

Homily of the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph Year C 2021

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128:1-5; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:41-52

The celebration of today's feast is of utmost importance to all of us because we all belong to families; and the family is the first and the greatest institution God created. Unfortunately, we are passing through a difficult time whereby many families are fractured and hurting in one way or another. Our difficult situation is compounded by an increase in instability in families caused by changing family values; and social, political, and economic reasons. Since families are the foundations and the constituents of societies, more fractured, hurting, and unstable families mean more fractured, hurting, and unstable societies.

The family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph being a holy family does not mean that everything was well and smooth for them. It was a lowly family with many ups and downs; but they held together in all their ups and downs. Therefore, the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is a model for all families.

Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary's pregnancy brought 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). As for Joseph, "When [he] 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 1:24-25).

Mary gave birth to Jesus in a very difficult circumstance. After a long journey on foot from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census, a distance of about 100 miles (161 kilometers), there was no inn to lodge in. They went to a shed in a farm where Mary gave birth to Jesus. It was not recorded that any nurse or midwife was available to help. We can only imagine how tough it was for the two of them all alone when Jesus was born.

We read in Matthew Chapter 2 how Herod tried to kill Jesus which made the Holy Family to flee to Egypt. And today's gospel tells us how Jesus got separated from Mary and Joseph after the feast of Passover in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple after searching for him for three days.

We have so much to learn from the Holy Family that can help us to keep our families from falling apart. Pope Paul VI describes the Holy Family as a school of Nazareth where we learn true science of life and the higher wisdom of divine truth. The Holy Family teaches us faith in God and obedience to him. The family teaches us selflessness, sacrifice, forbearance, understanding, harmony, and love.

The first reading reminds us that, "God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority over her [children]." Unfortunately, many parents have handed over this God given authority to their children. The reverse has become the case; whereby many children have authority over their parents, and able to control and manipulate their parents as they wish.

The first reading enumerates various blessings received by children who honor their parents, and who take care of their parents in their old age. However, Sirach 3:16 mentions curses upon children who disrespect their parents, and who abandon their parents in their old age: "Those who neglect their father are like blasphemers; those who provoke their mother are accursed by their Creator". On the other hand, the second reading challenges bad and abusive parents not to provoke (maltreat) their children, so that they may not become discouraged (Colossians 3:21).

There is no perfect family. Turning on one another and violence to one another only make matters worse. St. Paul encourages us in the second reading how to cope with family imperfections in order to avoid disorderliness, instability, breakdowns, and disintegrations: "Put on ... heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. ... And over all these put on love And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, ... And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Colossians 3:12-17). We can see, here, that St. Paul encourages families to pray together. "A family that prays together stays together."

We thank God for the gift of our families; biological, kinsmen and women, religious, church, business, groups, associations, and so on. May we learn from the Holy Family how to hold together. May we understand that the values that unite us are more than vices that divide us. May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph pray for our families and society to be saved from instability, breakdowns, and disintegrations. Amen.

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