

Holy Family

Preached December 30, 2018; St. Peter Catholic Church, The Dalles, Oregon

Jesus Christ came into the light of day the same way we all did; he was born of a woman. He entered a human family in which the Virgin Mary was his Mother and St. Joseph, the husband of the Virgin, filled the role of the father.

Every one of us belongs to a family, even if someone might be the only surviving member of the family. Every one of us has an ancestral line. Every one of us has a father and mother. Even, given the perversions that have been introduced by modern medicine, someone who is conceived 'in vitro' and carried to term in a rented womb, has a biological father and mother.

Human life is first of all always life in a family; our identity comes first of all from our family. Even the priest or nun does not escape this law, because not only are they born into and grow up in a family, but even more because they belong to the Church, which is the family of Jesus, united by his Blood.

Human life is first of all life in a family; wounded families mean wounded lives. Today family life is lived not so much on a battlefield as in the middle of a massacre. Families that possess even the appearance of health seem to be more and more an exception.

Families today stand very much in need of the healing brought by the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. The Church, while she is wounded in the life of so many wounded families and the offspring of so many wounded families, because she is also the extended family of Jesus, is also the place of healing.

Now Jesus brings us forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God through his suffering, offered as an expiatory sacrifice on the Cross. Nevertheless, what Jesus offered on the Cross was the strength of his perfect manhood, body and soul. So he not only expiates our sins, he gives us the example of a perfect life and the grace to follow him. The light of his mind gives light to our mind; the strength of his will gives strength to our will; the purity and order of his human emotions, gives peace and calm to our emotional life.

So also, while the Holy Family experienced poverty, persecution, and exile, Mary and Joseph loved each other as no husband and wife ever did before and after, and they loved the Son entrusted to their care as no father and mother ever did, before or after. As a result, the health of Jesus' perfect family brings healing to our wounded families. So also the health of his perfect family brings healing to the wounds that we have received because of the disorders of our own upbringing.

For that reason we must contemplate the example the Holy Family and offer ourselves and our families to receive a true re-education in the Holy Family of Nazareth. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph want to welcome us into their home.

Since the Holy Family is sometimes referred to as the 'earthly Trinity' it will be good to contemplate their example in the light of the heavenly Trinity; the Holy Trinity, the perfect communion of life and love that is God himself.

In the Holy Trinity, there is perfect order, perfect equality, and perfect unity. The Father is first because the others come from him and he from no other; the Son is second because he comes from the Father alone; the Holy Spirit is third because he comes from the Father and the Son and no divine person comes from him.

Yet, in the Trinity, even though there is an order derived from origin, there is perfect equality because the Son receives the whole godhead from the Father and the Holy Spirit receives the whole godhead from the Father and the Son. They are each fully and perfectly God.

Finally, there is perfect unity of substance and perfect unity of love. They are not three equal gods, but only one true God. Yet, while retaining their distinction in their unity there is a perfect and complete gift of love; the Father gives himself completely to the Son; the Son gives himself completely to the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeds from the two as the divine "breath" that shows the mutual bond of their love.

Turning now to the Holy Family, we find a sort of reflection of the Holy Trinity. Jesus himself is the very Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. St. Joseph stands in place of the Father. The Virgin Mary manifests the presence and love of the Holy Spirit.

Still, every created reflection of the Trinity will fall short of the reality. We would like to see the Trinity reflected in equality because we find that inequality injures our pride. God, however, loves order, which in the created world always involves some sort of inequality, but God equalizes things through love.

In the Holy Family, we see two sorts of order: the order of outward authority and the order of interior holiness. We should observe that in the human world outward authority ultimately is meant to serve interior holiness. In the order of outward authority of the Holy Family, Joseph, as head of the family, is first, Mary is second, and Jesus is third; in the order of interior holiness, Jesus, the Holy One of God, is first, Mary is second, Joseph is third. Nevertheless, in this family devoid of pride and egoism they are all bound together in the union of love.

So, how does an ordinary family follow the example of the Holy Family?

Let me give some general recommendations. A caveat is in order because these might not apply in all circumstances, especially in situations of extreme disorder or

grave abuse. Still, the general outline is important as it provides us with a vision of a true normal over against the perverse madness of the “new normal” that is taking over our public culture.

So first, *being together and living together*.

The Holy Family teaches us that family life is not built up by having lots of things, but by being together, being present to each other, and living together. A family has a home, not a dormitory.

So then, a family should eat together and pray together; work together and play together.

Of course, modern life makes that difficult, both by way of the structure of the economy and the increasing perversity of the public culture. That means in today’s world a family requires tremendous vision, commitment, and resolve in order to stay together.

Second, *simplicity*.

As much as possible get rid of electronics, cell phones, and sports; family life should not be about chasing children around from here to there following and promoting their sporting lives. Nor should a child’s day be scheduled minute by minute from the time he wakes up to the time he goes to sleep.

Third, *respect*.

Respect differs according to the relationship and position in the family.

Wives: respect your husband, stop nagging, and instead give way to your husbands as Mary gave way to Joseph; let them lead, welcome their leadership; accept your womanhood and bring the warmth of love to your home.

Husbands: for your part, reciprocity is needed. If you want the respect of your wife you will need to listen to her and be attentive to her needs. If you want her to honor your position as head of the household, you will need to step up and actually be a leader, like St. Joseph, first of all in the things of God; the husband and father should be the priest of the domestic church, the family. A true leader needs to have his priorities in order. Mary didn’t need to tell St. Joseph to bring the child to temple to present him to the Lord; Joseph knew that was his responsibility; Mary didn’t need to tell Joseph that they should make a yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover, Joseph knew that was his responsibility as a Jewish man and he fulfilled his responsibility because that is the sort of man he was. Further, being a leader doesn’t mean just giving orders, raising your voice, and applying brute force. True authority is rooted in moral character. You will need to learn to guide your children with both gentleness and authority.

Children, listen to your parents, they have something to teach you - even once you have reached your teen years - obey them, don't lie to them, and don't talk back to them.

Finally, let us all look to the example of Jesus, the Son of God, who in today's Gospel first manifested his divine sovereignty by remaining behind in the Temple, his heavenly Father's house, but then did something even more amazing: He voluntarily stepped back into the human world of the Holy Family, he returned with Joseph and Mary to Nazareth and *he was obedient to them*. The Son of God obeyed his human parents. Joseph and Mary commanded the Son of God - with what reverence they must have given those commands - and he obeyed.

What did Jesus do from the time of his birth until he came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John at thirty years of age? He didn't work a single miracle. Rather, he obeyed Joseph and Mary.