

Homily Notes – Sunday, December 31, 2017 – The Holy Family, Family Life.

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14, Colossians 3:12-21, Luke 2: 22-40

1. Introduction: On the last Sunday of the year, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. God created the Holy Family to embody the pattern of **prayer, learning, and work**. This pattern of family life is made explicit in the pages of Sacred Scripture.

2. The first reading comes from the Book of Sirach. It is one of the seven deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament. Written in Hebrew between 200 and 175 B.C., the Book of Sirach has always been recognized by the Catholic Church as divinely inspired and canonical. It has also been known by the title, “Liber Ecclesiasticus” meaning “Church Book”. This was due to the extensive use which the church made of this book **in presenting moral teaching** to catechumens and to the faithful. It was written when the Hebrew people were in conflict with the Greek Hellenistic culture.

3. This reading is a commentary on the fourth commandment: "Honor your father and your mother." Ben Sirach has many good things to say about living properly according to the Torah. Sirach reminds children of their duty to honor their parents – even when it becomes difficult. He also mentions **the five-fold reward** which God promises to those who honor their father and mother.

The first reward is “riches,”

and the second long life: “*Whoever reveres his father will live a long life.*”

The third blessing is having many children.

The fourth and fifth rewards are forgiveness of sins and God’s prompt answer to prayers. He reminds children that God blesses them if they obey, revere, and show compassion to their father.

Comment on the Blessings: The family is important to everyone, personally and societally.

1. For prosperity: Divorce is a disaster economically. Only 10% of children in poverty have two parents at home. Having a father and mother who are deeply committed to their children’s education and formation is very important for maturity and capability in children.
2. For long life: Single men are remarkably dysfunctional and short-lived when not engaged in family.
3. For many children: Essential for survival of society. Western death spiral. Family essential for formation and education of children. Peter Kreft says children’s responsibility to parents involve four elements: 1) respect, 2) gratitude, 3) obedience, and 4) support. Review the list of virtues in second reading.
4. Training in avoiding evil and formation in virtue. “He who honors his father (& mother) atones for sins. Evil and sin always promote destructive behavior. Virtue leads to stability and success.
5. God answers the prayers of those who are in right relationship with him (v.5). See also Mal 2 and 3.

4. Psalm Response: Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

It is in the family that obedience and the will of God is to be learned and godly habits developed.

5. Paul, in the letter to the Colossians, provides a description of virtues especially appropriate for the household: heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, and love and peace. Take the time at home to read verses 12-17 and reflect on how you, as a family, live these virtues.

6. Paul’s advice is part of the "Household code" – the rules for members of the Christian family. He first identifies desirable virtues. Paul teaches that children should learn and practice noble qualities like compassion, kindness, forgiveness and sharing in the warmth of the family. In a truly holy family all members are respected, cherished, nurtured and supported, united in the bond of love.

7. The second part of the reading deals with right relations between the members of the family. Mutual submission is a key attitude in adult relationships. See Ephesians 5:21-33 for the guideline of “mutual submission.” Submission is not equal to “obey” for children or workers. To submit, (*hupotassomai*), is a “middle tense” Greek verb usually applying to adults, equally male and female, meaning that both the subject and the object are equally responsible for the relationship although in somewhat different ways. Men are to love

wives as Christ loved the Church, avoiding any bitterness toward them; wives are to be obedient to their husbands (but as in a relationship of equal responsibility).

8. Key ideas from the first two readings.

1. A family is headed by a man and a woman.
2. Mother and father have authority over the children (v.2).
3. Whoever honors his parents or takes care of them in their old age actually atones for sins (v.3).
4. Children who honor their parents have their prayers heard by God (v.5).
5. Honoring the father brings many benefits (3:2-6).

9. Two observations from Pope Francis concerning present day issues. “There is critical confusion on both the nature of marriage as well as gender.

1. “We do not joke about the nature of marriage. Let’s call relations between same sex partners “civil unions.”
2. Pope Francis sees both issues as a modern assault on the notion of intrinsic biological differences men and women which threatens both human dignity and the development of persons and societies. (See my study sheet “The Bible and the Catechism on Homosexuality”).

10. Further reflections on family life and raising children:

11. Parental discipline goes past 18 years of age. Note in 1 Samuel 3:11ff and Ch 4) that this obedience and the responsibility of parents for direction goes on beyond 18 years of age. See God’s condemnation of Eli for not correcting them. It does change once they are out of the house and married.

12. Fathers not to provoke children to discouragement. Note also in Col 3:21 and Eph 6:4 the important warning to fathers not to provoke their children to the point of discouragement (Col 3:21), nor to anger (Eph 6:4) but to bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

13. Note in Hebrews 12:5-11, the importance of fathers to provide the discipline which is also instruction. The Greek word translated “discipline” in this passage is “paidaia” from which comes “pedagogy. Scripture literally says that “If you are without discipline, in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards.” We must work so that all children receive wise and prudent discipline with love. This specifically means that men must be actively involved in the formation of their children.

14. Gospel Reading: Luke 2:22-40. The prophecies of Simeon and Anna. Today’s Gospel describes how Joseph presented Mary and the Child Jesus in the Temple for the ritual of the mother’s purification and the child’s “presentation.”

1. Note the great dignity given to marriage for this is the way God sent his Son into the world.
2. Note the serious religious devotion of Mary and Joseph. They “fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord”(v. 39).
3. Notice the fact that all the prophets and women bearing godly children are marked by holiness and righteousness (Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, and Hannah (Samuel’s mother). Even the Greeks observed that one had to be good to understand the good.

15. Questions for application (individual or family).

1. How can I (or other family members) be a better father, mother, child in our family?
2. For children, how am I doing in being obedient and in taking care of elderly parents or grandparents? This is one of the commandments of God, therefore very important.
3. For couples, how are we doing in being mutually submissive to and respectful of one another?
4. For parents, how are we doing in guidance and education of our children without provoking them to discouragement or anger?
5. How are we all doing as adults in giving and taking suggestions, guidance or correction from within the family and seeking wise guidance, when needed, from outside ourselves?
6. What have we done (need to do) to promote happy family gatherings and better relationships?