

Holy Family

27 December 2020



As I was reflecting on this Feast Day of the Holy Family, my mind wandered back to my own family with a particular incident when I was about 10 years old. So, these places our family in the 1976 Chevy station wagon making that 10 miles trip from our house to St. Bernard Church in town. For some odd reason, the Zielinski kids proceeded with heckling and teasing, we are running late for Mass. You could see the glare of my father's eyes as he looked through the rear-view mirror. He was not happy at all! We received a lecture prior to arrival about our **"unholy behavior"** and how we needed to pray during Mass asking God to help us

behave and act like holy kids. Oh my, this was not a good start for Mass that Sunday.

We knew we were in big trouble. So, we all sat quietly and on our best behavior during Mass. At the conclusion of Mass, I remember a lady coming up to my parents and complementing them on how we were such a lovely family as the children sat there so well behaved. I recall my mother grinding her teeth with no smile, and my father not responding. I wanted to jump up and yell, “**preach it sister.**” The lady had no idea about the not so pleasant car ride to Church that morning.

I think it is easy to fall into temptation of looking at my life or my family and trying to compare it to another. I wish I could be as smart as that person, I wish my family could be as nicely dressed; I wish family could be as holy as that family. I wish I would have done this or that differently with my family. So, the thoughts go racing through our mind.

The first two readings give us some insight into virtues that bring a blessing upon a family. The first reading from Sirach talks about the fruits that come forth from honoring one's mother and father. Actually, our responsibility to do that and particularly in their old age. The second reading, the Letter of Paul to the Colossians, **“put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another.”** These are extraordinary qualities and virtues that will truly make a family more psychologically healthy and facilitate better communication.

So, what truly makes a family holy? Since I talked much about Mary in my Christmas homily, I would like to focus on someone who has no recorded word in the Bible and tends to stand in the background not calling attention to himself.

This is Joseph! I truly believe that Joseph's actions and leadership as earthly father of Jesus and husband of Mary strongly lend to the holiness of the Holy Family.

One of the greatest qualities or characteristics of holiness is obedience. The word obedience comes from the Latin root word “**obedire**” which means to listen, to be attentive to, to submit. So, we know in the Christmas story that Mary was with child before she was officially married but was betrothed to Joseph. Joseph wanted to quietly divorce her until an angel of God appeared to him in a dream, “**Joseph, be not afraid, you are to take Mary into your home.**” Joseph listens! It is almost as if Joseph received some type of training, spiritual direction to prepare himself for this sacred encounter. He was a humble man who would have spent time in worship, prayer and listening to God’s word and the teaching of the rabbi.

Next, his wife gives birth to the Son of God in a stable for farm animals. He is placed in a manger which is literally a food trough. He is born in Bethlehem which means, “**house of bread,**” and becomes food for the world and will later declare himself the “**Bread of Life.**” Shortly after the birth of Christ, Joseph is warned in a dream by an angel to take Mary and the child and head to a foreign land where they speak a foreign language with a different culture. He would have had to find

a place to live, find work to provide for the family. All unscheduled. It is not known exactly how much time they spent in Egypt but while there the angel appears again and tells Joseph to take Mary and Jesus back to Nazareth.

Joseph's response is simply one of acceptance. He does not question or demand an explanation. In silence, he responds. I truly believe this posture of silence, listening and acceptance is a movement that carries an individual and family on the journey of holiness. Joseph did not make these plans, he merely accepted the way of God.

We live in a world that is filled with noise and distractions. How can I like Joseph empty myself of noise and distractions? This I think happens when we enter into silence. Granted we cannot push the mute button on everything around us. However, I think we can make the slightest move to empty ourselves so we can better listen. This small movement is moving me and/or family toward something greater. It is a greater love; it is God's love. Joseph responded to God's loving plan. When I or members of my family look outside of

ourselves toward God's loving plan it raises us upward and forward into a greater love. This love in the Bible is called "**agape**" which is a sacrificial love which is other oriented. Obviously, it is perfectly revealed in the sacrifice of the Cross. As he fully knows the immensity of the act of obedience that would be required but fully knowing the greater love that would come in the sacrifice, "**Father, not my will but your will be done.**"

The Responsorial psalm that we just heard today, "**Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.**" We repeated this with a desire and a cry for God's help to walk in his ways. Brothers and sisters, sadly we live in a world that makes disparaging remarks about God's ways. The popular media will castigate religious leaders who take a strong stand for God's revealed beauty, goodness, and truth.

Via television, pod casts, blogs and various internet sites, people of faith will be convinced that they are the source of their own truth and obedience is about choosing your own truth which can change at any moment. Also, in our scientific driven world there seems to be this mentality that for it to be true it must be explained. This is not walking in God's ways or

responding with acceptance like St. Joseph. God does not owe us an explanation. He reveals out of a greater love.

I truly believe that every person that is sitting in this Church today or joining us online desires to grow in holiness. Growing in holiness is not accomplishing 10 tasks and crossing the finish line. It is about obedience, listening, accepting God's way, and choosing to sacrifice or offer one's self for a greater love. This does not require a perfect person or perfect circumstances. It is a humble heart that yearns for greater love. This costs nothing but only requires our response of acceptance and response to God's word like St. Joseph.

God is alive and moving in each of you. However, this might be different for each person. **Where is God calling me in my life to move toward a greater love?** **What is the sacrifice he is calling me to?** May we ask St. Joseph for the wisdom, insight, and strength to simply respond to God's movement toward a greater love that is stirring within us.