

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH, YEAR B

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is a model for all families. Being a Holy Family does not mean that everything was smooth for them. It was a family with many ups and downs.

Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary's pregnancy was a troubling situation for both Mary and Joseph. They, however, accepted the situation when each of them was ministered to by the angel of the Lord. Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). "When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son" (Matthew 124-25).

Mary gave birth to Jesus in a very difficult circumstance. After a long journey on foot from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of about 100 miles, there was no inn to lodge in. They went to a shed in a farm where Mary gave birth to Jesus. There was no nurse or midwife; only Mary and Joseph. We can only imagine how tough it was for the two of them.

As we read in the Gospel of today, at the presentation of Jesus in the temple, Mary was told that a sword would pierce her heart. No mother would be glad to hear such a prediction concerning her baby. Her first experience of the sword piercing her heart was when the Holy Family fled to Egypt to save Jesus from Herod's wrath. It was another traumatic experience when Jesus got separated from them after the feast of Passover in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple after searching for him for three days.

In all their ups and downs, Mary and Joseph remained together. As the Gospel says, Jesus grew under them and became strong, filled with wisdom; and God's favor rested upon him.

The family was the first institution created by God. Jesus tells us that marriage, which is the foundation of every family, is sacred and a mystery. He says, "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Mark 10:6-9).

We are aware that the family as an institution is under attack. Despite the attack, the Catholic Church's teachings have not changed. The Church has not changed the definition of marriage as a covenant, and not a contract. The Church maintains that marriage is a union between a man and his wife. The Church has not changed her teaching that life begins at conception. The Catholic Church has not changed her teaching that parents have the right to bring their children up in the ways of the Lord. The Catholic Church has not changed her teaching that children are obliged to provide for aged parents.

What can we learn from the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in order to keep our families from falling apart, and also keep our families as sacred as God made them to be from creation? Pope Paul VI described the Holy Family as a school of Nazareth where we learn true science of life and the higher wisdom of divine truth.

The first and second readings tell us about Abram's faith in God, while in the Gospel we see the faith of Simeon and Anna. Mary and Joseph were persons of great faith as already mentioned above. We are, therefore, encouraged to put faith in God all our considerations and actions. Faith in God is the master key to a happy home.

When a family puts their faith in God, the Spirit of God easily ministers to the members to support one another, encourage one another and be present for one another.

Love for one another increases with time when members of a family put their faith in God. When they lose faith in God, love for one another decreases with time.

Faith in God makes us, humbly, listen to God through listening to one another. Faith in God makes us realize that life is better as 'us' not as 'me.' Faith in God encourages us to value self-denial and self-sacrifice for the good of those in need.

Faith in God enables us to be obedient to God and to one another. Members of a family experience peace when they respect and obey each other. Disobedience is one of the vices that disintegrate families.

One of the signs of faith in God is prayerfulness. A family that prays together, stays together. There is power in prayer. A prayerful Christian is a faithful Christian and a powerful Christian.

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