

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

St. Luke 2:22-40

Today, the first Sunday in Christmastide and the seventh day of the Christmas Octave, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

The Holy Family is the model for all families for families are an integral part of God's creation for they are created by the lifelong fidelity of a man and woman in marriage whose love for one another overflows into the birth and raising of children. Just as marriage is a participation in the life of God because it is an image of the intimate love within the Holy Trinity and the intimate love of God for every man and woman, so the family is a participation in the life of God because it is a reminder that God's love is so great that rather than holding it within Himself God chose to see the outpouring of that love in the creation of mankind as His children and the union of all men and woman with Him our Heavenly Father. Within our families and in being with other families we should see a reflection of God's own love for each of us.

Families are a place of great blessing but they are also a place of great pain. Our family knows the best of us and the worst of us. The family can be a place of refuge amidst the torments of our life but also a place, at times, of misunderstandings and strain. For the most part, families do not choose to argue within themselves but often the security of a family gives us the sense of space to be able to unleash the difficulties that we all bear. Of course we should all have a place of refuge where we can unburden ourselves but we must be just as ready to remind our family of how much we care for them. Often we can demand a great deal of patience and understanding from the family but we are

not as ready to make the sacrifices necessary to give patience and understanding when others need space to vent their frustrations.

As we read later in the Gospel of St. Luke when the boy Jesus was lost for three days in the Temple in Jerusalem, all families suffer misunderstandings. The Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph thinking that Jesus was somewhere with the rest of the travellers, some of which were probably aunts and uncles and cousins, were distraught when they realised that Jesus must have been left behind in the city in Jerusalem. Finding their son in the Temple with a group of men discussing religion they were upset that Jesus had not left with them as He should have but stayed behind without telling anyone. The words spoken between His parents and Himself show the frustration that all families experience.

Much of that frustration and misunderstanding, as it may have been in part with the Holy Family, concerns the place of each member of the family within the family and each person's place in the world. Adolescence causes great pain and is a cause of great pain. Teenagers suffer in the conflict between the two worlds that they are supposed to inhabit; that of being seen as a child but with the expectations of adulthood. Parents suffer too for it is difficult for them to see that the boy or girl who would run to greet them or cry in their arms seems distant and finds refuge with unknown friends.

Families are dynamic—they grow and as they grow they change and change is often difficult. The Holy Family themselves experienced this growth and change and difficulty as heard in this Gospel. The answer does not lie in demanding that things stay the same nor in submitting to ever-growing demands for independence, but in understanding that we all change but that amidst those changes the family should be a place of support and love and stability. We must recognise that most of us sin because of anxiety and frustration and torments and that if we can see that members of our family will sometimes be angry or harsh or distant, not by choice, but because it is the only way that most of us

know how to express our inner torments. Then maybe we will see that the space we need to be angry as well as joyful is the same space that they want as well.

Pray always that the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, who suffered poverty and threats of death and exile and misunderstandings, will be the patrons of your family so that in them we will all see that families are not about being perfect but about sticking together no matter what.