

Homily – Feast of the Holy Family

Today we continue our Christmas celebration with a consideration of the Holy Family. This feast has the same first two readings every year but one of three different Gospels. The first reading is always the reading from Sirach about the honour that children should extend to their parents. The second reading is always the reading from Colossians about respecting each other's position within the family. It is not a divine decree that women should be subordinated to men any more than was St. Paul's admonition to slaves to be faithful to their masters is a divine endorsement of slavery.

In today's Gospel Mary and Joseph present Jesus in Jerusalem's Temple in fulfillment of their religious tradition. You parents can remember when your children were infants. You couldn't wait to show them off to family and friends. You probably had a big celebration on that very special day when you went to your parish church and presented them to the Lord to receive his life in Baptism. They left the church on that day of their baptism still your children — but also the Lord's. Mary and Joseph must have loved showing Jesus off just as you loved showing your babies off. They must have enjoyed the fuss that people made about him, just as you enjoyed people stopping by to see your babies and say a kind word or two to you.

When you first held your children, when you brought the baby home from the hospital, when you survived that first night when your baby would not get to sleep, you probably asked yourself, how will I, how will we, deal with the challenges this new life is going to bring? Perhaps you are still asking yourselves that question. Certainly there is not a parent here who has not wondered: how can I be the best parent possible? What will happen to my child during his or her life? What sort of person will he or she become?

Today the Church bids us to look to the Holy Family. They kept their union with God as the foundation and glue of their lives. This resulted in a tranquility that let them meet each challenge they faced...conquering the surrounding chaos instead of being destroyed by it.

It was in my family that my character, personality and individuation were formed. I became an individual and a person with a distinct character because I lived in a family. When I did something wrong my father would teach me by telling "that's not our way". For a family makes an individual, and individuals in turn constitute the family.

It is in our family homes that we learn a way of life. It is there that we acquire principles by which we should live and relate to others. It is there, in the domestic church, that God

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is acknowledged, that prayer is learned, and devotion is formed. It is there that our soul is nurtured at the family altar, the family table in which we share a communion of food for the body, the mind and the soul.

Is it any wonder, then, that our Church pays close and reverential attention each year at this time to all that it means to be family? For God chose to come among us as a member of a human family, with all that it entails.

So in thanking God for the gift of the Christ Child, let us also thank God for our mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, and the wonderful gift that we have been given, our family.