

HOMILY – HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH 2020

In a great many paintings, devotional prayers and Christian traditions, the Holy Family has been idealized so much that it has almost been an impossible model for modern day families to duplicate. In this Holy Family, Mary is portrayed as a perfect mother. Joseph is portrayed as a kind, understanding, and humble old man.

But that perfect picture, in many ways accurate, has the possibility of depriving us of seeing their humanness, and keeps them at a distance from us, because we honestly can't identify with a family that's so holy and perfect.

The Gospel today gives us a more understandable image of this family. Mary and Joseph are searching Jerusalem for a lost twelve-year-old Jesus, who hadn't bothered to tell them that he was staying behind. They were worried and not happy by what he had done. This incident is a good reminder that this family shared in many of the struggles and tensions of normal family life. For Mary and Joseph, holiness consisted, not in all these wonderful privileges that devotional writers like to dwell upon, but in the daily struggles to accept their situation, to cope with their problems, to take care of each other and to work at being a happy family.

All of us here together today are part of a family – not only a biological family but also a spiritual family called the Church. Like the Holy Family in the Gospel today, we have been on a variety of journeys. Those journeys have sometimes been joyful and continue to fill us with pleasant memories. Sometimes our journeys have been difficult and even unplanned. But what made these journeys bearable was that we were accompanied by loving and caring family members and friends. They stood by us and supported us in good times and bad moments.

While we may not have noticed it, Jesus was also with us. His presence was manifested by those who showed us loving support by laughing and crying with us, who offered a hand of support or a shoulder to cry on. We can face anything in life if we have family and friends around us – we never have to walk alone.

We know that this New Year will take us on new journeys, both joyful and perhaps challenging. Looking back over 2020 – we most likely had to face more challenges than we ever imagined when that year began. It was not easy living

through this unexpected pandemic and sadly it will continue to affect the way we live moving into 2021. What has kept us sane and together throughout these long months of Covid-19 – is the support and love for each other and our love of God. The love and support and caring presence we have needed have often been made difficult because we couldn't be together like we have been accustomed to in the past. I am sure we all long for the day when visits won't be on Zoom and when being together will be like it used to be.

Just as the Holy Family survived all its many trials through love and support for each other, I am sure you join with me during this Mass in hoping that all our families, our friends and our parish community will overcome all difficulties, stay safe and grow in love for each other and have a greater faith in God.