

## **FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY, December 27, 2020**

It does not matter if you are a mom, or a grand mom, or a dad, or a granddad, or an aunt or uncle, sister, or brother. Even a good friend. All of us have had or still have someone in our lives who looks after us or has in the past. That is the Family life I want us to reflect on today as we look at the Holy Family! The family which goes beyond Mom and Dad and includes all those people we have lived with or work with, pray with and journey together in our daily lives.

All of us in some way or another look after someone else. No one has made a difference in the world without someone having their back. Who's got your back? Who's back do you have? It might be a small family of two or many but there is someone, may be a blood relative or just a friend and that will make a family. Today I suggest will look at that loving relationship that exist or existed in your life as we try to look at it in relation to that of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.

I remember watching a home video. In the video, a one-year old toddler was just learning to walk. His father was holding his hands from above at first, then let go, and watched, as the young boy part walked, part stumbled across the floor, to land on his bottom, then get up, and try again. At last, he got up, turned toward his father, and walked first slowly, then ran, successfully into his arms. Later, that same relationship would be repeated in learning to ride a bike, to play soccer, to master geometry, to get through college.

Although the young man's father didn't prevent him from failing, couldn't prevent him from messing up a few times, may not have been able to prevent a few times when he experienced the break-up of his girlfriend, the failure of an English exam, or a failed marriage, he WAS always there to pick him up again, dust him off, and set him back on his feet to try one more time. He always had his back.

It's the role of every parent, every good friend, isn't it? To be the one there with you when things go wrong. Neither your parent nor your friend can prevent life from happening to you. Nor should they. If they did, how would you learn? Neither your parent nor your friend can prevent those times in life when catastrophe hits, when evil strikes, when humanness trips us up and intrudes into our lives. If they did, our lives would not be free, but we would be living in a padded cell.

We can't protect our children or our loved ones from living in an imperfect world. We CAN be there to pick up the pieces when sometimes our dreams and our hopes are temporarily shattered. We CAN have their backs. This day, in a world that may be unforgiving, in a culture that may be unfair, in a life that has its joys and turmoil, ups and downs, uncertainties and surprises, God is our true constant and God will be among us if and when we journey together as a family.

When the Holy Family is put before us as a model for us to imitate, we feel that is impossible. They are so far beyond us in holiness that imitating them would be like any of us trying to play Golf like Tiger Woods or any other Sport like Basketball like Michael Jordan or baseball like Babe Ruth.

Well, we may not be the perfect holy family, but we are a holy family if we are in God's grace. It's God's grace that makes us holy and if the members of our family stay in God's grace, we are a holy family. *The only danger we face is becoming spiritually complacent and lazy.* We never stay in the same place spiritually, we are either moving forward or backward, and unless we keep trying to grow in God's grace, we will end up slipping backward or even losing grace altogether.

As we heard in the second reading, there are no secrets to living and growing in grace. It's just a matter of practicing the ordinary virtues we learned when we were young: kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, etc. Jesus summed them up in his famous answer about the greatest commandment: loving God as much as we can and loving our neighbor as ourselves. The neighbor that we most often neglect is

the person or persons closest to us. We too often take each other for granted instead of making time for one another, helping each other, complimenting each other, thanking each other or being patient and forgiving of one another. Good relationships are made up of just so many little things.

I think at times we imagine the Holy Family lived a charmed life without problems or stress. Problems began even before Jesus was born when Joseph was about to break his engagement to Mary. Think for a moment where Jesus was born - not neat and clean like the little mangers we put up in our homes. He was born in a stable that probably was smelly and dirty, maybe damp, and cold. In today's gospel we are told about their presenting Jesus in the Temple and offering the required sacrifice according to the law of the Lord.

St. Luke is telling us they were poor; they offered the sacrifice of the poor. St. Luke, incidentally, is telling us they observed the laws of their Jewish faith and were obedient to God. We can't be holy and ignore the things God asks of us. As they went to the Temple, surely, they were happy to be able to bring their child there. But then an old man came up to tell Mary her heart would someday be broken because of her child. What a chilling prophecy!

Shortly after this St. Joseph is told by an angel to get out of the area, that the king is planning on killing their child. So they end up refugees in a foreign land for a few years. The only other event we know of during Jesus' youth was when he was 12 and he was lost in the Temple for three days. What a worry and concern that must have been.

Again, I can't stress it enough that a holy family is not a family without problems or heart aches. It's how we deal with those problems that really matters. Our families today therefore can learn much from the readings of this Feast of Holy Family. If God can work through such unlikely people as Abram and Sarai, Simeon and Anna; God can surely work through you or a family member just as easily. Let us trust in ourselves and in our families, flawed though they may be, and allow the Christian promise to come out. Then this will be blessed Christmas season and Blessed year ahead. We must always be faithful to God and we must deal with each other with fairness, kindness, patience and love. **May God's blessings be with you and your families today and throughout the coming year 2021**

*Thank you all again for your love, Care and concern for me as a member of St. Ann family. For the many wonderful gifts, I have received from you this Christmas and many during the year. My attitude will always be that of Gratitude.*

**Fr. Mark**