

Solemnity of the Holy Family - Being a Holy Family

December 27, 2020.

This Sunday, we celebrate **the Feast of the Holy Family**. In our natural competitive attitude, we are tempted to look at the Holy Family as an ideal we cannot realize in our families. But, Jesus, Mary and Joseph had their share of struggles like us. The trust which is fundamental to a marriage was challenged by the pregnancy. Joseph was forced to bring Mary to Bethlehem when she was nine months pregnant. He had to escape Herod by moving to a foreign land, Egypt, away from family and traditions. Packing up everything and go to a foreign country with nothing is hard. I am sure Joseph would be quite concerned: how is he going to find work in a foreign country, not knowing the language, not knowing the people? Still, **the Holy Family conquered their struggles through their faith-life**. Mary had faith both in the angel and in God working through Joseph. Jesus, having emptied himself of his divinity, had faith in his parents to care for him.

We have been listening to stories of Mary of Nazareth during the Advent. Maybe we spend some time on St Joseph. The first appearance of Joseph is in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, from around 80–90 AD. In Matthew, Joseph obeyed the direction of an angel to marry Mary. Following the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, Joseph took the family to Egypt to escape the massacre of the children of Bethlehem planned by Herod, the ruler of the Roman province of Judea. Then, to avoid Herod's son, he took the family to Nazareth in Galilee and settled there. In the Gospel of Luke, Joseph already lived in Nazareth, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem because Joseph and Mary had to travel there to be counted in a census. Subsequently, Jesus was born there. Luke's account makes no mention of him being visited by angels, the Massacre of the Innocents, or the visit to Egypt. The last time Joseph appears in person in any Gospel is in the story of the Passover visit to the Temple in Jerusalem when Jesus is 12 years old, found only in Luke. No mention is made of him thereafter. The story emphasizes Jesus' awareness of his coming mission: here Jesus speaks to his parents (both of them) of "my father," meaning God, but they fail to understand (Luke 2:41–51). The New Testament has no mention of Joseph's death, but he is never mentioned after Jesus's childhood, and Mary is always presented as by herself, often dressed as a widow. during the adult ministry of her son. Joseph is not mentioned as being present at the Wedding at Cana, nor at the Passion at the end. If he had been present at the Crucifixion, he would have been expected to take charge of Jesus' body under Jewish custom, but this role is performed by Joseph of Arimathea instead. Nor would Jesus have entrusted his mother to the care of John the Apostle if her husband had been alive.

On December 9, Pope Francis has proclaimed that the Church will honour St. Joseph in a particular way over the course of the next year. The pope's announcement of a Year of St. Joseph purposely coincided with the 150th anniversary of the saint's proclamation as patron of the Universal Church by Pope Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1870. Pius IX's successor, Pope Leo XIII, went on to dedicate an encyclical letter published in 1889 to devotion to St. Joseph, "Quamquam pluries." **"Joseph became the guardian, the administrator, and the legal defender of the divine house whose chief he was,"** In the letter, Pope Leo XIII also added, **"Now the divine house which Joseph ruled with the authority of a father, contained within its limits the scarce-born Church,"** In the past 150 years, nearly every pope has taken steps to further devotion to St. Joseph in the Church and to use the humble father and carpenter as a witness for the modern world, setting examples for all fathers, fathers-to-be and priest-fathers.

"For St. Joseph, life with Jesus was a continuous discovery of his own vocation as a father," wrote St. John Paul II in his 2004 book "Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way." He continued: **"Jesus Himself, as a man, experienced the fatherhood of God through the**

father-son relationship with St. Joseph. This filial encounter with Joseph then fed into Our Lord's revelation of the paternal name of God. What a profound mystery!" He said that he looked to **St. Joseph's fatherhood as a model for his own priestly fatherhood.** In his announcement of the Year of St. Joseph, Pope Francis released a letter, "Patris corde" ("**With a father's heart**"), explaining that he wanted to share some "personal reflections" on the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. "My desire to do so increased during these months of pandemic," he said, noting that many people had made hidden sacrifices during the crisis in order to protect others. "**Each of us can discover in Joseph -- the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence -- an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble,**" he wrote. "**St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation.**"

The readings for this Sunday present some aspects of a Christian home especially the first reading (*Sirach* 3:2-6, 12-14) which says that children need to respect their parents. At first it refers to young children as it notes that mothers and fathers have their authority from God. Then it refers to older children when it says that children should take care of their parents when they age. **Little children learn respect for their parents from the respect they see their parents giving each other and the respect their parents have for their grandparents.** I have always believed that the way we treat our parents will be the way our children will treat us. If our relations with our parents are motivated by respect and love, and are evident in our kindness to them, our children will have learned this aspect of Christianity and will treat us the same way as our years mount. The second reading deals with the relationships within a family. St. Paul says (Col 3:12-21) to treat each other with kindness, to be patient with each other, to forgive each other continually, not to let out pride determine what we say and do to each other. He uses the term *heartfelt compassion*. That's why we have the phrase, "**Wives be subordinate to your husbands,**" closely followed by "**Husbands love your wives.**" **The heart of this reading is that husbands and wives must respect each other.** This same line of thought continues with children being told to respect their parents, and parents being told not to nag or continually finding fault with their children. Love, harmony and mutual respect are the basic ingredients of a happy family which have to be witnessed in action.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendour of true love, to you we turn with trust. Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic Churches. May families never again experience violence, rejection and division: may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing. Holy Family of Nazareth, make us once more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the family, and its beauty in God's plan. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer. (Pope Francis)