

## **12.30.2018 – Feast of Holy Family - Jesus Mary Joseph**

**I Sam 1:20-22, 24-28 I Jn 3:1-2, 21-24 Lk 2:41-52**

Christmas is very much a family time. Most of us will have made contact with our families over the Christmas. Today we celebrate the feast of one particular family. We traditionally think of it as a family of three, Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Yet, these three would have thought of their family in a much wider sense. The extended family was very important in Jesus' time and culture. There were aunts and uncles, grandparents, cousins, nephews and nieces in Jesus' family. Many of us will have happy memories of our extended family. I am sure many people here would acknowledge the hugely significant influence of members of the extended family on their own upbringing, be it grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins.

Christmas is such a family occasion, it can be a difficult time for those who do not have family, for one reason or another, those who live alone because family members have died or are living abroad. The blood family is not the only unit to which we belong. Through baptism we belong to a wider family, the family of faith, the family of the church. That wider family of the faith can be very important to those who have little in the way of blood family members. Early in his ministry Jesus set about the formation of a new family, the family of his disciples, whom he called his brothers and sisters. In this morning's second reading, Saint John declares that we are already the children of God, the sons and daughters of God, sharing in Jesus' own relationship with God, as his brothers and sisters.

Important as our blood family is to all of us, we need that wider family of faith as well. Our parish community is the local expression of that wider family of faith, and our parish church is where that local family of faith gathers for worship. We gather together as family in our parish church, as brothers and sisters in Christ, sons and daughters of God. The parish church is the house of God where we are all welcome as the

family of the Lord's disciples. The blood family has much to receive from this wider family of faith. It has much to give to that wider family as well.

Jesus was born into a family, as most of us were. His family would have been very conscious that they were members of a wider family of faith, the family of the Jewish people. This family of faith met weekly in the local synagogue to hear the word of God proclaimed. They went up to Jerusalem for the great feasts that were celebrated in the Temple there. In this morning's gospel reading we are told that every year the parents of Jesus used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. Jesus' parents were careful to initiate him into the traditions of this wider family. They had him circumcised on the eighth day; they brought him to the local synagogue in Nazareth every Sabbath, and occasionally brought him to Jerusalem for the great feasts. Parents today make efforts to initiate their children into the wider family of faith to which they belong, starting with bringing them to the church for baptism. Many parents bring their children to the family Mass here on a Sunday, and encourage them to get involved in the program for First Communion and Confirmation.

Yet, as parents, you know better, when it comes to that wider family of the church, children do not always take the path that parents might like them to take. They often stand up to their parents in relation to belonging to this wider family, especially when they get to a certain age.

Now in honoring the Holy family today, we also honor all families, big or small. And in honoring all families, we honor the family of God, the Church. But most especially, we focus in on the hidden, day-to-day life of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

The family home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph would have been, in numerous ways, just like any other home. They would have related together, talked, had fun, disagreed, worked, eaten, dealt with problems, and encountered everything else that makes up daily family life.

But with that said, their family would not have been exempt from daily toil, hurt and challenges that face most families. They would have encountered misunderstanding and gossip from others. They would have had to fulfill all daily chores, earn a living, put food on the table, and attend gatherings of family and friends and the like. They would have lived normal family life in every way. What kept the Holy Family together throughout all of these trails and crosses? The answer is love for each other and God – Forgiveness.

This is significant because it reveals God's love for family life. The Father allowed His Divine Son to live this life and, as a result, elevated family life to a place within the Trinity. **The holiness of the Holy Family reveals to us that every family is invited to share in God's divine life and to encounter ordinary daily life with grace and virtue.**

Now we cannot leave without recalling some thoughts, which we can take for ourselves from Nazareth family

1. a. We learn from its silence. We need this wonderful state of mind in the times of difficulties, conflicts, tribulations, pain and suffering, doubts etc. The silence of Nazareth should teach us how to meditate in peace and quiet, to reflect on the deeply spiritual, and to be open to the voice of God's inner wisdom and the counsel of his true teacher.  
  
b. Nazareth can teach us the value of study and preparation, of meditation, of a well-ordered personal spiritual life, and of silent prayer that is known only to God
2. We learn about family life. Nazareth family serves as a model of what the family should be. It shows us the family's holy and enduring character and exemplify its basic function in Society, a community of love and sharing, beautiful for the problem it

poses and the rewards it brings, in sum, the perfect setting for rearing children – and for this, there is no substitute.

3. In Nazareth, the home of a craftsman's son, we learn about work and discipline it entails. We would especially like to recognize its value – demanding yet redeeming – and to give it proper respect. It reminds everyone that work has its own dignity, but it is not an end in itself. Its value and free character, however, derive not only from its place in the economic system, as they say, but rather from the purpose, it serves.

Reflect, today, upon your own family life. Some families are strong in virtue, some struggle with basic communication. Some are faithful day in and day out; some are broken and deeply wounded. No matter the case, know that God wants to enter more deeply into your family life just as it is right now. He desires to give you strength and virtue to live as the Holy Family. Surrender yourself and your family, this day, and invite the Triune God to make your family a holy family. Holy Family conquers the crosses through love for each other and love of God. Do our families hold together in times of difficulties and crosses through Love and Forgiveness?

**Let us pray:** Lord, I do offer myself to you this day and in doing so I offer you my family. I offer every relationship, be it good or difficult, and I offer every challenge we face. Please come and sanctify my family, making it holy in imitation of your family in Nazareth. **Jesus, I trust in You.**