

## **Homily of the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus Mary and Joseph Year B, 2023**

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128:1-5; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:22-40

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, hurting, and disordered in one way or another. Since families are the foundations and the constituents of societies, more disordered families mean more disordered societies. Therefore, the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is a model for all families.

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. 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." (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 on 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.

As we read in today's gospel, at the presentation of Jesus in the temple, Mary was told that a sword would pierce her heart. The first experience of a sword piercing her heart was when the family fled to Egypt to save Jesus from being murdered by Herod. A sword pierced her heart when Jesus got separated from her and Joseph after the feast of Passover in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple after searching for him for three days. Finally, a sword pierced Mary's heart when she witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and death. In all the ups and downs, Mary and Joseph remained together. Today's gospel concludes, Jesus "grew under them and became strong, filled with wisdom; and God's favor rested upon him" (Luke 2:40).

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 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. Unfortunately, too, the God-given authority has been snatched from many parents by governments, social media, and gadgets.

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 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 make matters worse. For this reason, the second reading encourages us on how to cope with family imperfections to avoid disorderliness, breakdowns, and disintegrations. The reading says, "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." (Colossians 3:12-17). Also, it is important that family members pray together. "A family that prays together stays together."

Our reflection today goes beyond the biological families we come from. It also, applies to other external families we belong to: church family, religious family, business family, groups, associations, and so on.

May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph pray for our families and our society to be saved from disorderliness, breakdowns, and disintegrations. Amen.

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