

Homily of the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus Mary and Joseph, Year C, 2024

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

Today's feast is of utmost importance to all of us since we all belong to families; and the family is the first and the greatest institution God created. No doubt, 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, fractured, hurting, and disordered families mean fractured, hurting and disordered societies. Therefore, the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is a model for all families.

Being a holy family did 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.

However, they 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. 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.

During the presentation of Jesus in the temple, Simeon prophesied to Mary 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, as we read in today's gospel. Finally, a sword pierced Mary's heart when she witnessed Jesus carrying the cross, his crucifixion, his death, and his burial.

As for Jesus, he "grew under them and became strong, filled with wisdom; and God's favor rested upon him" (Luke 2:40). As we can see, the Holy Family was not spared from earthly troubles.

Therefore, 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. We draw courage and wisdom from the Holy Family's experience when we think we have done everything right, yet misfortunes happen to us.

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 are able to control and manipulate their parents as they wish. Sadly, the God-given authority has been snatched from many parents by governments, social media, and gadgets. Proverbs 22:15 says, "Folly is bound to the heart of a youth, but the rod of discipline will drive it out." And Proverbs 13:24 says, "Whoever spares the rod hates the child, but whoever loves will apply discipline." We are seeing what the society is becoming as we do not apply discipline on our children. One obvious result is that we have a generation that is spiritually hollow, unable to see meaning in hard work and perseverance, and incapable of prevailing in hardship.

The first reading contains blessings for children who honor their parents and who take care of their parents in their old age. However, Sirach 3:16 warns 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 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 our biological families. It extends to the 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 us and for our families. Amen.

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