

## HOLY FAMILY December 30, 2007

It feels good to be here among you this morning. I want to thank Sr. Dorothy for the invitation to not only celebrate the holy sacrifice of the Mass both with you and for you, but also for the opportunity to bless the beautiful prayer garden dedicated to the Holy Family. When I prayerfully gaze back at all my priestly assignments, the appointment as your pastor for five years is one I will forever cherish, because we did so much together. I remain eternally grateful to Almighty God for all of you and your continued prayers and support. Miles may separate us, but you remain forever engraved on my heart and continue to hold a special place in my prayers.

A few weeks ago I was celebrating Sunday Mass at St. Pius, one of the two Brookline parishes where I offer assistance. It came time to receive the offertory gifts, so in the customary way I proceeded to the aisle where I was greeted by a beautiful young family of five. The parents, two little girls dressed in matching outfits and a boy who happened to be serving the Mass. As the family presented the gifts, the second grade girl with a smile on her face said "Today is my mommy's anniversary." Mom quickly corrected her and said "it's daddy's anniversary too."

Following the Mass we met again. I found out that the couple was marking 12 years of marriage. When I asked how they were going to celebrate the mom said "Well father, the five of us are going to a restaurant to have a nice dinner." And then the youngest interrupted and said "And then we are going to visit the crèche downtown." Mom added "Yes, father our kids see our wedding anniversary as one of the best days of the year, because we go out to eat and then we go to see Jesus, Mary and Joseph." What a beautiful tradition. Isn't that what family is all about?

Well today is not an anniversary we celebrate. Nevertheless, the entire church family visits the crèche and reflects on the powerful image of Jesus, Mary and Joseph as we celebrate the feast of the Holy family. This feast has become a family tradition and an integral part of the Christmas season. In fact, it is hard to imagine Christmas without the manger and the persons of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

This feast is more than just a tradition in our Christian Catholic faith. It is a touchstone and a reminder to all of us of what we are to become. We are not only called to be family but also a holy family. How does that occur?

St. Paul in today's second reading, a letter to the Colossians, offers an answer. He writes "Put on as God's chosen one, as God's chosen ones holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another." St. Paul summarizes all of this by saying "And over all of these put on love . . ." The Holy Family therefore, is distinguished by love. In a very real way it is clothed in love.

When I was a child my sister Cathy and I would often have a race to the front door to retrieve the newspaper. I wanted to see the sports section, while she for her part wanted to view the comics, as well as a daily piece entitled "Love is..." Everyday there would be a picture of what love is and interestingly enough it was never the same. In other words it was different every day.

True love, particularly, familial love is never the same as it always demands something new and more. It does not stay the same because it is a lived dynamic, exposed to the rigors of life.

When many of us think of the Holy Family we no doubt conjure in our minds the image of the manger with Mary, Joseph and the newborn child Emmanuel. How tempting it is to view this image as the only image of the Holy Family. The gospel for today takes us beyond this comfortable image to a family moving on a journey first to Egypt and subsequently to Israel. But because of a dream their plans were changed and the new destination became Galilee. Suffice to say, for the holy family things did not stay the same, as there were challenges and changes. And yet through it all they never stopped loving.

My dear brothers and sisters, today's feast of the Holy Family is an opportune time for us to reconnect and recommit ourselves to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. As we live out our family lives the Holy Family is our model. They show us, particularly today, that family life is filled with challenges and changes, but the key remains Love. And the point is, as long as we continue loving God and one another we can embrace some of the most difficult and even surprising challenges and changes in life. Be it in our own individual families or parish family.

Thanks to the generous support of so many, the image of the Holy Family is one that now will not be just a Christmas image. It now becomes a special part of this parish family life. Every time we pull in the driveway or walk into the church, from the driveway side we will be reminded again and again about the need to clothe our families in love and the realization that this love will seldom be the same. And inevitably, that love will take us beyond the comfort of the manger and our individual homes to face the challenges and changes of life. The dedication of this Holy Family prayer garden says something else too. Namely that every day when embraced with faith, hope, and love, can be Christmas. Merry Christmas and may the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph show us the way to live family life according to Gods plan.