

Feast of the Holy Family – Year A

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family – Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. As we gaze into the manger we gain a glimpse of what our families are to be – a group of people centered in Jesus Christ. Every year on this Feast day, my dear mother would put a gold bow on our family portrait, reminding all of us children that our family is a wonderful gift. On this day, I hope and pray that we might all view our families as a gift – even amid the warts, blemishes, and conflicts. God chose our family for us – and certainly he knows what he is doing. Please know that on this feast I pray for you and your families, and I thank God for our parish family.

One of the more daunting tasks in life is that of selling a house. Not only are there emotional implications to this process, but there are also financial, legal, and logistical considerations. After the decision is made to sell, there typically is a series of meetings that follow with real estate agents, appraisers, inspectors, and prospective buyers. Perhaps the hardest part in this whole process is waiting. Sometimes this waiting goes on for months. And if a new house has already been purchased – this waiting becomes even more excruciating. It is desperate times such as these that people turn to St. Joseph. That's right. Apparently, there is a long standing practice that home sellers turn to – burying St. Joseph upside down. Some religious stores even sell "St. Joseph kits for selling your home."

With all due respect to St. Joseph, I have not seen any statistics detailing what the success rate is of this practice. I can tell you that when we sold our parents house it sold as soon as we put it on the market – and we did not bury St. Joseph.

Nevertheless, I wonder how St. Joseph ever became associated with real-estate. I thought he was a carpenter, what is the connection?

Today's Gospel offers an insight. Joseph obviously was not a sound sleeper. How could anyone with an infant sleep sound. By the way, you know what the favorite carol of parents with an infant is? *Silent Night*. Joseph's difficulty with sleep, however, had more to do with dreams. In today's Gospel an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and says, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him."

Joseph heeds this command and after Herod dies he has another dream and the angel says, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." Once again, Joseph complies with this command. And subsequently he has another dream in which he is warned and finally settles the family in Nazareth so that the words of the prophets might be fulfilled.

Perhaps now we can appreciate the linkage between Joseph and real-estate. He was always on the move, but in constant contact with a God of surprise who kept changing things. Joseph remained open even though it meant at times standing upside down on his head. He and his wife no doubt had great plans for their child, but God's plans were greater, and in faith they deferred to his plans.

Over fifty years ago a young couple living in this parish gave birth to a baby boy. Imagine the joy and exuberance that couple experienced – waiting for and then welcoming a child into the world. After 5 days, however, that joy turned to sorrow as that little boy died. They had great plans for this child, but God saw otherwise. This couple went on to have other children, but to this day they have never forgotten that child, nor those 5 days.

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Months ago, as we were preparing to paint the Church, I mentioned on a number of occasions that the next focal point for us would be the Blessed Sacrament altar. It would be nice if we could enhance that area, especially given the fact that we find ourselves in the Year of the Eucharist.

Well, this couple, who have chosen to remain anonymous came forward and said, “Father, we would like to do something with that area in memory of our son.” If you look at the area you will see a mock-up of a sculpture of Jesus with his hands extended – and they are not there now, but there will be the words, “Come to me those of you who are weary and find life burdensome.” For the record, this is a substantial expense – costing nearly \$20,000.00. But what an expression of faith by this couple, to face the greatest loss in life and still be centered in Christ. That is what it means to be a holy family.

Perhaps St. Paul in today’s second reading articulates this holiness best when he says, “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.... Put on love.... And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

You know, being and becoming a family is never easy and it is even more challenging to be a holy family. What makes it so difficult is that we have to put on Christ, which means embracing the cross, standing upside down, and saying everyday, “Not my will but your will be done.”