

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

In the Gospel today, Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple to present him to the Lord; to be consecrated to his Father; to his earthly mission; and to us; to OUR salvation.

Mary and Joseph experience the profound reaction and prophetic words of Simeon and Anna which must have left them contemplating all that would unfold in their lives over the coming years.

Then after this dramatic scene, they returned to their home in Nazareth, where Luke tells us that Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Then comes 30 years in the life of this Holy Family that are largely undocumented, with the exception of the account of Mary and Joseph losing track of Jesus in Jerusalem when he was 12 years old. We are told he went home and was obedient to his parents. This is the model God has given for us.

Today's Solemnity of the Holy Family reminds us that our family is a bedrock of love. We count on them and we know that they count on us.

The family is the cradle of life and love into which we are born and grow. That bedrock also reminds us that we can always count on the love of God as well.

In today's First Reading, Sirach reminds us of the blessings available to us when we care for and honor our mother and father: "When he prays, he is heard." Who doesn't want or need that? God's Will is for us to love and take care of our families.

Yet, we can't always eliminate moments of anxiety from our family lives.

We all know of truly tragic and heart-breaking family situations –

- divorce,
- children lost to drugs,
- squabbles, large or small
- misunderstandings, or even betrayals.

When hardships come, we can remind ourselves that Jesus hasn't forgotten about us. We need to rely on God to help us through these challenges and remember how he modeled love for us.

In our 2nd Reading, St. Paul writes,

"Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection."

This model of love, mutual respect, help, and reliance is meant to be reflected in our society as well. When it's not lived in the family, it's no surprise that society suffers as a result.

Our family is more than what they do or don't do for us, and more than what they mean or don't mean to us: they are our family. God has given them to us, and us to them. We are all brothers and sisters in the great family of our Heavenly Father.

We're made holy by sharing in the life of God, through our Baptism, and we are "beloved" because we have received the gift of life itself, no strings attached.

With a spirit of gratitude to God for the gift of life and the gift of his Son, we serve and love each other in our family, avoiding bitterness and provocations.

The Holy Family is the model for the Christian family, and yet we might be tempted to look upon the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph and think: There's no way my family could ever be like them!

After all, Both Jesus and Mary were without sin, and Joseph was a very holy man himself! The Holy Family still serves as a model of what the family should be – not perfect, just Holy.

In our families, we are responsible for one another's spiritual growth and destiny. The primary role of marriage is for spouses to help one another get to heaven. And the primary role of parents is to help their children get to heaven.

WE just celebrated Christmas Day, the BEGINNING of the Christmas season!
NOW is the time for great joy.

NOW is the time to pause and wallow in the birth of our savior.

- Let's continue to enjoy the lights, the music and the holiness of the season with our families.
- Let's pray at home together as a family.
- Maybe pray the Holy Family Novena which you can find online. It is beautiful!
- And don't forget how very important it is to make time for one another.

As we continue to contemplate the Holy Family,

- let's thank the Lord for the wise and beautiful design of the family, in which that life takes shape and grows to maturity;
- let's thank him for his personal love for each one of us and promise that we will imitate that love in the way we live out our family lives.

Heavenly Father,

Have mercy on our families.

Let our family be the place where your only Son is free to dwell.

Let us open our door and embrace the mysterious and Holy Family of Nazareth.