

Feast of Holy Family C

We celebrate the feast day of the Holy Family, our patronal feast day here at the parish. What's really great about this feast is that it's about something to which we can all relate with. It's about the real stuff that we have to deal with every single day of the year, and so when we celebrate the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, we also celebrate our own families and relationships in life.

As we celebrate the holidays, we observe it with joyful songs and happy stories. It's a time when we want everything to be OK, and sometimes to make it OK, we idealize our families. We try to "wish" them into something they are not. And yet we know that all too often our families fail to live up to that Hallmark image glowing in our imaginations. Our families are not perfect, and honestly, most families are a little messy.

There are a lot of families that have been struck by tragedies this year – some over which they had no control with like a death of a loved one, a pain or anguish of an illness, or the losing of a job. Others have experienced hurtful tragedies such as an ugly separation or divorce, alienation of children, or the almost unbearable pain of infidelity, which were the direct result of someone in the family not doing whatever was necessary to make family work. We could wonder how different these situations could have been if every member of the family had listened to St. Paul's admonition to keep the commandments and love one another. How many of these tragedies could have been avoided if they keep them into heart? How many friendships and relationships could have been saved if we lived by these reminders?

One priest was once asked by a Protestant friend about the difference between their faith. His mind is immediately filled with explanations of the Sacraments, Mary, the Mass, or our teachings about morality. But then one significant reality hit him, our belief in relationship. As Catholics, our primary focus on spirituality is not just about "Me and God" relationship where it is entirely about our personal relationship with God. But rather, a common relationship, shared by a larger group of people, called to serve each other, to love each other, to care for each other, to guide and forgive each other – not to shun nor judge, not to destroy nor harm. Our understanding must go beyond our "God and me" relationships. We must lift it up into a self-less and truly sacrificial relationship. There's an old adage that says, "It takes a heap of living to make a house a home." And it

takes every one of us working together to make that group of people related to each other either through blood or marriage or friendship, into a family.

The Church has given us the Holy Family as a model for Christian living. It seems overwhelming however to live up to them because they are the Holy Family. But we have to remember that the three of them, Joseph, Mary and Jesus, were also just as human as we are. Theirs was a real family that experienced many of the same challenges each of us experience in our families. We can see this in the Scriptures. At the beginning, there was talk of divorce when Joseph first heard about Mary's pregnancy. Thank goodness, that matter was resolved. Then there was the housing problem: no room at the inn. We tend to romanticize this, but who of a mother-to-be wants her child to be born in a stable? Immediately after the baby was born, King Herod wanted Jesus to be killed. The Holy Family needs to flee to a strange land where they were strangers and aliens. In our Gospel today, we're also given of a description of Mary and Joseph's reaction when they finally found Jesus after losing him for three days. "Mary said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? You see your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow." These words don't even give us a total sense of what Mary and Joseph must have been experiencing. How many of you have ever lost track of one of your children at the mall or a ball game even just for a split second? I believed that the kind of feelings and emotions that you experienced are the same kind of feelings and emotions that Mary and Joseph were feeling during those long three days while they were searching for their son. My dear brothers and sisters, the Holy Family was indeed a real, human family. They experienced themselves what we are experiencing in our families.

This is why our celebration today calls us to follow the model of the Holy Family. It calls us to live the principles that Paul speaks about in his letter. It calls us to stop focusing on our own self-interests and feelings and self-fulfillment, and focus on those who God has given to us as a family, our loved ones and all those entrusted to us for our care.

One of the most pressing needs of our times is for families to deliberately and intentionally strive toward being a holy family. Holy families don't just happen. They are something we need to consciously create and be chosen by every person working together and persisting in tough times. My brothers and sisters, God gave us our family as

a gift and a legacy. We are called to love it, cherish it, and to constantly build it up, even if it is imperfect and messy. Amen.