

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph B/2017

The readings of this solemnity focus on the reality of the family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus as a model for human families. They invite us to check the consistency and the faith-commitment of our families in reference to the Holy Family of Nazareth.

The first reading describes the blessing Abraham received from God as he and his wife, Sarah, became parents in their old age. It shows in particular the abundance of God's grace toward them as he promised them an offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky. It equally highlights the righteousness of Abraham who put his trust in God by believing that what he promised was true.

What is behind this text is the idea that children are a blessing from God. There is also the idea that for God nothing is impossible because he is able to bring joy where there is sadness, laughter where there are tears. The latter idea is related to the truth that God keeps his promises no matter how long it can take.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as it talks about the presentation of Jesus in the temple. The Gospel starts with the trip of Mary and Joseph to the temple in Jerusalem for their purification and the presentation of their first son according to the Law of Moses.

Then, the Gospel speaks of Simeon, a righteous man who, at the sight of Jesus, was full of joy as he saw with his own eyes the fulfillment of the promise God made him that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. The Gospel speaks also of the joy of Anna, a faithful widow, who never departed from the temple. After that, the Gospel talks about the amazement of Mary and Joseph as they heard so many things said about their son. The Gospel finishes with the mention of the return of the parents of Jesus to Nazareth while Jesus himself was growing stronger, full of wisdom and grace before God and men.

At the light of this Gospel, what can we say about this feast? Today I want to talk about the unity of family. First of all, what do we call unity? Unity is the state of being one, a propensity to form a whole from separate parts. For instance, the father is different from the mother as the mother is different from the father, in terms of both personal history and background. But, they all stick together as one body we call family.

The same is true for the children who, though different from one another, are all brothers and sisters and stem from the same parents. Unity in the family starts with the example of the parents in their relationship to one another and how they extend it to their children. If the relationship between parents is poor, it is likely that it will affect the children and the way they relate to the family as a whole.

The reality of unity of family is challenged today by the structure of our society. Many factors contribute to that challenge. In fact, we live in a society where people have to work hard, sometimes out of their home, by giving priority to their job in order to succeed in life. Such a preoccupation bears, in one way or other, some consequences on the reality of family.

In order to maintain the unity of the family, some principles have to be respected. First, there is the principle of togetherness. What I mean by it is that the family has to strive to stick together in bad and good times; to create daily routines, traditions and celebrations

which affirm the members and connect them. That could be the case of eating together, at least twice a week; celebrating together the birthdays; participating in the special events that cross the life of the members; encouraging the members in their struggle and crisis of life, etc.

A great danger we have today against the life of togetherness is the cell phone. It seems that everybody is occupied with his cell phone; there is no more true conversation or communication outside the use of the cell phone. In order to prevent such a danger, some families have installed a basket in which each one puts his phone before the meal so that they might be attentive to one another. Some others shut down the TV so that it might not prevent their life of togetherness during the meal.

The second principle is that of faith. In fact, faith plays a big role in contributing to the unity of the family. The Gospel shows clearly how Joseph and Mary set an example for their son, Jesus, by bringing him to the temple and fulfilling the requirements of the Law of Moses for him.

I believe that Joseph and Mary, by doing so, were aware that their son was a gift from God and wanted to thank him by fulfilling his Law. I believe also that they did not take for granted the fact of having given birth to a child. That is why they felt compelled to go to the temple and present him.

When the parents do not practice their faith, it is likely that their children will be affected by it. I do not minimize the fact that children may change over the years as they grow up, due to some factors crossing their life. However, it is my conviction that the example of parents in bringing them up in a Christian manner is very important for their future.

In other words, the personal spiritual experience of parents opens the children to the reality of God like a flower that blossoms when it is exposed to the sun. The consistent life of prayer of the family strengthens the bonds of its members. When a family is Christ centered, it can cross the crises of life with the certainty of being unmoved. When the children are able to pray daily, they will easily feel the guidance of Jesus in their life.

The Gospel says that Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. I presume that this is a consequence of his early exposure to God whose blessing comes to us in a very mysterious way. Here we have an opportunity to examine some of our practices. For instance, we easily celebrate the birthday and the graduation of our children, but how many celebrate the anniversary of baptism, first communion or confirmation of their son or daughter?

If we have to work for the unity of our family, we have to use all the means, spiritual and non-spiritual, at our disposal in order to build a strong relationship among the members of our families. Let us ask Jesus, Joseph and Mary, who know all the difficulties modern families have, to intercede for us and bless our families. May God bless you all!

Genesis 15: 1-6; 21: 1-3; Hebrews 11: 8, 11-12, 17-19; Luke 2: 22-40

Homily Date: December 31, 2017

© 2017 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20171231homily.pdf