

Today the Church celebrates the great Feast of the Holy Family of St. Joseph, our Blessed Mother Mary, and Jesus their son, our Lord and Savior. Many times we have a tendency to simply romanticize the life of the Holy Family and turn them into this “Polyannish, Beaver Cleaver family” that lived an *absolutely* perfect existence that was *totally free* of problems and suffering of any kind.

Now please don't misunderstand me, Jesus and our Blessed Mother Mary were certainly “*perfect*” in that they were *absolutely sinless* and incapable of sin—I mean, poor St. Joseph being the only “sinner” in the family. My point is that *despite* the sinlessness of Mary and Jesus, the Holy Family *did have* their own fair share of suffering, problems, and struggles. Out of their great love for each other, humanity, and God the Father, Mary and Jesus experienced pain, suffering, and sorrow, which are all the tragic effects of sin, even if the sin wasn't their own.

Simply consider the evidence from the Gospels. In the midst of their engagement, the threat of separation and divorce loomed over Mary and Joseph as Joseph was shocked over Mary's unplanned pregnancy.

Joseph thought that Mary was unfaithful to him and so he was afraid and conflicted. Initially, he didn't know what was going on and so in the midst of their engagement, there was misunderstanding and conflict.

Then once Joseph accepted the truth about Mary and the child in her womb, he then had to lead them on a treacherous journey to Bethlehem for a census. Then once it came time for Mary to give birth there was no room for them in any local accommodations. They faced rejection *right when Mary was about to have her child*.

And so they had to stay in a manger, where the local animals lived and fed. Now don't let the beautiful nativity sets fool you: this manger would've been similar to a small cave and it was definitely not your "five-star hotel"—it was a feeding trough for the animals. So the Son of God was essentially born in a *dirty, animal food dump*. Our Lord Jesus was born into utter poverty.

Once our Savior was born, his life was immediately fraught with danger. Out of an evil lust for power, King Herod the Great felt threatened by this newborn Savior, and therefore tried to kill him by slaughtering all of the babies of Bethlehem under the age of two. This

forced the Holy Family to flee their homeland and become migrants in a foreign country. So they escaped the massacre perpetrated by King Herod by going on *another* treacherous journey fleeing to Egypt for three years, leaving their families and all that they knew behind.

Moreover, given that we hear *nothing* about St. Joseph past the start of Jesus' public ministry, which began when our Lord was around 30 years-old, many scholars surmise that Joseph must've died when Jesus was relatively young, possibly when our Lord was in his twenties or late teens. And so Jesus would've dealt with the loss of a parent relatively young in his life.

Lastly, the whole Passion and Death of Christ was certainly a painful and horrific experience of suffering for both Jesus and His Mother Mary. If you're the Blessed Mother, can you imagine watching your own Son, *your own flesh and blood*, be barbarically mocked, spat at, rejected, tortured, and brutally killed right in front of your eyes?! The only reason Mary was able to endure the Passion and Death of her Son is because she knew it was for the salvation of the human race and

so she humbly submitted herself, however difficult it may have been, to the Father's saving will and the mission of Redemption.

So brothers and sisters, next time you think that the Holy Family “had it easy,” think again. Despite all of their difficulties and struggles, all of the pain and suffering they experienced, the Holy Family *persevered in love*, which is “the bond of perfection” and the crowning virtue that we just heard about in the second reading! This is why the Holy Family is the exemplary and perfect model for *every* family, because they *lived and persevered in love* and *love conquers all!*

Despite all of their suffering and challenges, St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother lived a persevering and virtuous life of love that was *centered* on their Son Jesus, *Who is Love incarnate!*

Brothers and sisters, tragically, there's no such thing as “the perfect family.” The truth is that *we all* come from families that are dysfunctional to some degree (some maybe more than others)—but *all* of our families *have, have had, or will have* problems at some point. Such is the unfortunate reality in our fallen world. There are challenges, crosses, and drama in *every* family. However part of the beauty of the

Catholic Church is that *we're not alone—we're all in the same boat together!* The Church is a *family of imperfect families and sinners* who are continuously striving *together* for holiness and virtue.

And in spite of all the challenges and imperfections of family life, *it's in the family* that we learn *how to love* and *be loved—how to forgive* and *be forgiven!* *It's in the family* that we learn how to be merciful, compassionate, and patient. On this Feast of the Holy Family, one practical thing that we can all do is prayerfully consider a family member(s) that we might struggle to love. ***Right now***, think of a family member(s) that you may find difficult to love. Maybe you're estranged from this family member because of some past wound or conflict. Maybe there are grudges between you and this family member(s). Maybe we've hurt another family member by our words and actions and so we have to sincerely apologize to them for what we've done.

Whatever it is, let's begin ***today*** on the Feast of the Holy Family to reconcile with a family member(s) that we have problems with. Let's swallow our stubborn pride and reach out to them in humility, love, and mercy! Let's ask God for the grace to love them ***as He loves them!***

Because brothers and sisters, *nothing* is more tragic than a family that doesn't love each other.

So today, as we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist, let's ask Him for the grace to be instruments of love, mercy, peace, and reconciliation *within our families*. Let's pray specifically for those family members that we may struggle to love or forgive. Let's ask the Lord for the grace to forgive and to also see our *own sins* and where *we* may need to seek forgiveness. And finally, like the Holy Family, let's make the Lord Jesus the center of our lives so that we can persevere in love—because it is *love alone* that conquers all!