

## **HOLY FAMILY – A**

### **December 30, 2007**

Each year on the Sunday after Christmas, the Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Family. The purpose is not only to honor that most perfect of families—Jesus, Mary and Joseph—but also to encourage us to take a good look at our own family so we might imitate their family life. And in a broader sense, whether we like the idea or not, we need to begin to look upon all people all across the world as members of one enormous family, just as God intended in the story of creation.

I remember my seventh grade geography teacher telling our class that the family is the “hub” of society, and the purpose of this was to get our seventh grade minds thinking beyond the limits of our own families and to see all people as created by God.

Our first two readings today just by themselves would present us with a fine concept of Christian family life, and therefore they could be read any time during the year, and for that matter this feast could be celebrated at any time.

But since we are in the Christmas season this feast can easily be understood as a continuation of Christmas because the coming of Christ into our world has a profound effect on every aspect of human life, especially the family. Today’s Gospel reading gives us the connection between the Christmas season and the concept of the family.

Familiar post-Nativity Gospel story, the Flight into Egypt. Notice that Mary does not speak in this passage. Joseph does not speak here or anywhere in Scripture. Only the angel speaks. But the scene shows us a family, holding together in difficult circumstances, a father protecting his wife and child.

When he was born into our world, Jesus willingly took on every aspect of human life, except sin of course. He accepted the sort of life we all lead, including sickness, love, anger, fear, sadness, joy, pain, even death. He was also born into a specific human family, and the first thirty years or so of his life were very simple and ordinary. This family lived for God and each other, united in a bond of love that was so deep it was beyond even their comprehension.

It’s true that this Holy Family is supposed to serve as an example for the rest of us in our own families, but translating all of this into loving relationships within our families is not always easy. This is because close relationships can often be enormously difficult since we tend to expect so much of those we love and depend on.

Sometimes family members do not live up to our expectations and so we feel let down and disappointed, and sometime our expectations of family members are simply unreasonable. Perhaps their expectations of us are also unreasonable at times.

I would estimate that about two thirds of the problems people have brought to me over the years I’ve been ordained have been family issues. Some of these problems can be solved easily, some can be solved only with great difficulty, and some cannot be solved at all, only managed.

Throughout the Christmas season, we’ve all seen lots of beautiful advertisements and greetings cards that show perfect families in perfect homes, with perfect clothes and perfect smiles, sitting in front of a perfect fireplace or a perfect Christmas tree. When we see one of those ads or cards, then we look at our own family and we say, “Yeah, right!”

Let's face it, our families aren't perfect. But they don't have to be—thank goodness. They simply are what they are. That's what makes them “real,” which is the way God intended way back at the beginning of Scripture, in the story of creation.

To understand this fully, all we have to do is to look at some of the *other* families throughout Scripture: Adam and Eve and their sons Cain and Abel; Noah and his family; Abraham, Sarah and Isaac; Job and his wife; King David and his son Solomon; even relatives of Jesus, like Elizabeth and Zechariah and their son John, later known as John the Baptist. None of these families were typical, average, everyday families.

Families relate in different ways, and the real trick to being a successful family is not in the ability to be perfect and to avoid all conflict because that's just not going to happen. But the real trick to being a successful family is in knowing what to do when the conflict occurs, and how to eventually forgive and be forgiven and then to put that conflict in the past and move on.

So today's feast of the Holy Family is a challenge for us, not to be a perfect family like Jesus, Mary and Joseph, but to be a “real” family that tries very hard, to the best of its ability and in spite of many differences, to build loving relationships among all of its members.