

Holy Family Sunday

December 28, 2014

*A sign that will be contradicted*

Readings: Sirach 3: 2-6,12-14; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2: 22-40

It is most appropriate for the Feast of the Holy Family to be situated in the context of the great season of Christmas. Families spend more time together, as well they should. It is the task of the Church to promote and protect family life as the tremendous gift that it is for the Church and society. The truths of family life are not hidden amidst obscure medieval theological treatises, but are found in the depths of our own hearts. The truth of family life is discernable in the world around us, according to God's Natural law inscribed on the human heart.

Our Gospel this year centers on the person of Simeon, a righteous and devout man who prophesied that Jesus would be destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and that he would be a sign of contradiction. These prophetic words could not possibly have made the immediate impact upon Mary and Joseph that they have for us today, because we have been given the benefit of perspective and history.

Indeed, Jesus has been a sign of contradiction, and so too the Church He founded while on earth. The teachings regarding marriage and family, despite being based in large part upon the natural law, are consistently being contradicted by agendas strongly put forward by those who are diametrically opposed to the truth of the Gospel.

The Church calls the family the "*domestic church*." This phrase was used by the Magisterium for perhaps the first time during the Second Vatican Council, in "The Constitution on the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*). "[The family] is, so to speak, the domestic Church, in which the parents, both by word and example, have to be the first preachers of the faith for their children..." (LG, #11) But the phrase is much older than Vatican II.

St. John Chrysostom wrote about the domestic Church, encouraging fathers to see to it that two tables are set up at home after Church...one for dinner, the other for the Word of God, where the father of the family should repeat the things said in Church to all in the household, including the servants. Even in the 4<sup>th</sup> century people discussed the priest's homilies after Mass! He further exhorted:

“Make of your home a Church, because you are accountable for the salvation of your children and servants... for where we find psalmody, prayer and the inspired songs of the prophets, there is certainly no mistake in calling such a gathering a ‘church.’” (*Homilies on Genesis 6:2 & Exp. In Ps. 41:2*)

On this feast I encourage parents to discuss the beautiful teaching on marriage and family with their children in an age appropriate manner and with clarity about some of the basics including: the existence of objective Truth; our need to follow a correctly formed conscience in all moral matters; and a delicate education in human sexuality that fosters a healthy understanding of God's gift, as well as a personal treasuring of one's body as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

A fundamental ministry of the Church is to provide the necessary spiritual support for the families entrusted to our care. There are real world statistics that should give us pause, for the numbers do not lie:

- 40% of children today are born to unwed mothers
- There are 10,000,000 single Moms in the USA
- More TV sets (2.93) per U.S. household than people: 2.24 (Nielson)
- Average adult 5 hours/day online, e-mails;
- Couples who spend 30 minutes per day experience far greater happiness in marriage.

Is it reasonable to ask people to spend 10 minutes per day in personal prayer? Could you spare that amount of time? If not, why not? The same author I quoted earlier had this to say about prayer: It is possible to offer fervent prayer even while walking in public or strolling alone, or seated in your shop, . . . while buying or selling, . . . or even while cooking.”<sup>1</sup>

We know that you may at times 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. 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.

We priests pray for peace and tranquility in your families, and when necessary, we begin by praying for healing and reconciliation. I just read that the would-be assassin of Pope John Paul II returned to the Vatican for the first time since that fateful day in 1981. Mehmet Ali Agca received a special visitor on December 27, 1983 in the person of the Holy Father himself. It remains one of the most poignant photos of the saintly pontiff ever taken— just the two of them in a private moment of discussion in a Roman jail. Having spent many years in jail, that same man laid flowers at the tomb of St. John Paul II earlier today. Reconciliation and forgiveness remain the only lasting path to peace.

Let all families be kept together in love—young families, old, empty nesters, as well as those who are now alone due to death or other circumstances. May those who are single see that the Church truly cares for them. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Ecloge de oratione* 2: See Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 2743.