

Today, within the Octave of Christmas, we celebrate the great Feast of the Holy Family of St. Joseph, our Blessed Mother Mary, and Jesus their Son, our Lord and Savior. In today's Gospel from Matthew, we hear of the harrowing account of how the Holy Family became migrants and refugees and had to flee their homeland into Egypt in order to escape the murderous rage of King Herod the Great, whom secular and extrabiblical history recounts as a tyrannical and maniacal ruler, *obsessed* with maintaining power at all costs.

Just to give you a sense of what kind of paranoid and murderous dictator King Herod was, according to historians, he murdered his favorite wife Mariame, three of his sons, and others in the royal household whom he perceived to threaten his throne. In fact, the Roman Emperor at the time, Caesar Augustus was said to have joked—using a Greek pun—that it was safer to be one of Herod's pigs than his son, since Herod was Jewish and therefore couldn't eat pork. In today's Gospel, we hear of Archelaus, who was one of Herod's surviving sons who succeeded him as ruler of Judea.

So the Gospel of Matthew corroborates the historical profile of Herod the Great, who ruled with an iron fist as a puppet King of Judea from 37 to 4 BC. And if you're wondering why this Herod was called the "Great" it's not because he was Mother Teresa, but rather he was one of the most ambitious builders in Jewish history: establishing various cities, erecting and strengthening a host of public buildings and fortresses, and to gain public favor, which all political rulers crave, he launched a massive rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem in 19 BC although the work would not be completed until 64 AD. Overall though, the narrative accounts in the Gospels are consistent with Herod's cruel and despotic tendencies as known in history.

Juxtaposed to the tyrant King Herod, in today's Gospel we have *another* man, one who is the polar opposite of the murderous king of Judea, and that is St. Joseph, the husband of Mary, and foster father of our Lord Jesus. While King Herod is consumed by selfishness, pride, hatred, wrath, and a lust for power, St. Joseph is defined by selflessness, love, humility, obedience, faith, hope, courage, and heroic self-sacrifice. While King Herod shows absolutely no regard for innocent human life,

St. Joseph seeks to protect and cherish innocent human life. In St. Joseph, we see a man of greatness—a heroic man of great holiness who is the model for all men!

Even though St. Joseph is probably scared and a little more than worried about the safety of his family and has no clue what the future will hold for them, the foster father of Jesus *surrenders totally* in love and humble obedience to the will of God as expressed by the angel. We hear in today's Gospel how St. Joseph faithfully listens and then courageously and humbly cooperates with God's will in protecting Mary and his baby Jesus. St. Joseph heroically fulfilled the role of leader, protector, and provider—a beautiful role that *all men*, and *especially husbands and fathers*, are called to fulfill in a unique manner out of love for their wives and children.

Even though today's Gospel doesn't record one word of St. Joseph: his trusting faith, selflessness, heroic love, and sacrificial actions speak for themselves. St. Joseph is certainly an exemplary role model for all husbands and fathers in how to faithfully care for one's family and protect them from evil in humble obedience to the will of God.

St. Joseph fulfilled his vocation with great success *precisely* because he was centered on Christ our Savior. Moreover, as Pope Francis eloquently stated, “The family of Nazareth is holy *because it was centered on Jesus.*” And so despite all of their suffering and challenges, St. Joseph and our Blessed Mother Mary lived a persevering and virtuous life of love that was centered on Christ, *Who is Love incarnate!*

Brothers and sisters, Nativity sets perfectly depict the life and orientation of the Holy Family in that they’re centered on Christ. Being faithfully centered on Jesus, Mary and Joseph were virtuously obedient, faithful, and receptive to God’s will and plan for their lives, even in the face of great challenges and suffering. With Christ at the center of their lives, Mary and Joseph were prepared to overcome whatever challenges the future may hold.

Brothers and sisters, can we say with honesty, great confidence and clarity that our family is centered on Christ our Savior? Can we say with honesty, great confidence and clarity that our Lord Jesus comes *first* in our family? Is a relationship with Christ *in and through* His

Church, nourished by prayer and the sacraments, our family's *top priority*? Or are we as a family so distracted by other, *lesser* things like technology, sports, work, etc. that our family's overall relationship with Jesus suffers? Obviously such things are not intrinsically evil, but do we have our priorities straight? When was the last time we prayed together as a family, and I'm not just talking about grace before meals?

Brothers and sisters, if our families are centered on Christ and if He comes *first* in our family, then that *doesn't* mean our family life will magically become free from all dysfunction, suffering, and problems. *Christ never promises us that.* Rather if Christ is the center of our families and if He comes *first* in our family, *then we will love each other as we should*; then we will be more *compassionate, merciful and forgiving with each other as we should*; then we will grow *in patience with each other*. In the daily circumstances of family life, patience is constantly being tested.

Yet this is exactly why the Magisterium calls the family a "domestic church" because it's *in the family* where we should learn how to love and how to be loved. The family is meant to be a school of

holiness where we should learn how to grow in virtue. If Christ is at the center of our families then we will grow in holiness together and allow God to sanctify us as He so greatly desires. Brothers and sisters, if we root our family *entirely in Christ*, then our merciful Savior will *never lead us astray, I guarantee it!*

As we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Mary and Joseph, let us pray this beautiful prayer composed by the Venerable Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, a Vietnamese Cardinal who died in 2002 and was imprisoned for 13 years by the Communist and atheist government of Vietnam:

“Mary, my mother,

Joseph, my father,

Give me your eyes to contemplate Jesus; give me your hearts and spirits to understand Him, and to be impassioned for Him. Give me your will so that I may work for Him with my whole heart and mind without growing weary. Give me your soul that I may endlessly proclaim:

*Jesus, my Lord and my All!”* Amen.