

Holy Family Sunday

*A Model of Love, Fidelity and Firmness of Purpose*

December 29-30, 2012/ 7:00 pm, 9:00 SVDP, 12:00 Noon, 5:00 pm

Readings: 1 Samuel 1: 20-22; 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24; Luke 2:41-52 (Year C alternate readings)

It is entirely appropriate for the Feast of the Holy Family to be situated in the context of the great season of Christmas. After all, it is quite likely that we have been spending more time than is typical this past week with our family as well as our relatives. It is part and parcel of the season. It is equally true that for our families to remain united in life and in Christian charity, we need more than nice dinners and an exchange of gifts.

Today's feast is a great gift to the church precisely because family life is at the every heart of our faith. A Church comprised without families is utterly incomprehensible. A Church whose leadership fails to honor families could be construed as a 'slight' to the most basic unit of the Church, the domestic church of the family.

The Law prescribed that faithful followers of the Lord make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for three major feasts: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. However, custom excused those who lived at a distance from all but the Passover pilgrimage. The rabbis were not in agreement about whether women and small children were exempt from the journey, but it was not uncommon for entire families to journey together. Thus, it is not at all unlikely that Jesus was walking for a time with other members of his village, with Mary and Joseph having no reason to assume that anything was amiss. Suddenly, they realize he is not traveling with the crowd, and as would any couple, they became extremely worried.

One of my earliest memories was as a pre-school student. Somehow, I had inexplicably relayed to an adult that my brother was walking me home today, and that I was not in need of a ride from the pre-arranged carpool. You can imagine my mother's horror when I did not show up.

Suddenly I was standing alone. Thanks to the kindness of two teenage girls, I was able to recall my phone number and was brought safely home from school after about an hour. I think they even bought me an ice cream cone at Bridgeman's, but I cannot be absolutely sure of that detail.

One of a parent's greatest sorrows afflicts Mary—first to lose sight of her child, and then not to understand her own child. Upon finding Jesus, she must have been filled with a mixture of emotions—joy, relief and perhaps a mixture of frustration. She was still trying to understand the full impact of what her motherhood meant, as well as the full implications of the life of Jesus yet to come. She pondered on these things in her heart, and it seems reasonable that this pondering endured for a time.

In our complicated world today, there is certainly a mixture of emotions for parents in relation to their children. As they strive for understanding, sometimes it seems to be in short supply, as does patience when one needs it the most. This Feast may well be one of the easiest with which to make connections in our daily lives. While we know that we have imperfect families, we nevertheless have hopes and dreams and wonder about God's plans for us, our brothers and sisters, children and parents.

We pray for peace and tranquility in our families, or if necessary, we begin by praying for healing. We have our hopes and dreams and we may question where God may be found in the ups and downs of family life. Some families demonstrate heroic virtue in accepting particular crosses and challenges, owing to serious health concerns, abusive relationships, and wayward children to name just a few.

Others feel at times or even in large part that the crosses have been too heavy and burdensome, and feel crushed by their inability to bear them in faith and trust. To these families, the Church's promise of prayers and

support must be heard and proclaimed. Your witness is tremendously edifying to those of us who have answered the call to a religious vocation, for our own vocations were borne from loving families, imperfect as we may all be. May we all look to the Holy Family as a model of love, fidelity and firmness of purpose.

May children be able to see the love of their parents, not just when they are showered with gifts, but more importantly when they are showered with questions, including those that begin with “why, where, when, with whom?” In truth, deep down, these questions are a sign of love and concern. In our first reading Hannah prayed assiduously for Samuel: “I am the woman who stood near you here, praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted my request.” Parents pray more for their children than their children would ever be able to imagine.

Parents also seek discernment, wisdom and good judgment. May they rightly discern when their own motivations in regards to their children are pure and when they may be clouded by unrealistic expectations. May God’s grace help them to know the difference between a legitimate “need to know” and “prying” that can at times be construed as showing a lack of respect for legitimate privacy. Let them feel the presence of God in the very midst of some of life’s questions that admit of no readily visible solutions, always seeking God’s wisdom in their parental decisions.

Most of all let all these challenges be subordinated under the banner and headship of Jesus Christ, who is himself the head of all households. Any human authority is derivative from Christ’s headship within the family. In honoring Jesus, Mary and Joseph today, we also honor all those who strive in their own families to emulate their example. May God’s grace always be close at hand for each of you on this great Feast.