

Holy Family - 2020

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14; Col 3:12-21 (long); Lk 2:22,39-40 (short)

This Sunday we take a look at the next step after having a baby - being a family. Mary and Joseph - after the birth of Jesus - have now become a complete family. In the Holy family we see a wonderful example of what our families can be, and also a model of God's love. It is in the family that we learn not only how to love others, but also learn about being a member of the family of God our Father. Not all families match the ideal represented but the Holy Family, however, it is still important to look at this ideal for a guide for our personal families and also for our the life of our church family. There are three things about family that we can reflect on today: (1) a sense of a place and position within the family unit, (2) the connection of the personal individual family to a larger family headed by God, and (3) the responsibilities, duty, and sacrifice that is part of a family life.

In terms of place and position, our first reading is clear: *God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons.* The second reading echoes the same theme with an interesting added part: *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged.* . The parents may be over the children in respect and authority, but a mutual love and respect is due. Even the line about wives being subordinate to husbands - which troubles many (I tacked that one head on in a homily a couple years back, and will do so again next time). This line is actually counteracted by the command of the husband to love his wife and avoid bitterness. There may be an order and authority in the family, but this is not cause for bitterness, this is not cause for bullying. It is a trick to maintain the lines of respect for authority and for everyone to be able to respect each other and give in when that is necessary.

But each of our personal families is part of a larger family. Living in our personal families sets the stage for taking our place in the larger family headed by God. God is the ultimate head of the family and due all respect. Mary and Joseph act like good children as they come to the temple in the Gospel today *in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord* - they were being obedient to God. But God is not a stuck-up dictator Father. As they come to that temple to obey their Father, they are carrying in their arms the ultimate act of parental humility. A God who cares so much for his children that He comes down to them as a helpless

little baby. God is not above humbling himself - you can be the parent and in charge, but can still be humble and be vulnerable. We are all part of that family of God, and all have our place in that family. We should follow the example of our Father - respect the natural authority that is there (like younger siblings give difference to older siblings or the one that mom and dad have put in charge while they are away). But that does not mean that the older sibling does not realize when the younger is correct and follow. I can see how I grew, as the oldest child, when I was in charge and my younger sister attempted to usurp my authority - I had much to learn in those days of mutual leadership - lessons that continue to unfold. In our families - we learn to behave in the larger family headed by God our Father.

But family life is not all about authority - it is about responsibility, duty, and sacrifice. I spent part of this past Christmas Day with two brothers. I have known them since they were teens and now they are young men. They were adopted from a family that was in shambles, and are presently estranged from their adopted family, yet, they still crave family connections. The younger one really wanted to get together with his brother and I have become a surrogate father and helped facilitate it. The older one now is part of his girlfriend's family - but he did feel he needed to give at least some time to his brother. In family life we need to be able to sacrifice ourselves and our plans for family members. Listen to these tender words from the first reading: *My son, take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not as long as he lives. Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him; revile him not all the days of his life.* The second reading speaks about conditions that must be in place in our personal family and also our family of the church: *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; if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.*

We must do as the Lord God who is highest in authority, yet humbled himself to serve his children; just like the God who calls us to a larger family under one divine Father, and gives us the ideal of the human family; just like the God who forgives us and is patient with us giving us an example of family compassion. God binds us together in the pattern of a family - a family modeled for us today in the Holy Family. May we pray and work to heal the divisions in our personal families and in the larger human family, and live together with heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, and gentleness - just as our Father in heaven calls us to do.