

Aloha everyone. Merry Christmas!

Just two days ago, we celebrated the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today, we gather in faith to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family -- a family of loving relationships between a wife, a husband, and a son. And not just any wife, husband, and son.

It was the SON, our God who came in the flesh to Mary, Joseph and to us.

The betrothed wife who was found with child through the holy Spirit, **“full of-grace”**.

And the husband who could have walked away from a commitment as many other men in a similar situation, but this husband didn't. He took Mary into his home as the angel of the Lord had commanded him. (cf. Mt. 1: 24)

From the outset, life wasn't smooth sailing for the Holy Family, in particular their relationship with one another.

Joseph could have made a different choice, but didn't when he learned about Mary's pregnancy before they lived together.

Mary too had had a hard time at the Annunciation and was greatly troubled when the Angel told her that she would conceive a child in her womb and name him Jesus.

And Jesus, the Begotten Son of the Father, upon coming into this world, was not wrapped in royal silk and linen but cloaked in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.

While we may not understand everything about the Holy Family, it doesn't mean that we can't learn much from them -- for in a certain sense, the Holy Family holds up for us an ideal to strive for, a model for the rest of us to embrace.

Think of all they went through.

The long journey Joseph and Mary took and a search for a place to stay on a cold-winter night – the birth of a child in a place suited for animals – and the prophecy to be fulfilled.

“You yourself a sword will pierce,”
“so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” (Lk 2: 35)

Most of us wouldn't wish that on anyone. But both Mary and Joseph made it. They persevered. They stayed together. They worked through the hardship and difficulties. They accepted their role in God's plan and the fact that they would fulfill it together. And they managed to hold on to hope in the midst of sorrow, fear, and disappointment.

We should be so lucky. Well, luck has nothing to do with it. Faithfulness and a sincere heart is the key. And what does that look like?

St. Paul, in today's Second Reading, gives us a clear picture of what healthy, holy relationships are made of:

“Heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another.” (Col. 3: 12-13a)

Sounds a little too holy and perfect, right?

Well, it should. For Paul is doing exactly what the good preacher does; he's holding up for us an ideal to strive for, an image to hold before us as we walk on this journey of faith.

Difficult? Yes. Does it take a lot of work? Absolutely. Unrealistic? Hardly.

In many ways the inspired holiness that is set before us is more real than we know. It's the life we were created for. It's the opposite that's less real -- the pettiness and jealousy and laziness and selfishness.

The bar is set incredibly high because the possibilities for us are much higher than we could ever expect. We just tend to aim low and accept mediocrity. But God wants so much more for us. And the Holy Family can assist us on the journey.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

To be a holy family is possible, but not on its own. The difficulties, struggles, missteps, and uncertainties will always be there. But the very best of us can be there too, in the midst of all of it.

No matter the circumstances, no matter what comes our way -- no matter what the magnitude or duration of our struggles or pain -- our relationships can be infused with holiness and peace, provided we take seriously our call to be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, and loving.

Doesn't sound easy. It's not, but it is possible, if we believe it to be.

The Holy Family is not only proof of that, but also can be the inspiration for us to start moving along the path to more God-centered, meaningful relationships -- no matter what else might be going on in our lives. Jesus, Mary and Joseph have shown us how to live together in love and to bear the burden in life together.

May the Holy Family inspire us to be what God wants us to be, to grow in favor with God and those around us.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, pray for us.

Amen.