

Holy Family Feast A/2010

Anytime I have to preach on the feast of Holy family, I feel really embarrassed. Not that I do not know what to say, but because I always think that you are the experts on family and, for that reason, you should tell me something on how you live and handle the crises that appear in your lives as husbands and wives and between you and your children. Or maybe our deacons would do well to preach on this occasion. However, because of the present schedule, I accept to preach.

Let me start with a question: why did the Church institute the feast of the holy family? The Church has instituted this feast so that we may find in the example of Joseph, Mary and Jesus a model for our own families and the necessary human and spiritual resources needed in order to live in accordance with the will of God and in harmony with the members of our families.

What makes a family holy is the type of relationship of love that unites its members with one another and which founds obligations and duties they have to fulfill toward one another. Obligations and duties we find in today's readings are formulated around the reciprocal love spouses have to show to one another, parents have to show to their children and children to their parents.

The book of Sirach highlights, above all, the duties and obligations that children should fulfill toward their parents. Children should owe their parents respect, reverence and honor. They should be considerate of them, especially when their minds diminish because of age.

Why are these important? These obligations are important because anyone honoring his/her father and mother, not only receives in many ways God's blessings, but also the forgiveness of his/her sins and a response to his/her prayers. To these obligations, St Paul adds the importance of obeying the parents as pleasing to God.

If this is true, then, it is clear that any time we maintain a broken and poor relationship with our parents for any reason, any time we forget them and all the sacrifices they have endured for us so that we become who we are today, we will miss God's blessing upon us and our families. This is addressed to anyone of us, whatever our position might be today. We should never forget that we are children of our parents.

I am not denying the possibility of conflicts and what the relationship might have become over the years. In all that, we have to learn to forgive one another. Without forgiveness, life becomes impossible. Sometimes I wonder whether we do not exaggerate the tenure of conflicts only because it is with the mother-in-law, the father-in-law, or the son or the daughter-in-law, etc. Sometimes our conflicts with these people are a result of our bad character, or our intention to isolate from them or our unwillingness to live in peace with them.

As I am saying this, I remember a lady who came to me a couple of years ago complaining about her mother-in-law. My response was spontaneous. Suppose that 20 years in the future, your son tells you that you can no longer come to his home because his wife cannot stand you; how will you feel? Her answer was as short as was mine: "I will never accept it. When I consider

all the pain I endure for my son today, nothing will separate me from him". Well, I said, that is exactly what the mother-in-law is feeling too. Work on your relationship with her and your husband will be happy. Probably your husband is supportive of you, but it does not mean necessarily that he is happy.

Let us now examine the obligations and duties of parents toward their children, especially in meditating on the Gospel. What comes out of the Gospel is mostly the example of Mary and Joseph, how they tried to be good parents by protecting their child. Because the life of the child was in danger, they fled with him. All this is an expression of their care for the child, their love of him and their concern that he might grow up and come to full maturity of life.

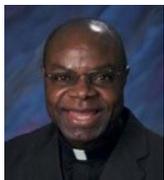
That is one of the roles of parents, namely to protect their children from negative influences that can jeopardize their future, to help them grow up in the right way and to come to know God and serve him as good citizens and good Christians. The situation of our culture today is not easy, but they have to do anything they can so that they may not fail in this mission God has given them to raise children.

That is why, the episode of Mary and Joseph fleeing with Jesus in Egypt shows that they did face a tough choice and a tough situation. Like any parent, they had to make some decision for the good of their child by going abroad. That being said, it is clear that if the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is called holy, it is not because they never had problems, but because of the quality of their relationship with one another and the place of God within it. The more superficial the relationship, the more a family is dislocated. The stronger the relationship, the more a family lives in cohesion with one another.

The last point I want to bring is about immigration. If Joseph and Mary were not welcomed in Egypt, probably Jesus would have been killed. But because they were welcomed, they saved their child. Think about your position on immigration. Do not forget that you are all descendants of immigrants who came to this country searching for a better future. Most of the time when I see people talk on television about immigration, they are nasty and ugly, including those who say they are Christians.

I have decided to stay in this country and give the best of myself for the word of God, because since I have come to this country I have found people who welcomed me and loved me. If they did not, they would have pushed me out of the door and _taken another course. This is the time to follow the wisdom of our bishops on this matter. May the holy family bless your families now and forever! May you find in the example of Mary, Joseph and Jesus a model for your own families! May God bless you all!

Sirach 3, 2-6, 12- 14; Colossians 3, 12-21; Matthew 2, 13-15, 19-23



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