

Feast of the Holy Family A/2013

All the readings of this celebration of the feast of the Holy Family reflect on the reality of family. They invite us to find in the example of Joseph, Mary and Jesus a model for the guidance of our families and the needed resources to live in harmony with the members of our families.

The first reading of Sirach focuses on the familial duties and obligations, namely those of parents toward their children and those of children toward their parents. They show in particular the spiritual benefice that the children would reap if they honor, respect and care for their parents.

What is behind this text is the idea that the respect of the fourth commandment holds divine blessings for those who apply it in their life. Another idea is the truth that children's fulfillment of their duties toward their parents is a source of blessing. The last idea is the recognition that because God is the source of life, by honoring their parents, children honor God himself.

This reading allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel. First of all, the Gospel says that, once the magi departed, the angel of God told Joseph to flee with the baby Jesus to Egypt because his life was in danger.

It says also that in his obedience, Joseph stayed in Egypt until Herod died. But after Herod's death and according to the advice of the angel, he resolved to go back to Israel. But, when he realized that it was a close relative of Herod who took his place, he changed the direction and went to live in Nazareth.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about duties, obligations and responsibility of family towards one another. First, we have the obligations of children toward their parents. In fact, we, children, have duties and obligations toward our parents. When I say we, it means each one of us, including grandparents, whose parents are still alive. We should not forget that we are all children of our parents. We owe them respect, reverence and honor, especially when their mind diminishes.

By doing so, God will bless us and we will receive the forgiveness of our many sins. If that is true, then, we understand that to maintain a broken relationship with our parents diverts God's blessing from us. Of course, I am not minimizing the conflicts or what the relationship might have become over the years. But, it is here we have to forgive each other, because without forgiveness, life becomes impossible. Sometimes I wonder whether we do not exaggerate the tenure of our 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 the 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.

Second, we have the duties and obligations of spouses toward one another. Here I do not have too much to say because you do it already so well. However, what I have to add is that you should not forget the long road you have made together. Do not forget that girl or that boy who has given her or his life to you. In this man or this woman turned old, that girl or that man is still present. The question to ask today is: Is she still happy? Is he still happy? Why? Is there any way to fix the problems that destroy you today? Can you have the courage to do it?

Third, we have the duties and obligations of parents toward their children. Parents have great responsibility toward their children. Mary and Joseph give us an example of how they protected Jesus. Because his life was in danger, they fled with him to Egypt. When the time of returning to their land was up, they changed the location because the life of their child was still in danger.

That discernment is needed of parents in order to protect their children. They have to shield them from negative influence that can jeopardize their future. They have to help them grow up, 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 the mission God has given them to raise children.

That is why, the episode of Mary and Joseph fleeing with Jesus to Egypt shows that they did face a tough situation. Like any parent, they had to make some decision for the good of their child by going abroad. If their family 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 flight of Mary, Joseph and Jesus in Egypt opens also our eyes on the problem of immigration. It is sure that 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 freedom and a better life. On television and radio, some people talk in a nasty and ugly way about immigration, including those who pretend to be Christians or Catholic. At which side are you? May God bless you and bless your family!

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



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