd, the Feast of the Presentation. Today’s gospel describes to us Mary and Joseph performing this ritual and meeting Simeon who was inspired by God to come to the Temple at that precise moment. He knows that this forty day-old baby is not just any baby, but He is the Messiah. He has been waiting for this day and had been inspired by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen Christ the Lord. Simeon approaches Joseph and Mary. He foretells the mission of the Messiah and the role of the mother. He prophesied that this child is the glory of Israel and a revealing light to the Gentiles.

This encounter of the Holy Family and Simeon was probably not noticed as being special by others in the Temple. However, this was an encounter that

brought peace to Simeon for he saw that God was true to His word and allowed him to see the Messiah. He also spoke in somewhat a prophetic way as he revealed what the presence of Jesus meant to Israel, as well as to Mary and Joseph. The Gospels present Mary and Joseph as calmly meeting each challenge the baby's life brought.

The tranquility of the Holy Family is the result of their union with God. The peace that Jesus brings is not the absence of war or external turmoil. The peace the Lord brings is internal, spiritual. United with God, our families can calmly deal with the challenges of life.

To the Holy Family it was a confirmation of the message of Gabriel to Mary, and the dream of Joseph in which the Angel told him to trust. It confirmed that this child born of a virgin was truly God Himself and would change the world.

How often in our lives do the seemingly insignificant events and encounters turn out to be moments of profound confirmation of God's work in our lives? This Feast of the Holy Family presents us with two important reminders that can help us in our faith.

(1) The first is that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were the Holy Family. And even as the Holy Family they faced the knowledge that things would not be perfect.

(2) The second point is that each family is called to be a holy family. We grow in holiness by growing in unconditional love for one another, praying for one another, and praying for each other. This Feast calls us to ask the Holy Family to intercede for us in our various needs as God's families. As Servant of God, Fr. Patrick Peyton taught us, *"The family that prays together stays together."*

Like many of you, I have been praying for our families and particularly for our children. We realize the seeming contradiction: that even though our children have more abundance than any previous generation they also experience greater depression and sadness. They have devices like computers and cell phones that can instantaneously retrieve information and connect with people anywhere, yet they experience more disconnectedness. They have become alienated not only from the practice of the faith but even from faith itself.

Many of our parents here in the parish feel like Mary in today's Gospel. A sword pierces their heart. I feel it too. There's no easy answer. We know

**that there is no quick solution. I certainly don't have an answer, but Jesus does.**

**Allow me then to invite you to focus your attention on the traditional Catholic values of your family. For sure we face a great challenge today but not without hope. God will intervene if we empty ourselves.**

**Amen.**