

Feast of the Holy Family December 27, 2015

Sirach 3, 2 – 6, 12 - 14; (1 Samuel 1, 20 – 28) 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24; (Col 3, 12 – 21) Luke 2:41-52

On the last Sunday of the year, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. This feast celebrates the family unit and the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. On this day we offer our own families and all the members of our community on the altar for God's blessing from the Holy Family. The feast of the Holy Family reminds us that as the basic unit of the universal Church, each family is called to holiness. The Holy Family tells us about the Divine Son of God Jesus, his mother Mary, and his foster-father Joseph. We know very little about the life of the Holy Family through the Scriptures. They speak of the early years of the Holy Family, including the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, the finding of Jesus in the temple and their life at Nazareth. The readings of today speak of the family as a gift of God. In the first reading Sirach provides the insight and reflections on true wisdom. His purpose is to help the readers to recognize the wealth of Wisdom in Israel. Mary and Joseph experience the awakening in their child Jesus his life's direction. Already now Jesus assumes the responsibility God has placed onto him. Even though they do not fully grasp its implication they go back with him to Nazareth and we have the example of the Holy Family. St John reminds us that we are all children of God and a gift from God begotten in love and called to give back that love only to God.

The feast usually falls on the Sunday after Christmas. Devotion to the Holy Family is a recent development, but one that has grown out of a love for Jesus and his family. The cult of the Holy Family grew in popularity in the 17th century, and several religious congregations have been founded under this title. The Holy Family also became portrayed in popular art of the period. On October 26, 1921 the Congregation of Rites under Pope Benedict XV inserted the Feast of the Holy Family into the church's general calendar. Earlier Popes particularly Leo XIII promoted the feast as a way to counter the breakdown of the family unit. The feast was kept as special day to consider the dignity of the family and to show our respect to the persons of the earthly trinity. From its early days, the church placed special emphasis on the importance of Family as a key unit in the structure of the Church. By celebrating the Sunday following Christmas as the Feast of the Holy Family, the Church encourages us to look to the Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph for inspiration, example and encouragement. They were a model family in which both parents worked hard, helped each other, understood and accepted each other, and took good

care of their Child so that he might grow up not only in human knowledge but also as a Child of God.

Every human family is in God's plan. From the time of creation God did not want man to be alone but he created the human race as a family. He intended that the Son of God, who is like us "in all things but sin" was born into a human family. This communion of persons on earth is a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, is the human institution that best reflects the life of the Holy Trinity. The Son of God had emptied himself to assume the condition of a powerless and totally dependent infant to be like us in every way. He came into the world which is his own creation but his own people ignored him. Even then God does not take recourse to any miraculous power to care for his son but makes use of the natural provision, family to look after him. The family constitutes in fact the privileged and protective environment into which God wills all of his children to be born and to grow. His plan for his only-begotten Son was no different. The Feast of the Holy Family is dedicated to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, commemorating their life together in Nazareth and calling us to focus on Catholic family life. Today, in celebrating the Holy Family, we ask God's blessings on our own families.

In our First Reading from the Book of Sirach tells us about the obligation of parents towards their children. It reminds us of the first parents who were created in the image and likeness of God. The reading reflects the close bond that exists between God and man and must reflect in the esteem children show towards their parents. The young ought to learn from the precepts received from God. If the parents give their children the example of a life of obedience to the Law of God of their country, the children in turn will carry out their duties to God, to their parents and to their fellow human beings. There have been and will be exceptions but majority carry out the prescription laid down to them by their parents. The author invites children to show their esteem towards their parents and this should not diminish over time. Every honour shown towards parents brings harmony and comfort to a family. But honour also brings advantages only God could give. Among these include long life, comfort in knowing prayers will be answered and atonement for sins.

The Second Reading of today reminds us of the centrality of love. Because God loves us, we are the children of God. In addition to our own family, we also belong to God's family: we are all brothers and sisters to each other because of our common Father and we share his life. There is then an obligation for all of us to care for each other. Married couples and parents should not be left on their own. St John tells us of our relationship with God which is a total

commitment to Jesus Christ and his Way, and at the same time a call to love one another. These things are precious and irreplaceable. We are called the children of God and hence members of one family. We were reminded of the great love that the Father has given us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life." In the truest and most absolute sense, there can be no greater love than this unique love of God. It is this free gift, undeserved by us sinners, that has made it possible "that we be called children of God." With the help of Jesus and his spirit we grow in love for one another and bring great gift to the church family. This calls us to live in fidelity to God which is confirmed by obeying His commandments and doing what pleases Him.

Luke in the gospel intends to show us that Mary and Joseph was a typical pious Jewish couple, who went about their business doing all that was required and expected of good observant Jews. The fact that they were poor can be deduced from the detail that their sacrificial offering was the lowest required: a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. The ordinary offering would be a lamb but exceptions were made for those who could not afford it. The Gospel tells us of the silent offering of the three persons of themselves to God, as a family. After this they returned to Nazareth to live a life of obscurity and poverty for the next thirty years. They were probably often short of necessities of life, the earnings of Joseph as a village carpenter may not have been high. They willingly accepted the simple ordinary life in a remote village, living in harmony, observing the laws prescribed, visiting the Temple and Synagogue and living an exemplary life. They indeed accepted God's will and having understood partially at least the salvific role of Jesus, they were ready to accept the suffering and pain that came along the way. They are for us a true example of what a family life should be here on earth.

The Gospel of today tells us how Jesus is lost in the Temple during their obligatory visit. Only parents who have had a child go missing in a big and strange city can really appreciate the agony the parents of this only child must have experienced. And it was three whole days before they eventually found him again. For parents in such a situation that must have seemed like eternity. Jerusalem was full of strangers and there were undoubtedly people around who could be dangerous. This narrative tells us of the close bond of the family and at the same time the underlying mission of Jesus. What was important for Mary and Joseph was to find the child that was lost. For Mary the words of Simeon were still fresh in her heart reminding her of the sword. The child Jesus had enemies trying to kill him and she had the task of protecting him. This pictures the very human side of the Holy Family. They found him discussing

with Rabbis would have surprised them and yet they express their anxiety as to why he did this act. Regardless of his explanations it was difficult for them to understand and Mary ponders these things in her heart.

The Feast of the Holy Family is not just about the Holy Family, but about our own families too. The main purpose of the Feast is to present the Holy Family as the model for all Christian families, and for domestic life in general. Our family life becomes sanctified when we live the life of the Church within our homes. This is called the "domestic church" or the "church in miniature." St. John Chrysostom urged all Christians to make each home a "family church," and in doing so, we sanctify the family unit. The best way is by making Christ and his Church the centre of family and individual life. St. Paul gives us some advice on family life in Colossians, Chapter 3: Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

The feast of the Holy Family is a good time to remember the family unit and pray for our human and spiritual families. We also take this feast to reflect on the value and sanctity of the family unit, and to evaluate our own family life. Finally, we can use this feast to ask ourselves what we are doing to promote the family within our own cultures, neighbourhoods, and communities. Pope Benedict XVI said during his pilgrimage to the Holy land that we must contemplate ever anew the silence and love of the Holy Family, the model of all Christian family life. Here, in the example of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, we come to appreciate even more fully the sacredness of the family, which in God's plan is based on the lifelong fidelity of a man and a woman consecrated by the marriage covenant and accepting of God's gift of new life. Here too, we think of Saint Joseph, the just man whom God wished to place over his household. From Joseph's strong and fatherly example Jesus learned the virtues of a manly piety, fidelity to one's word, integrity and hard work. In the carpenter of Nazareth he saw how authority placed at the service of love is infinitely more fruitful than the power which seeks to dominate. Finally, we turn to the child Jesus, who in the home of Mary and Joseph grew in wisdom and understanding, until the day he began his public ministry. We pray for our families that we may be filled with love of the Holy Family.

Pope Benedict XVI during his pilgrimage to the Holy land invited all to contemplate always the silence and love of the Holy Family, the model of all

Christian family life. In the example of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, we come to appreciate even more fully the sacredness of the family, which in God's plan is based on the lifelong fidelity of a man and a woman consecrated by the marriage covenant and accepting of God's gift of new life. Here too, we think of Saint Joseph, the just man whom God wished to place over his household. From Joseph's strong and fatherly example Jesus learned the virtues of a manly piety, fidelity to one's word, integrity and hard work. In the carpenter of Nazareth he saw how authority placed at the service of love is infinitely more fruitful than the power which seeks to dominate. Finally, we turn to the child Jesus, who in the home of Mary and Joseph grew in wisdom and understanding, until the day he began his public ministry. We pray for our families that we may be filled with love of the Holy Family. We see around us today the breakdown of families and the uncertainty and the anxiety of many. We pray to the Holy Family to inspire into our hearts the mutual love necessary to build a harmonious family.

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A little kid narrates the story of burnt biscuits: When I was a kid, my mom liked to make breakfast food for dinner every now and then. And I remember one night in particular when she had made breakfast after a long, hard day at work. On that evening so long ago, my mom placed a plate of eggs, sausage and extremely burned biscuits in front of my dad. I remember waiting to see if anyone noticed. Yet all my dad did was reach for his biscuit, smile at my mom and ask me how my day was at school. I don't remember what I told him that night, but I do remember watching him smear butter and jelly on that biscuit and eat every bite. When I got up from the table that evening, I remember hearing my mom apologize to my dad for burning the biscuits. And I'll never forget what he said: "Honey, I love burned biscuits." Later that night, I went to kiss Daddy good night and I asked him if he really liked his biscuits burned. He wrapped me in his arms and said, "Your Momma put in a hard day at work

today and she's real tired. And besides - a little burnt biscuit never hurt anyone." Life is full of imperfect things.....and imperfect people. I'm not the best at hardly anything, and I forget birthdays and anniversaries just like everyone else. But what I've learned over the years is that learning to accept each other's faults - and choosing to celebrate each other's differences - is one of the most important keys to creating a healthy, growing, and lasting relationship. And that's my prayer for you today. That you will learn to take the good, the bad, and the ugly parts of your life and lay them at the feet of God.

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