

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph C2024

I would like to begin this homily by telling you this story of a father and his son. One day a father came home from work. Unlike every other day, the son greeted him with a question: "Dad, how much do you make for an hour?" Surprised, the father could not answer such a private question that only he and his wife know... He just ignored him. But the boy insisted to know, how much he made for an hour? A little bit bothered, the father said, "Twenty dollars".

Okay, the boy continues: "Please, would you lend me ten dollars?" At this question, the father got mad and sent him to sleep. In his own bed, the father felt guilty for not giving his son the money he wanted. Perhaps the son needed to buy something important. Finally, he got up and went to his son's room and gave him ten dollars.

Once the boy received the money, he reached under his pillow and brought out ten more dollars. "Now I have enough! Now I have twenty dollars!" the boy said to his father. "Dad, could you sell me one hour of your time?"

Strange story, but an expression of the truth today's feast of the holy family wants to bring to our awareness, namely that we have to invest more of our time in our family life. We have to look at the Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph for inspiration, example and encouragement for our own family reality in today's world.

Our life in this world as well as our history is a gift from God. Our children as well as everything we have in this world come from God, as a grace. To maintain such a claim should lead us to consider the human family as on a pilgrimage of faith and a place of thanksgiving.

As described in the first reading, Elkanah and his wife Hannah consecrated their son Samuel to the Lord, in the temple; because they understood he was a gift from God. This is also true for Mary and Joseph as they bring Jesus to Jerusalem for the annual pilgrimage and the day of prayer.

To thank God for having heard her cry while she was barren, Hannah and her husband let Samuel serve the Lord in his temple and become his servant. More than a simple obedience to the law of Moses that recommended the first born to be consecrated to the Lord, there is a personal act of faith and witness to the truth that the giver of gift, God, is worthy of receiving what is the most precious in the world to somebody, like a unique child.

In the same way, by taking Jesus to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage, Mary and Joseph affirm their faithfulness to the tradition they pass on to their child. But, at the same time, they realize that the child has to take his own way, independently from what they would expect. Thus, when, anxious and worried, they find Jesus in the temple, they are surprised to hear him saying that he should be at the business of his Father.

The Gospel of this Sunday has a strong message for us. It teaches us that parents have the responsibility and the obligation to introduce their children to the fullness of life including spiritual life, so that in the future they become good citizens in society, and good Christians in the Church.

However, to recognize that children are God's gift means also that they belong primarily to God and not to their parents. That is why the parents should recognize the freedom

of their children and help them make good choices for the future, including the choice for religious life.

To respect the choice of children is to respect their identity and to let them become what God wants them to be. We should not forget, however, that there is no better teaching than the example we give.

How can parents give good education to their children, including Christian education, if they do not live what they teach? The wisdom and age and grace in which Jesus advanced were received first in his own home, before they were reinforced through the interaction with public milieu and scholars in society.

By recalling this fact, it is not my intention to blame parents, as though they do not do enough for their children. As a teacher and an educator, I know the many difficulties parents have nowadays for the education of their children, especially with regard to the evolution of our culture. I know the suffering many of them experience to see their children taking a way that is totally the opposite of what they have received as education in the family.

My intention, however, is to bring to our awareness the fact that the more serious these challenges are the more we have to pray continually for our children so that the Lord may guide them in the right paths of life. We should always hope for the days of grace and visitation from the Lord. Remember the example of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, who spent the whole of her life praying for the conversion of her son. In the crisis of your children, take her as your example.

Do not forget that a family that strives to live its commitment faithfully and lovingly is always a strong shelter for the children. A couple that strives to live its vows faithfully by placing Jesus at the center of its life and in spite of possible problems and conflicts, is able to cross the storms of life with their heads above of the waters.

Today the institution of marriage and the family are in crisis. The first sign of that crisis is the divorce, and the first victims are the children. How can we make our families stable? I continue to believe that a family whose life is based on a sincere faith and practice of the word of Jesus is able to resist the temptation of minimal effort and least resistance that is characteristic of our time and culture. Without fleeing conflicts, which are inevitable, it can become strong, like Mary and Joseph, and have the interior force and wisdom that help support and live the reality of family otherwise.

May the celebration of Holy family bring us to pray for the unity of our families! May the parents who are blessed intercede for the children whose parents are separated! May parents find joy in the realization of the project of life of their children! May God touch today the hearts of all the children who have abandoned their parents and do not care about them! Amen!

(Extract from the homily of the Feast of Holy Family 2009)

1 Samuel 1: 20-22, 24-28; 1 John 3: 1-2, 21-24; Luke 2: 41-52



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