

Families are all unique, but perhaps the most unique one is the Holy Family of Nazareth: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Yet though their family is very different from any of ours, they still have much to teach us.

Back in 1964, Pope St. Paul VI made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and during his visit to Nazareth, he offered some profound reflections on the lessons taught by the Holy Family. First, he considered “the silence of Nazareth [which] should teach us how to meditate in peace and quiet... and to be open to the voice of God.” Instead of getting swept up in the loud, busy world, we can imitate the Holy Family’s quiet, prayerful life. Next, the pope continued, they show us that a family should be “a community of love and sharing,” accepting both the rewards and the problems that come with family life, and especially providing a safe place for children to grow up. Finally, in Joseph and Jesus’ labors as carpenters, we see the value and dignity of work. It is demanding, but also redeeming when united to our love for God and to provide for our family’s needs, instead of making work or profit ends in themselves.

Each of our families are different, and they can change from year to year, welcoming new members through birth, adoption, or marriage, or sadly losing members to death or (more sadly) to estrangement. Yet we recall that our families and each individual member are under God’s care. It is God Who makes our families grow, and it is to Him that we pray for healing when our families are divided. Even the members of our family who have passed away are still part of our families because God holds their souls in His care. One day, by God’s grace, we can hope to be reunited with our loved ones in God’s heavenly kingdom.

God intends for families to be communities of love, and schools of patience and forgiveness. After all, each member of a family is an imperfect human being who brings good qualities, as well as weaknesses and sins into the family. We must strive to practice patience and forgiveness in our families. We ought to reflect God’s mercy, which doesn’t just leave our loved ones to continue making the same mistakes, but leads them toward growth and repentance.

We do not own the members of our family; we cannot control them. Each of us belongs to God alone, yet He has chosen to entrust us to each other. We have a duty to care for and love one another. It is only possible to do this with well God’s help. And the greatest gift He gives to help us have more loving families is the same gift He gave to Mary and Joseph. God gives us His Son, Jesus, to live in our families and bless us with His presence.