

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

Year C: Sir 3:2-6, 12-14; Ps 128; Col 3:12-21; Lk 2:41-52

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Our celebration of Christmas continues today with the Feast of the Holy Family. The Holy Family remains in our thoughts and our prayers during these holy days of Christmas, as we remember everything that Mary and Joseph did to help bring into the world the Christ Child who is Our Savior. And the Church asks us to reflect on the Holy Family to learn from them how each of our own families can be strengthened and sanctified.

For our reflection from the Gospel, the Church proposes the scene of the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem when He was 12 years old. We can imagine the relief that Mary and Joseph must have felt when they finally found Him, after three days of searching. But then, we have to imagine their reaction when Jesus said to them, “*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?*”

If we didn’t know that Christ was divine and holy, we might think He was being fresh and disrespectful to His Mother and St. Joseph, by speaking to them in such a way. It almost sounds like He was insulting them for not realizing who He was and where He would be. But the Gospel tells us that Jesus returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and that He “*was obedient to them,*” as He “*advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.*” The Gospel also tells us that “*his mother kept all these things in her heart.*” Mary was pondering and reflecting on everything that happened with her Son and on everything that He said. And, as Christians, we should do the same throughout our lives.

The finding of Jesus in the Temple teaches us about the Holy Family, and also about how our own families can be sanctified and strengthened. The scene and Christ’s response to Mary and Joseph emphasizes the priority that each person in a family should give to his or her relationship with God. Even though Mary was Jesus’ Mother and Joseph was His guardian and legal father, Jesus was telling both of them that His relationship with God the Father, His *real* Father, was the most important bond and relationship in His life. It was the deepest truth about who He was and why He was born.

In the same way, our relationship with God should be the first priority in our lives. It should be the center of our identity, because it is the deepest truth about

who we are and how we should live. If all the members of a family focus more on their own personal relationship with God, it won't weaken their relationships with each other, but rather strengthen the family and unite it even more. Putting God first in our lives does not take us away from our other relationships, unless perhaps they might be sinful, because God teaches us how to be more faithful and loving to each other. A stronger personal relationship with God and fidelity to His teachings is the glue that can hold a Christian family together.

But for this to happen, members of a family may need to help each other to be faithful to God and to put Him first. For example, members of a family sometimes need to encourage each other to be faithful to God's Commandments and to make time for prayer. It's members of a family who can often encourage each other to grow in virtue and holiness. For example, one member of a family may need to help another to speak with charity or to be honest and temperate with food or drink.

Here's St. Paul's spiritual recipe for a strong and happy family, from the second reading today: *"Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another ... . And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, ... . And be thankful."* These are the virtues that can strengthen a family: kindness, compassion, gentleness, patience, humility and love. But these virtues are best achieved if each member of a family deepens a personal relationship with God through prayer and frequent confession and worthy reception of Holy Communion. This is the *Catholic* recipe for a strong family – living a sacramental life and asking God for the grace to be more faithful to Him and to the members of our family.

One of the things a priest often gets to see when he goes to anoint the dying, is the love of a faithful family who are gathered around the deathbed to usher their loved one from this life and into the arms of Christ with their prayers and gestures of love and support. It's a beautiful thing to see, a very spiritually intense moment, when faith is often deepened for all who are there. When someone we love is on the threshold of time and eternity, we become more aware of the ultimate purpose and meaning of our lives, and we see more clearly how our faith can unite our families and bring them closer together. The goal, though, is to do this throughout our lives, and not just at the end. Through the prayers of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may each of us learn to strengthen our own relationship with God, so that He can strengthen and sanctify the relationships in our families.