

HOLY FAMILY – YEAR B - (2020 – All Masses)

The last line of today’s gospel reading says, “The Child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.” What parent would not want to have that said about his or her child? I have no doubt at all that one of the reasons Jesus grew and became strong and filled with wisdom was because of the influence of Joseph.

St. Joseph, the husband of Mary, had guts. He had the guts to pay attention to his dreams or, more correctly stated, he had the guts to pay attention to what God was telling him in his dreams. He had the guts to trust his inner wisdom as opposed to conventional wisdom when he discovered that Mary was pregnant before he took her into his home, and when he fled with his family to Egypt to escape the horrors of Herod who ended up sacrificing innocent children to protect his own power. Joseph was wise enough and strong enough to be led by God as to where his family would live and, more importantly, as to how they would live. Even though the gospels tell us little about him, his influence on the child Jesus had to be tremendous.

My dad had guts, too. There is one incident in my childhood that stands out. When I was in the 5th grade, my dad and I were in the car, on the way to the local high school for a meeting of parents and of students who were interested in joining the band. The meeting was in early November, just after Halloween. One of the pranks the local teenagers would play on Halloween was to take a bar of soap or a block of paraffin wax and write dirty words on the store windows. As we drove past the hardware store, there was a four-letter word on the window. I cannot say the word here but, I am sure you can figure it out from the context of the story.

I don't know if I was more naïve than other kids my age or if it was plain innocence, but I had no idea what that word meant. So, I asked my dad. He said, "We'll talk about it when we get back home." When we got back home he took me to a private place and told me about the facts of life and the meaning of that word. My dad did not have a very fancy anatomical vocabulary, but he made everything very clear. I don't know if he was nervous or not, if he was it didn't show. The last thing he said to me, though, is what has stayed with me. He said, "If you ever have questions about this, you come to me. That's what I'm here for." My dad had guts.

There is a columnist that I respect greatly. His name is John Rosemond and some years ago the Enquirer carried one of his columns entitled, "Little tyrants aren't born; they're made." He said that he recently gave a father some advice on parenting. The advice was in favor of strict obedience and the father's response was, "Oh, I don't feel comfortable with that." Mr. Rosemond said, "I felt like telling him that it wasn't about him. It was about his child. And it wasn't a matter of what he did and did not feel comfortable doing. It was a matter of his child's best interest.

Parents today need have guts, too. We need to have the guts to oppose those elements of modern culture that are dangerous to our own faith and the faith of our children. We need to trust our deeper instincts when those instincts tell us to limit our kids' screen time, to limit what comes into our homes and their devices, to say no to certain fashions, or to hold to a curfew, whatever it is. More than ever before in living memory, Christian parents need to be very, very vigilant; vigilant about what is on our children's devices, knowing their user names and passwords and, like the shepherds we heard about on Christmas, to keep watch over the lambs entrusted to their care. We need to listen to the

promptings of God through our hopes and our conscience when we are teaching our children about the importance of relationships above things, or the value of using talents for the good of all rather than simply for self-aggrandizement. We need to trust our deeper instincts rather than assume that what the general culture is espousing will be just fine for our kids.

In all of this, we need to have the guts to be willing to take our children's anger, their frustration and what they feel as hatred. Not being afraid of alienating their children's affections; the guts to be less concerned with their own discomfort rather than their child's best interest.

Joseph had guts. He had a great sacrificial love for Mary and Jesus. He showed great leadership in his family. Let's ask his help and guidance that we who are parents might do the same.