

Holy Family- A 2010  
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[Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Colossians 3:12-21; Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23](#)

*Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/122610.shtml>*

Today is Holy Family Sunday. Every year on this Sunday the lectionary has a Gospel story that models Jesus, Mary and Joseph for us as the ideal family. Last year it was the story of the missing Jesus as a youth being found in the temple. It highlighted Jesus' obedience to his parents—a theme you heard in our reading from Sirach today. The year before was the story of the infant Jesus being presented by his parents to the Lord at the Temple. (Lk 2:22-40) That story spoke of a child's destiny and a parent's sacrifice. And today we hear the story of Jesus as a toddler and his family's flight to Egypt.

So what does the Holy Family model for us? Are they the perfect nuclear family of father, mother and child? Frankly, the culture of Jesus' day and most of the cultures around the world today favor the extended family over that of the independent nuclear family of America. In some cultures there is little difference between cousins and brothers and sisters.

And in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we are redefining the family. In the US, less than half of our children live in families with one father and one mother.<sup>1</sup> That is no longer THE model, but A model. American children are being raised by married parents, unmarried parents, single parents, grandparents, same-sex parents, step parents, foster parents and undocumented parents...and those are the lucky kids with parents.

Jesus gave us his own definition of family:

*And stretching out his hand towards his disciples he said, "Here are my mother and brothers. For whosoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother. (Mt 12: 49-50)*

Today, we might come to think of our Holy Family as the perfect family and try to emulate their every aspect. I remember reading a book by Maria Von Trapp<sup>2</sup> of *The Sound of Music* fame in which she researched how a typical Galilean family lived right down to what they wore and ate. In religious zeal to be just like Jesus, one might think they could emulate him right down to what he had for dinner. My Cornish tradition of pastry and beef, however, won out over that religious devotion.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ask.com/wiki/Sociology\\_of\\_the\\_family#Statistics\\_on\\_American\\_Families](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Sociology_of_the_family#Statistics_on_American_Families)

<sup>2</sup> Let Me Tell You About My Savior

There can be a challenge in trying to imitate our Holy Family. We could think that they are so good that we could never approach such holiness. So then what's the use of trying? I mean after all, didn't they have a bit of a head start? I mean consider Mary's Immaculate Conception, Jesus' virgin birth and Joseph's... well nothing is dogmatically claimed for Joseph, but we don't have any record of him screwing up.

While imitating the Holy Family may not be about eating the same kind of breakfast, in what way are we to aspire to be the same?

Let's list some of the goods listed in our first two readings:

- Honor
- Reverence
- Care-taking
- Kindness
- Obedience
- Compassion
- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience
- Forbearance
- Forgiveness
- Submission
- Love

These are the goods of family. No matter what a person's family configuration, these goods direct us to a right relationship with each other and with God. Our readings promise God's providential response when we embrace these goods.

So is the message, "Just be good and you will be holy"? I try to be as conscientious as the next person. Now I was raised Lutheran and Catholic guilt has nothing on Lutheran guilt. We Lutherans didn't have Confession. Somehow, "Just be good" doesn't take us the full distance to happiness. "Just be good" frankly leaves a little bit to be desired in the inspiration department.

For inspiration, I am thankful to Joseph. In today's story he responded to God's messenger at least 3 times. "Get out of Dodge. Go to Egypt. Now come home. No, come to your other home." Now is that the kind of husband one would want for one's daughter? One who quits this job, takes that job, moves here or there based on dreams?

But Joseph isn't being a dreamer or being flighty. He is Joseph the faithful being open.

It is tough to be open to God if one doesn't practice at the goods I mentioned. But the goods don't get us there. God does. The inspiration of this story is how Joseph is

open to God. It is in intimacy with God that one could be so responsive. That is inspiring. That gives me hope. That allows me to see the beauty of heaven here on earth. That takes me beyond *my* sense duty and conscientiousness. That is holy.

Mary was open to God. When informed of her impending motherhood, she replied: "May it be done to me according to your word." (Lk 1:38)

*We* can respond as Mary did and as Joseph did to God's messengers. Do not be inhibited by some sense of falling short of the standards of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

You also *have* been open to God. You *continue* to grow in your openness to God. You have come in hope that at this table you take Jesus' holy presence into your very bodies.

*You* are the Holy Family.