

Holy Family Sunday 2020
St. Patrick - Milford

If I were to just extol the virtues of the Holy Family, I fear that I might set too high an ideal for everyday families. It's important that we all remember that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had to face many issues not unlike those of our own households. Fortunately, the Gospel tells (in a down-to-earth way) that the Holy Family had many hard times from the very beginning of the infant Jesus' life.

Even though we honor them as the Holy Family, it does not mean they never had problems to face, as every family must. Just as every Christian has a share in the cross of Christ, the Holy Family also experienced the cross in their shared life. To mention just a few examples, we can imagine how misunderstood both Mary and Joseph must have been about the conception of Jesus before they came to live together. Joseph was even planning to divorce Mary privately before being assured that it was the work of God. Nine months later, the birthplace of Jesus was an animal shelter, since no better lodgings could be found.

They would then have to flee as refugees to Egypt because the child Jesus' life was in danger from king Herod, in much the same way as refugees from war-torn countries have to flee to save their lives. This prompts us to be more aware of, and show more empathy towards, those refugees in our own day who seek a safer life among us than they had in the countries from which they fled. St Luke has another story to illustrate what trials were faced by Mary and Joseph, in trying to understand the development of Jesus as a young person. When he was twelve, they were shocked to lose him for three days and then had to deal with the unsatisfactory explanation that he "had to be about his Father's business." Still, he returned with them to Nazareth and was subject to them, in the quiet rhythm of family life in their village. We do not hear of Joseph any more after that so we presume that he had died before Jesus began his public ministry. Then too, the public life of Jesus must have taken its toll on Mary.

In our Gospel today, we remember visit of Mary and Joseph to the Temple to present their infant Son to the Lord God. On that day of the Presentation of the Lord, old Simeon told Mary: "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted—and you yourself a sword will pierce— so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." How Mary must have been pained to hear his enemies say that Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners, and at the end, when Mary watched her son die in public disgrace, on the cross and hold his dead body in her arms.

What sustained the family of Nazareth through all of these trials and crosses? What holds families together in times of difficulty is love and trust. Whenever families are happy, it is where love and respect are highly prized among them. We pray for an outpouring of those qualities in our families today. A major threat to family life nowadays is that we don't spend enough time together, in friendly conversation. We are so busy working, socializing, using our electronic gadgets or watching TV that we have no time to talk to each other.

A true story to make an important point! A busy woman attorney was living just ten miles from her old, widowed father. All too often, months passed between her visits to him. When her father texted to ask when she might bring his grandchildren to visit him, she listed lots of reasons and excuses that kept her from doing so, court schedules, meetings, new clients, etc.

Her father then asked her, sadly, ‘When I die, will you come to my funeral?’ The daughter was indignant. “Dad, how can you ask me that? Of course, I’ll be there!” He smiled and said, “Aah! Then please forget my funeral and come to visit me now. I need you now ... more than I will then.” Message understood – a soul changed ... and the daughter began to visit him regularly after that.

Every family has a role to play in God’s dramatic story of salvation and shares in the miraculous gift of hope. Each member of a family has been willed by God to serve a unique purpose. And it was through the birth of One Solitary Life ... one child in a family ... that all of us share in the hope of salvation.