

We are all part of the Holy Family

c-b-Holy Family December 31, 2017

Undoubtedly many of you, over the past few days have spent time with your families. During that time you told the same old stories. You listened as young mom's and dad's told another year of the exploits of their children. You prepared and ate some of your family's traditional foods. And perhaps unfortunately even got into some of the disagreements that have lingered in families for decades. Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family and probably many of you are thinking, "I am sure that the Holy Family—Jesus, Mary and Joseph—were an extraordinary family and God laid out the red carpet for them, wherever they went, and whatever they did. Our family is nothing like the Holy Family."

I think there is this myth that the Holy Family walked 30cms off the ground, and everything was handed to them on a silver platter. But let us examine this myth. 1) To be pregnant before wedlock was considered a great disgrace. Joseph had to be convinced by an angel to marry Mary—otherwise he would have dismissed her quietly. 2) Mary had to endure a journey to Bethlehem, when she was nine months pregnant, because some emperor in Rome wanted to do a census. 3) Mary and Joseph had to become refugees in Egypt, immediately after Jesus was born, because the local king wanted to kill him. This is definitely not a family that had everything handed to them on a silver platter. Indeed when Mary and Joseph came to present their child in the temple, they offered a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. Now if you read the law as it states in the book of Leviticus (12:8) it states, "When the days of her purification are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb in its first year for a burnt-offering, and a pigeon or a turtle-dove for a sin-offering. If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtle-doves or two pigeons, one for a burnt-offering and the other for a sin-offering; and the priest shall make atonement on her behalf, and she shall be clean. (Lev 12:8) The fact that Mary and Joseph only brought in two turtle does is an indication that they did not have much money.

The etymology of the word holy comes from the Hebrew word "qodesh" which means "apartness, set-apartness, separateness, sacredness." In the New Testament, the word for holy is "hagios" and means set apart, reverend, sacred, and worthy of veneration." What sets the Holy Family apart from other families is their faith. Joseph never questioned what God asked him to do. Mary never questioned what God asked her to do. Jesus never questioned what his father asked him to do. And theirs was not a blind faith, that they merely went through the motions. They truly believed that God was with them, and although they may not fully understand that was being asked of them...they always said yes.

This is what marks someone as holy--what sets them apart from the mere ordinary--that they were always ready to do what God asks them to do. Abraham and Sarah were well past child bearing years when they were finally given an heir, and even then, when Isaac was the only heir, Abraham was not afraid to raise his knife to sacrifice his son. He may not have understood what God had in mind, but he never questioned God's requests.

The real question is not what sets the Holy Family apart from other families....what makes them holy. The real question is can our family be a holy family. The simple answer is yes...but a qualified yes. To be a holy family we must model our family on Jesus, Mary and Joseph...and not what our society deems a family to be. If you were to ask our society what makes a family they would say: 1) They are consumers and help with the economy. Society would also say, that to be a family you must be productive. If you are not productive you can be dispensed with. And we see this with the number of people who are never visited in the seniors homes. You see it with the number of disabled children

being aborted before they have a chance a life, and you see it in the rising incidence of Euthanasia, which is the ultimate way of getting rid of those that are “Useless.” What I find extremely disheartening is that society is telling us to be a family you do not even need to be in your right mind. The legalization of marijuana allows people to escape the reality of their lives.

Thankfully the Church is holding us accountable. And there are a great many parallels between our family’ and the Holy Family. Just as Jesus as taken to the temple shortly after his birth, we do the same thing. Shortly after a child is born, young parents bring the child to the priest so he can baptize the child. However, it must be noted that when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple, it was to present the child...offer the child. The laws in the Old Testament are very clear, “You must give me the first born of you sons. (Ex 22:29). The offering was in part, an offering for the purification of the women...and a recognition that the first born male belonged to God. This “Buying back” of the child was a way of acknowledging God’s prior claim. Would that every child who was baptized, was seen as someone who was set apart, someone who would be raised not according to the norms of society, but according to the norms of God.

What Mary and Joseph were doing, and in a sense what every couple who brings their child for baptism is doing...it is a recognition that they must bring up the child in the faith. This is not just a ritualistic action. This is a promise made to God that you will do all that you can to raise the child in the faith. Mary and Joseph did not take that promise lightly. No parent should take that promise lightly.

Indeed no one can ever take their faith lightly. Simeon was a righteous and devout man, and the Spirit rested on him. Meaning he saw with the same eyes of God. So when Mary and Joseph brought in the child Jesus, he didn’t see a small child. He saw the Son of God, the Messiah. Now I cannot even begin to say how many times I have heard, or even said, that each one of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Meaning each one of us has been set apart. Meaning if we truly saw with the eyes of God, we would see the dignity that each human being has, and that dignity must be cherished in every way. Think about this...and then think about how you treat your children—grandchildren—neighborhood children—neighbours—homeless persons—drunks on the street. Each and every person is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do we cherish them as such.

The feast of the Holy Family is a reminder that we are all holy, and that in God’s eyes we are all his children. When we do not treat one another with the dignity of a child of God, we are doing a disservice to the Holy Family (pause) and all of God’s family.