

Feast of the Holy Family B2023

After the joyful Solemnity of the Nativity of our Lord, we celebrate today the feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth. This celebration comes often in a particular context because Christmas is above all the Feast of the family. This is demonstrated by what we do at Christmas: the family's members come together, greet each other, share the meal and exchange gifts.

We call the family of Nazareth "Holy" because Mary, Joseph and Jesus were truly committed to do the will of God. That is why the Church presents them as a model that our human families have to follow and imitate in their journey on earth.

One time, I heard someone say: "How unfair to expect us to take the Holy Family as our model and to ask us to be like them. After all look at who they were: Jesus, Son of God as well as Son of Mary. He must have been a model child. Mary, his virginal Mother, preserved from sin from her conception, and Joseph, the just man who was so careful to protect Mary when he discovered her pregnancy, though he knew the child was not his."

"They had no problems at all as most families have today: No disobedient kids. No alcoholic or abusive spouses. No sons or daughters or husbands or wives involved in the army abroad or domestically, etc. After all, we are different from them."

Although such a remark can be, to some extent, understandable, it forgets, however, the human side of the members of the Holy Family. It is precisely for having lived that human side with faith and exemplarity that they have been presented to us as a model.

Imagine, for instance, the pregnancy of Mary in those circumstances of time while she was just fiancée to Joseph. Imagine what the neighbors might have been thinking of her and the courage of Joseph to keep her after the instructions given him by an angel in a dream. Imagine the difficult trip to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus in a manger. Imagine a Young mother going abroad in Egypt as an immigrant to protect the baby.

What about the loss of Jesus in the temple and his own reaction to the anguish of his parents? No, the Holy Family did not have an easy life at all. At least from this point of view, we can look at them as we experience our own difficulties. We can look to them for an example of how to act in times of trouble, times when we don't know where we are going or what the next roadblock will be that gets in our way.

But there is more to look at the Holy Family. The glue that held this family together, that made it possible for them to navigate the twists of life with the head above the waters, was love. It was love that helped them through perilous journeys, exile and threats to the life of the child without forgetting the poverty of their humble conditions of life.

It was a love that began with God the Father who so loved the world that he gave his only son; it was the love that prompted Mary to say "Yes" to the extraordinary thing God asked of her; and it was the love that prompted Joseph first to do what he could to protect his pregnant wife when he knew full well he was not the father. He loved her, just as he would love the child that he grew to cherish as his own. The child himself would learn this love and as a man he would show that he, too, loved the world so much that he was willing to die for it.

The Holy Family was also remarkable for her faith in God. The Gospel shows 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.

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 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 lives.

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?

Today, the family is broken in our society with single parent, child abuse, parental addictions, divorce, abandon of elderly parents, etc. We face many social problems that have to be addressed by the government, Church, and local communities. We have to ask ourselves some hard questions: Why are family values so endangered? Who is responsible, and what will we do about it? Children will become good Christians and good citizens if they are brought up loved, motivated, properly disciplined, and educated by parents dedicated to religious and social values. Are we convinced of that?

May Joseph, Mary and Jesus intercede for our families so that they imitate their love and faith! May they help us build strong relationships among the members of our families so that one day together we get to heaven!

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



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