

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of St. Joseph, our Blessed Mother Mary, and their son, our Lord Jesus Christ. While the Gospels are mostly silent on the life of the Holy Family, today we're given some insight into their life from the Gospel of Matthew, when we hear about the Holy Family traveling to the Temple in Jerusalem for the Presentation and consecration of Jesus as a child according to the Mosaic law. Today's Gospel demonstrates that Mary and Joseph were faithful, devout Jews who lived according to the Mosaic law and were diligent in fulfilling the ritualistic requirements of the Law at the time.

When we consider the mystery of the Incarnation and the birth of our Lord Jesus, it's fascinating to consider that God, being omnipotent, could've chosen to become incarnate in many different ways, yet He chose to be born *into a family*—to be part of a family! Certainly, the Son of God could've become man *without* a family, but in choosing to be born *into a family*, God shows His great love and esteem for the family, which is meant to be a vibrant reflection of God Himself since He *is* a Trinity, a loving communion of Persons. In becoming part of a

human family, God *redeems* the family and elevates it to a divine institution where God Himself dwells.

Now most scholars and theologians surmise that Jesus was around 33 years old when He was crucified and died. In light of this, it's important to note that the Gospels don't record a lot of biographical details about Jesus' life growing up as the son of Mary and Joseph. And yet given what we know from the Gospels and their limited accounts of the Holy Family's life, we can surmise that the Holy Family lived the life of a typical Jewish family in first century Roman Palestine.

Our Lord Jesus was not only a baby, but he was also a young child, a teenager, and then a young adult. We're told in the Gospels that Jesus had an extended family with cousins and other relatives. So if you think about it, most of the Son of God's time on earth is spent in the quiet hiddenness of ordinary family life with his mother, father, and extended family—there's something extraordinary and very instructive in this historical reality.

Considering the Holy Family, one can't help but consider the unique significance of the family in general and then *our own families*

in particular! In freely becoming part of a family and living most of His incarnate life *within a family*, God is teaching us that the *family itself is extremely important and sacred*. You don't have to be Catholic or even religious to affirm the natural reality that the family is the building block of society—the most basic unit of human civilization.

The family, founded upon the permanent and exclusive marital union of one man and one woman, is designed to uniquely reflect the unconditional, faithful, and fruitful love of God. Husband and wife are called to lovingly help each other grow in holiness, that intimacy with Christ that is manifested by a life of love and virtue. And in their sexual difference and complementarity, husband and wife are called to love each other in such a unique way so as to humbly and mutually be open to the gift of children—and then, as father and mother, faithfully raise those children to also grow in holiness so that they can love God and others in accordance with God's love for them. The sacred and noble mission of the family is to make God's love present in the world so that we can be happy with Him now and forever in Heaven.

Since the pandemic began back in March, I've reflected that *out* of this physical evil, God is seeking to bring about the greater good of re-centering us on what is most important in life: our faith, *family*, and friends. Now for many people, one of the blessings over the last year is the ability to spend more quality time with one's family. And yet I fully recognize and acknowledge the reality that not everyone's family and home life is all good and hunky dory. News flash: none of our families are perfect and we all have dysfunctional families to some degree.

Yet I would seriously call 2020 the "Year of the Family" in that for many people, one of the greater goods that has come out of this pandemic is that families are now spending more quality time together—bonding and growing closer together and being strengthened in mutual love, understanding, and greater respect for one another. This is a good thing and such family renewal needs to continue and grow even stronger in 2021 beyond this horrible pandemic!

Brothers and sisters, in reflecting on the Holy Family, we have to ask ourselves: do we love, honor, and cherish our family the way we

should? The way God calls us to? Or have we given up on our families and begun to see them as a threat rather than as a gift and blessing?

Many times we can get stuck in habitual patterns of thought and behavior when it comes to our family in that we can get so used to treating certain family members in a negative and hurtful way that it's hard to see them in a different and better way so as to treat them with the dignity, respect, and love that they deserve. If we find ourselves constantly at odds with a certain family member, then we need to pray: Lord, free me from this self-made prison that prevents me from seeing and loving my family member as you see and love them. Lord, renew my heart and mind so that I may see and love this family member as You see and love them.

How the does the Lord see our family? He sees them as part of *His* family in that He created and redeemed them and so He loves them unconditionally as His own beloved sons and daughters. Lord help me to see and love my family as You see and love my family. Help me to see and love my parents as you see and love them. Help me to honor my father and mother as I should. Help me to see and love my siblings as

You see and love them. Help me to love, honor, and cherish my family as I should. Help me to be a peacemaker within my family. Help me to see my family as the school of holiness that **You** have enrolled me in Lord to make me a saint!

Many times we wrongly think: “I’d be a saint if it weren’t for other people!” And God looks at us with love and says, “no: you **couldn’t** be a saint without other people, especially those who drive you nuts, push your buttons, test your patience and may be difficult with you.”

Brothers and sisters, the devil wants us to see other people, especially our family members, as roadblocks to sainthood, when really God wants us to see them as **pathways** to sainthood. God gives us a family in order to sanctify us and make us saints. God gives us a family in order to teach us how to love, be patient, be merciful, compassionate, and forgiving, how to be just, kind, respectful, and generous. The family is where we as human beings should learn how to love God and others.

The family is meant to be a domestic church, where prayer is foundational. Do we pray as a family? It was the Venerable Father Patrick Peyton who famously said, “The family who prays together,

stays together.” Do we pray together as a family or do we consider that idea weird and awkward? Do we spend more time as individuals on our phones and technological devices, in front of screens, than we do with our own family?

Brothers and sisters, in the end, the family is truly meant to be the school of holiness and virtue that reflects God, Who is Love, Goodness, and Mercy Itself. That’s what God desires for each of our families. In the end, our world will only be renewed when the *family* is renewed in all its grandeur and goodness. Through the model of the Holy Family, may the Lord renew and strengthen *our* families so that a civilization of authentic love, life, and hope may flourish in our time.