

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. The family of course, is the basis of society where we are formed by **each other**, learning to live in love and acceptance. Without the family unit our society would be in chaos. Many of the problems we experience today are a direct result of the breakdown of the family.

The family is also the basic unit of the Church and we often call our families little churches.

It is in the family that we first learn to communicate in meaningful ways; we learn to be charitable toward our family members; we learn about the importance of forgiveness. We learn about God's profound **love** for us through the love of our parents; we learn to discern the difference between good and evil.

There are many things today that threaten the family. Our future as a society **depends** on the strength and health of our families.

As we take time today to reflect on the Holy Family, we can take **inspiration** from Jesus Mary and Joseph as they lived their family vocation.

Let us not forget that Jesus spent the vast majority of his life living in obscurity as a **member** of the Holy Family.

Presumably, life was ordinary, going about their lives in very ordinary ways; making a living in carpentry; preparing daily meals; being with friends; and practising their faith. The very fact that Jesus spent so much time in the ordinary “transactions” of life speaks to us of the holiness of our individual families, here and now, each and every ordinary day!

But, the life of the Holy Family was far from idyllic. They had many challenges to overcome. Life was hard in ancient Palestine. The Jewish people were under occupation by a foreign power that had **little regard** for their quality of life.

Mary in particular, faced harsh judgment for being a young, pregnant girl. And now Joseph contemplated breaking off their marriage because she was pregnant by what means he knew not. Who would believe Mary and her remarkable story of an angel's visit?

Jesus himself, was ultimately born in a shelter for animals.

The Holy Family were refugees in Egypt, forced from their home by the threats of King Herod.

Both Jesus and Mary endured the death of Joseph. We all know that even with the certainty of our loved one's eternal life with God, **we still mourn their loss in our lives.**

We also know from scripture that both Joseph and Mary had **great faith** in God's promises.

From the first moment that we see Mary in Sacred Scripture, she is devoted to God. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:38).

In Mary we find humility and trust but we also find great **strength and wisdom** in this teenage girl. In her song of prayer, the Magnificat, in Luke Chapter 1, she proclaims:

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit in God my Savior, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant...for the Mighty One

has done great things for me, and holy is his name.”

But she goes on to declare: “...he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

What a declaration for a Jewish teenager to make. These are words that challenged the world she lived in. These were not words that would be welcomed by the occupying forces of the Roman Empire. But she was not afraid to speak words of truth.

She recognized the need for social change in the society around her. She was well aware of the injustices that were perpetrated against the poor and the powerless.

Joseph, had a quiet, trusting way, but he was also a man of action. There was no hesitation on his part; he got up and got busy and he did what

he had to do to protect his family and to keep them secure.

In our Gospel today we read how Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord in the temple. They were obedient to God in their faith practices.

Mary is presented as a reflective woman, **pondering** things in her heart. She was a true contemplative.

The Holy Family prayed together as they made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old.

Aside from all the inspiration we can draw on when reflecting on the Holy Family, we find other instances in scripture where we learn of the importance of the family:

One such example is in the letter to the Ephesians. It is a beautiful teaching on marriage and family in chapter five. There we read:

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a great

mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.” In this way Ephesians compares the love of the married couple to the love that Christ has for his Church.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross is an example of how families are to exist: loving each other in a sacrificial way; giving of ourselves for the good of our family.

The love and community that God intends for our families is ultimately what we see reflected in the love of the Trinity itself; God loving the Son and both in turn loving the Holy Spirit all in a relationship of love.

Family life is ultimately holy, good and pleasing to God in its many different forms: whether it be two parent families, one parent, grandparents raising grandchildren and children living in two separate households. The family is the bedrock of our society today and will continue to be so as long as our society endures.

And we mustn't forget that we are all holy because we are created as God's daughters and sons.

Jesus reinforces this truth by taking on our humanity in himself. The marriage of God and humanity has been accomplished in His incarnation. This fact never ceases to amaze and overwhelm me with gratitude.

And so we can see that the family is not some kind of evolutionary accident; that it is not some strange anomaly. The family is part of God's plan.

Let us take the time to meditate on the attributes of the Holy Family which is our model of family life. In that way we will find **inspiration** on how to be faithful, trusting, forgiving, nurturing and kind. We will learn how to speak and live the truth, no matter how hard that may be.

We will recognize that our ordinary lives lived within our families is holy, sacred, and worthy.

Through our own **holy families** we witness to the value of children and to the value and wisdom of our elders, who we cherish and look to for answers. Through our families we will witness to the value of life at all stages and all circumstances of health or disability.

Today let us “ponder” as Mary did so many times in her life, on the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Let us take the time to look at our own families and be thankful for our loved ones.

Let us always be aware of the need for truth and justice as Mary was, and may we always be inspired by the example of our Holy Family.