

## Feast of Holy Family B2020

The readings of this solemnity focus on the reality of the family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus as a model for the 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 also 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 last 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 not to 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 Galilee 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. Before developing this subject, let me say that, this is the only time of the year that I feel embarrassed when I have to preach. Why? Because I have to speak to the experts in family and children how they should be. That is weird; no. In truth, they should teach me everything I should know about the family and the children, etc.

However, in spite of all that I am encouraged to speak because it seems to me that a neutral and external observer can sometimes be more helpful than the one who, not knowing how to take distance himself from what he is living does not see all the dimensions of the problem in which he is involved. Therefore, what I tell you here, I do it as an interested observer who wants the good of our families and our children.

The reality of unity of family is challenged nowadays 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 and give priority to their job in order to succeed in life. Such a preoccupation bears sometimes consequences on the reality of family as a whole.

I do not pretend that I have a solution to all the challenges that the family faces today. I want only to highlight the importance of the unity for the family. In order to maintain the unity of the family, its members should operate within the respect of some principles, like that 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. it is sure that the principle of togetherness faces the crisis of COVID19, but in normal times, it is a good direction in which the family has to walk.

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 in 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.

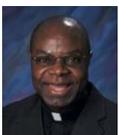
When the parents do not practice their faith, it is likely that their children will be affected by it. I do not minimize the fact that children may change over the years as they grow up due to some factors crossing their lives. However, it is my conviction that the example of parents in bringing them 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 prayer's life of parents impacts the lives of their children. 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: 11-12, 17-19; Luke 2: 22-40**



Homily Date: December 27, 2020  
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Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)  
Document Name: 20201227homily.pdf